ELEMENTS OF JAPAN

2023



江戸茶 Edocha Earth

空 Sora Air

猩猩緋 Shoujouhi Fire

水 Mizu Water

TW SPECIAL EDITION

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A close-up of Daisy Balloon's Apple Bear series. Read more on page 20.



Ed's Note

Welcome to the first edition of *Elements of Japan*, a magazine exploring the many facets of this fascinating nation. An element can, of course, be many things: a component, an essential characteristic, or even something so fundamental it can't be broken down into smaller parts. We've chosen to include all interpretations to reflect the diversity of what Japan has to offer.

We've borrowed from the timeless wisdom of the Greek four elements — earth, air, fire and water — to categorize each section of the magazine. Earth is represented by the color edocha brown, while Air is paired with a deep blue shade called sora. Fire is signified by shoujouhi red, or scarlet, and Water is light blue, with the fitting name of mizu.

We hope you find inspiration in the timeless wisdom of the four elements, as well as the amazing artists, destinations and products featured in this issue.

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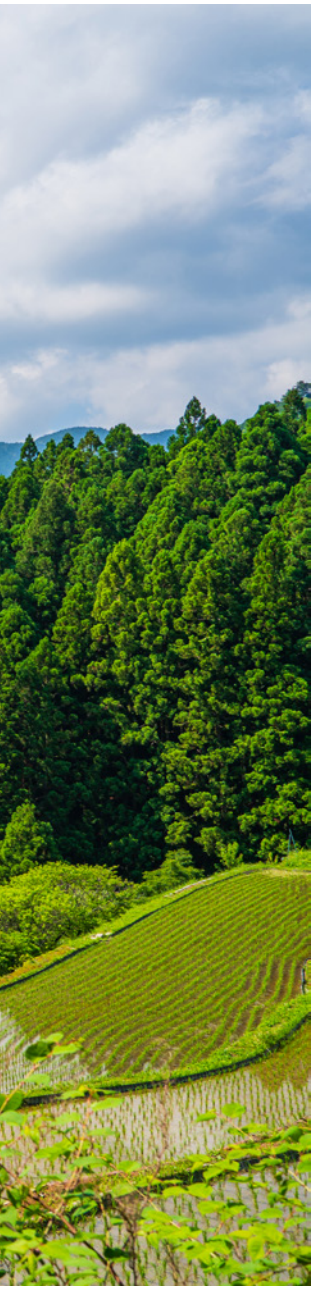
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Participate in a splash of activities at The Ritz-Carlton, Nikko.



EARTH

Earth symbolizes nurturing, stability and growth, encouraging resilience and patience. It's the foundation for all living things and a reminder that we can find solace in nature.

江戸茶 Edocha
#AF5F3C



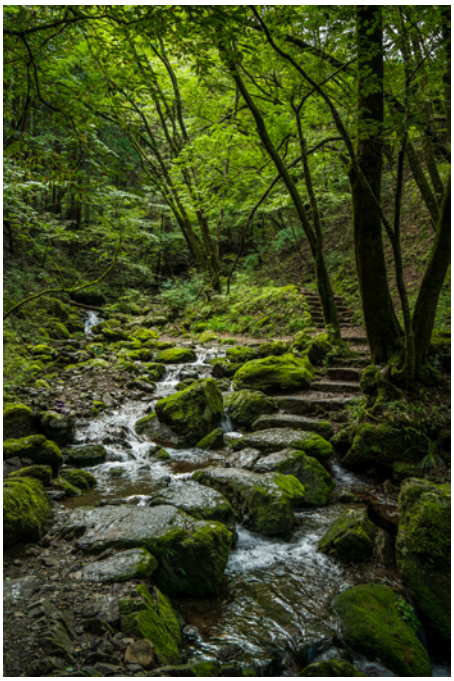
Find peace on **Tokushima's trails** that wind past terraced rice fields, moss forests and sugar factories.

Read more on page 14.

Find out where to meet some of Japan's most charming residents — including the famous **snow monkeys** — during your travels.

Read more on page 12.







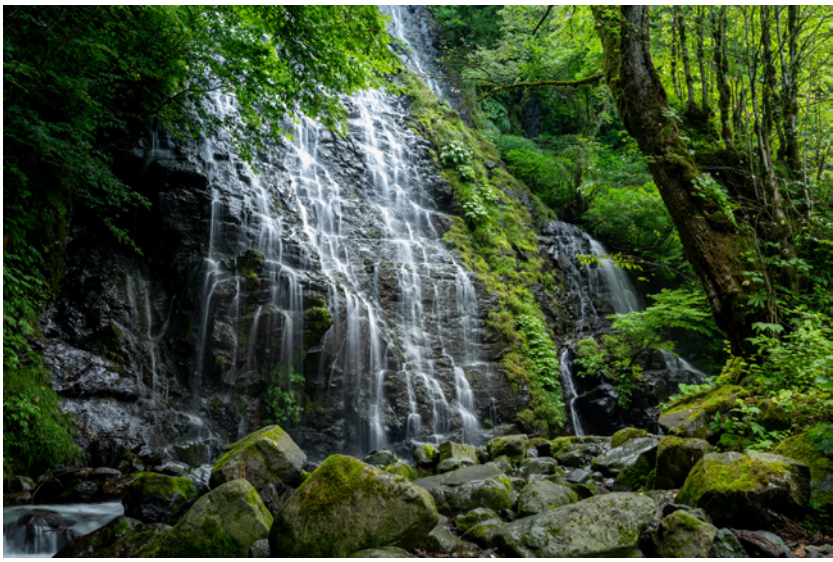
Creature Comforts in the Wild

Five reasons to make Keikoku Glamping Tent your next weekend getaway

Words by **Lisa Wallin**

Stepping out into the bright lights and busy streets of Tokyo is a thrilling adventure each time. Despite endless entertainment options, the fast-paced city life can feel a little drab after a while. Take some time for yourself and nurture your adventurous spirit — without leaving Tokyo or sacrificing any urban luxuries — by booking a stay at the grandiose Keikoku Glamping Tent.





1 You Can Experience Unparalleled Nature

Located in picturesque Hinohara in western Tokyo, Keikoku Glamping Tent is enveloped by deep forests and mountains from all sides. The village borders Chichibu-Tama-Kai National Park, offering a smorgasbord of pristine natural experiences nearby. The area is most famous for its waterfalls, with about eight of them within a 30-minute drive from the glamping grounds. Kuzuryu Falls, with its nearby Kuzuryu Shrine, is an easy 8-minute stroll away, while Yume and Ryujin falls are also easily accessible within a 20-minute trek.

2 The Villas Are Completely Private

Hinohara's sparse population of 2,100-odd residents — that's a density of roughly 20 people per square kilometer — guarantees little disturbance from the outside world. Within the Keikoku Glamping Tent grounds, there are only two self-contained villas and no on-site staff, making it easy to relax without interruption. Take the opportunity to luxuriate in your own private space, completely detached from the outside world.

3 It's Fully Loaded with Five-Star Amenities

The two villas provide anything a guest could ever ask for and then some. Both accommodations are spacious — the luxury tent offers a generous 37.5m2 area for up to three people, while the suite tent and its open-air pool span 50 square meters, with room for up to four guests. Each venue boasts its own wood-fired sauna and jacuzzi to soothe any aching muscles after a long day of hiking and exploring. Guests can follow up with a cozy dinner cooked over the on-site Char-Broil gas grill and maybe even make s'mores over the open fire pit — the firewood is provided and ready to light up.











4 You'll Have Excellent Dining at Your Fingertips

Guests can make the most of the gas grill by ordering Keikoku Glamping Tent's BBQ set before arrival, thus avoiding the hassle of organizing and carrying ingredients themselves. Those with allergies or dietary restrictions can be easily accommodated — just make sure to let the staff know when making the reservation. BBQ offerings include wagyu steak and Australian lamb cutlet assortments and others, all of which include a DIY pizza set. Extras like seafood paella and cheese al ajillo can be added as well. Breakfast can be booked, too, with freshly baked bread, jam and a selection of sides to start the day.

5 There's Always Something More

Whether you want to book a healing experience in the privacy of your villa or prepare a surprise for an anniversary or other special occasion, it's easy to tailor your Keikoku Glamping Tent experience to what you want. The grounds are also conveniently near several hot spring facilities for those who want to take their relaxing on the road. Guests keen to reserve their quiet time for the villa can book exciting activities nearby, including ninja experiences, zazen and waterfall meditation sessions, horseback riding sessions and more.

More info

Keikoku Glamping Tent
7072 Kazuma,
Hinohara village,
Nishitama district, Tokyo

Web: *www.keikokuglampingtent.com*

Yamagata: Spiritual Journeys and Culinary Delights

A two-day exploration of the rich cultural bounty of this beautiful Tohoku region

Words by **Cezary Jan Strusiewicz**
Photos by **Anna Petek**



It's easy to forget how vast and diverse Japan can be. To remedy that, an intrepid photographer and I boarded the Tsubasa Shinkansen on a sultry July morning. Three hours later we were in Yamagata Prefecture, a land of spacious skies and endless fields embraced by gentle mountains. Here's how we spent 48 hours in this gem of the Tohoku region.

Day 1

Witnessing Yamadera's Inextinguishable Beauty

Just beyond the town of Yamadera rises Mount Hoju, which houses Risshakuji Temple. Also known as Yamadera (literally "mountain temple"), this Buddhist complex dates back to 860 and resembles a town built into the mountainside. To reach it, visitors must climb 1,015 stone steps. The arduous journey is rewarded with unparalleled views of the surrounding scenery from Godaido Hall, which serves as an observation deck.

Before undertaking the strenuous 30-minute ascent, we headed to Konponchudo Hall to talk to head priest Seiden Kiyohara about the approximately 1,300-year-old eternal flame burning there. "It was brought over from Mount Hiei in Kyoto as a light to illuminate Yamagata. It's a manifestation of our religious teachings. I feel extremely privileged to tend to it," he explained.

The Historic Rice Terraces of Owarabi

After scaling Yamadera, we drove to the terraced rice fields of Owarabi. Dating back to the Edo period, this once essential breadbasket of Yamagata continues to fascinate and



inspire people like Juna Hirotani, who works at the Yamanobe Industry Division. "I'm from just down the road. I've always thought it was very special and wonderful to see so many rice terraces in one place. I want to protect these precious natural treasures of Yamagata," she said.

Looking at the tranquil fields, it's easy to understand why.



A Hot Spring Time Machine

After a long day of mountain pilgrimages and walks around rice fields, a long soak in a hot spring is in order. Visitors are spoiled for choice with a slew of options, including the famed Ginzan Onsen, with its nostalgic gas streetlamps and venerable wooden inns, as well as the hot spring towns of Zao Onsen, Kaminoyama Onsen and Tendo Onsen.









Day 2

Learning the Art of the Sword

On the second day, we joined an authentic samurai experience in Murayama, the place where iaido is said to originate. During the course, sword master Yoshihiro Abe taught us the secrets of the katana art. Every movement — including how you sit down — is meant to facilitate the quickest response to a sudden attack. This can only be done when practicing a state of constant awareness. "It's like Zen meditation," Abe said. "Iaido is Zen meditation in motion — a way to empty your mind."

The course involves both theory and practice, and concludes with an adrenaline-inducing tameshigiri experience where participants slice through a rolled-up tatami mat using a real katana.

Yamagata: A Fruitful Kingdom

Yamagata Prefecture's abundance of fruit orchards is, in part, thanks to the region's gentle slopes and nutritious soil. The extreme shifts between day and night, as well as the area's distinct seasonal changes, are also conducive to high quality fruit production. It comes as no surprise to learn that Yamagata holds Japan's largest yield of cherries and LaFrance pears, as well as an impressive share of the country's grape, peach and apple production.

With this in mind, we headed to Ohsyo Fruits Farm in Tendo to sample its cherry parfait. Tendo native and Oh! Show! Café manager Ayumi Sudo shared one of her secrets to enjoying Yamagata cherries. Her advice: Soak them in ice water first, as it makes them firm and boosts their flavor.

One for the Road

Established in 1836, the Furusawa brewery in Sagae distills the very spirit and history of Yamagata. Managing Director Midori Furusawa explained: "Before brewing sake, we were a safflower merchant business."

Known as benibana, the star-shaped safflowers helped the prefecture prosper as the crimson pigment extracted from them was highly prized for its vibrance in dyes and even cosmetics. Furusawa was no exception and prospered with the safflower trade. The transition to sake has served them well, as the brewery has won numerous awards for its sake thanks to "high-quality Yamagata rice, clean water, and cold winters."

Director Furusawa recommended many brands, but one spirit that instantly caught our attention was one of their rarer offerings: a shochu made using buckwheat. It was the perfect drink to toast the end of our travels — and promise the start of many more to beautiful Yamagata.





Anytime is a Good Time

While our northern adventure had us sampling the joys of Yamagata's summer treats, there is plenty to explore in all seasons. Autumn brings the fragrant aroma of imoni, or taro soup, on the breeze down the Mogami River. Nakayama town is famed for its Imonikai, an autumn event where people gather along the riverside to eat soup and make merry. Winter is ideal for hitting the slopes and soothing hot spring explorations. There are also unique events, such as the Kasedori Festival in Kaminoyama Onsen, where people in bird-shaped straw costumes parade the streets to wish for the prevention of fires. Spring has, apart from the typical cherry blossom fare, a plentitude of other flowers and events that await, ensuring that Yamagata is a great place to visit any time of the year.

More info

To find out more about Yamagata and to book off-the-beaten-path experiences, check out the official Visit Yamagata website.

Visit Yamagata
https://www.visityamagata.jp/en/

Email
info@visityamagata.jp



Japanese Serow

One of Japan's most elusive beasts, the Japanese serow (Capricornis crispus) is a national symbol of Japan. This solitary, shaggy-haired creature has an almost mythical appearance and is often described as looking like a cross between a goat and an antelope. Well-adapted to Japan's mountainous terrain, the Japanese serow is an agile climber and can sometimes — if its curiosity gets the better of it and it draws near — be seen in dense woodlands across northern Honshu, eastern Kyushu and occasionally elsewhere.



Wildlife Watch

Five animals that are endemic to Japan and where to find them

Words by **Lisa Wallin**

Japan's wildlife showcases an astonishing variety of species, each with its unique adaptations and significance to the country's natural heritage. From the elusive Japanese serow to the intriguing giant salamanders, these fascinating creatures are just a few of the amazing animals found around Japan.

Giant Salamander

The giant salamander (Andrias japonicus) is one of the world's largest amphibians, often reaching up to 1.5 meters in length. Surprisingly little is known about its ecology, natural history and numbers — studies have reported there are at least 10,000 individuals across the country, but no large-scale survey has been done. Despite its protected status, the giant salamander is still under threat. Its habitats — the clear, fast-flowing rivers of Japan — are increasingly disappearing as concrete walls and dams interrupt migration paths and destroy nesting sites and shelters.





Tanuki

The tanuki, or Japanese raccoon dog (Nyctereutes procyonoides viverrinus), is intertwined with Japanese folklore and mythology. In the stories, tanuki are mischievous tricksters who shapeshift into almost anything — but most often into a beautiful woman. Myths about the tanuki's testicles are also common, as they can use them to make raincoats, weapons and more. The real-life animal is less bold: It's shy and elusive, though it can sometimes be spotted in quiet areas of urban environments — including Tokyo. For the best opportunity for a chance encounter in the wild, a trip to Shimane Prefecture's Chiburijima may be in order — the small island has a population of 2,000 of them.

Steller's Sea Eagle

The northern coastal regions of Japan are graced by the awe-inspiring Steller's sea eagle (Haliaeetus pelagicus). The raptor is one of the world's largest and most powerful eagles — and, reportedly, one of the heaviest. With a wingspan of up to 2.5 meters, the Steller's sea eagle soars skillfully as it hunts for fish and marine life. Though found elsewhere — the species is endemic to northeastern Asia — it will often migrate from its breeding grounds to Hokkaido for the winter. Their numbers peak in late February, and they are most easily spotted on the coast and near lakes close to the Nemuro Strait.

Japanese Macaque

The mischievous Japanese macaque (Macaca fuscata) has earned the endearing nickname "snow monkey" for its resourcefulness and ability to adapt to cold climates. While thick fur and a compact body help the Japanese macaque retain heat, it's the ape's penchant for soaking in natural hot springs that brings hordes of visitors to Jigokudani Snow Monkey Park in Nagano Prefecture. Though you'll spot them here at any time of the year, winter offers the most picturesque view of these fascinating primates.



Tokushima Trails

Embark on three short hikes through this Shikoku prefecture's emerald-colored mountains

Words by **Lisa Wallin**











The Amagoi Falls and Higanji Trail

Difficulty: Easy
Peak elevation: Approx. 700m
Approximate length: 4km
Highlights: The powerful Amagoi double waterfalls
Starting and finishing point: Amagoi Falls parking lot
Estimated time: 3 hrs

The picturesque gorge with its rushing waters is ideal for those who want to take time to stop and enjoy the scenery. Take your shoes off and dip them in the cooling waters on the way to the legendary "couple" waterfalls of Amagoi. Here, hikers can rest and return to the trailhead, or continue onwards through the cedar forests to the peaceful Takanesan Higanji Temple before turning back.

The Awa Sugar Trail

Difficulty: Easy
Peak elevation: Approx. 100m
Approximate length: 3.1km
Highlights: The Waza-no-yakata handicrafts museum and former sugar factories
Starting point: Wasenji Temple
Finishing point: Anrakuji Temple
Estimated time: 1.5 hrs

Mount Oyama's historical trails connect three temples — Taisanji, Wasenji and Anrakuji — across its slopes. The stretch between Wasenji and Anrakuji temples traverses a wasanbon (traditional fine-grained sugar) production area, giving insight into the making of this regional specialty. This trek is completely downhill — a welcome respite for those who have also climbed the more arduous Taisenji pilgrimage trail.

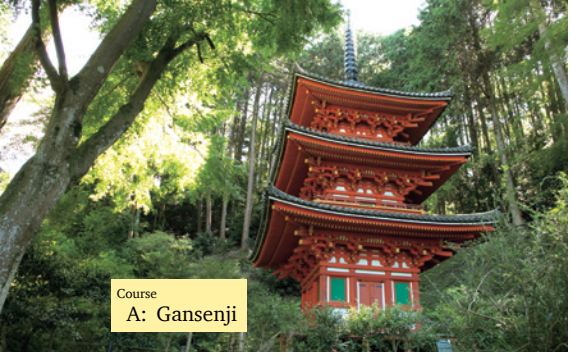
The Mount Yamainudake Trail

Difficulty: Moderate
Peak elevation: Approx. 1,000m
Approximate length: 9km
Highlights: The Kashihara terraced rice fields and a moss forest
Starting and finishing point: Parking lot near the rice fields
Estimated time: 4 hrs

Tucked away beyond central Kamikatsu — famed for its zero-waste ambitions — a circular route up Mount Yamainudake and back serves a moderate challenge for those keen on exploring Tokushima's natural landscape. From the breathtaking Kashihara terraced rice fields to a maze-like 8-hectare moss forest where ascetics used to train, this trail boasts many picturesque views.

More info

For more hiking trail tips in Tokushima Prefecture, visit *www.east-tokushima.jp/brochure/*.









お茶の京都

Explore with a local guide

Minamiyamashiro Old Temple Pilgrimage Tour

Discover the ancient temples of southern Kyoto and northern Nara in this special tour celebrating the completion of repairs to Joruriji's national treasures, the nine Amida Nyorai statues.

Held in collaboration with Nara National Museum's special exhibition Numinous Minamiyamashiro: Treasures from the Mountains Between Nara and Kyoto, an English-speaking guide will give valuable insights into the region's culture and history.







浄瑠璃寺九体阿弥陀修理完成記念　特別展

聖地南山城

—奈良と京都を結ぶ祈りの至宝—

2023 7.8[土]–9.3[日]

国宝 阿弥陀如来坐像（9軀のうち その1）
京都・浄瑠璃寺[木津川市]

奈良国立博物館 NARA NATIONAL MUSEUM

Tour Fee

Adult

¥ 2,500 per person (tax incl.)

Ticket stub required for participation.
Admission fee for Nara National Museum not included.

Meeting Point

Nara National Museum

*Exact boarding details will be shared upon application.

Contact

Planning: Ocha no Kyoto DMO
Host company: Kinki Nippon Tourist Co., Ltd.
E-mail: Kyoto-chiiki@or.knt.co.jp **Web brochure:**

Tour Options

Tour period: Jul 21–Sep 3

*Transportation will be via jumbo taxi and on foot

Course A approx. 2.5 hrs <every Wed and Sat>	Nara National Museum 12:15	Joruriji	Gansenji	JR Kizu Stn 14:45
Course B approx. 3 hrs <every Thu and Sun>	Nara National Museum 12:15	Omido-Kannonji	Kaijusenji	JR Kizu Stn 15:15
Course C approx. 2.5 hrs <every Fri>	Nara National Museum 12:15	Jindoji	Kanimanji	Kintetsu Shinhosono Stn / JR Hosono Stn 14:45

Note: Please check travel requirements in advance. To make a reservation, visit the web brochure via the QR code above.

Embrace Your True Beauty

Life abroad is full of compromises — your foundation doesn't have to be one of them

Words by **Lisa Wallin**
Portrait photos by **Allan Abani**

From bureaucratic red tape and apartment hunting struggles to deciphering food labels and finding clothes and makeup that fit, there are often hurdles that prevent you from being able to live a life that feels your own when you first move. Often, as you adjust to the cultural differences and immerse yourself with the support of your new local community, you can strike a balance between the expectations and the reality of your new life. We asked three international residents how they let their true selves shine through, no matter where they are.





Coco, Content Creator | USA

A complex character and eclectic nerd with a penchant for pastels.

What keeps you inspired?
I have so many interests; I kind of march to the beat of my own drum. I continuously do new things and keep my interest piqued. I enjoy anime and manga, video games, anime conventions, and I used to cosplay. I kind of went through a journey of self-discovery into nerdom after high school and it all went downhill — or uphill? — from there.

Being here in Japan, I want to be a voice of the Black community and inspire and motivate others to travel and explore. I'm the first person in my family to ever live abroad — many people I know have barely left my home state — so I want to ease people's fears and encourage them to go out into the world and live their lives fully.

My Three Words: Big. Black. Bold.
On Zen Wear: It felt light on the skin, not too heavy, and was a great match for my skin tone.

Find Coco on Instagram: *@kawaiiicoco*



Josh, Twitch Streamer | Australia

Cyclist, model and purportedly makes the best banana cake ever.

What drives you?

When I first moved to Japan, I found it difficult to learn how to be a part of Japanese culture. I was aware of the differences, but didn't expect how difficult it was to fit in. I ended up finding my home in the vegan community here and through livestreaming projects.

In June, I rode to the northernmost point of Japan — Cape Soya in Hokkaido — which took me 17 days. This year I've raised money for Mirai no Mori, an NPO that takes orphaned children out into nature for hikes and team-building exercises. Knowing that someone is at a disadvantage as soon as they're born due to something they can't even control really affected me. I want to help people, because I already do so much for myself.

My three words: Master of none

On Zen Wear: It survived a 15-kilometer bike ride in the Tokyo summer heat just fine.

Find Josh on Twitch: *@joshinjapan*



Elisa, Photographer | Belgium

Globetrotter and nature lover with a background in economics.

What keeps you here?

I ended up living in Tokyo by accident. I was here as an exchange student, but ended up loving it and wanting to stay. My biggest shock was probably that I couldn't read anything at first, which was overwhelming. Other than that, it was easy to adapt because everything is so convenient. I would probably have more reverse culture shock going back home.

I'm passionate about photography and especially street photography, so I spend a lot of time doing that. I like wandering around in the late afternoon, when the light looks really good and people are on their way home from work. Tokyo is great for street photography, so I'm a constant explorer. I feel like this is a place where I could evolve and find a community. It feels like a good fit for me.

My three words: Organized. Sensitive. Enthusiastic.

On Zen Wear: I was so surprised by how natural it looked, and it also resisted well to the heat.

Find Elisa on Instagram: *@inheroceaneyes*

Zen Wear: Showcasing Your Best Self

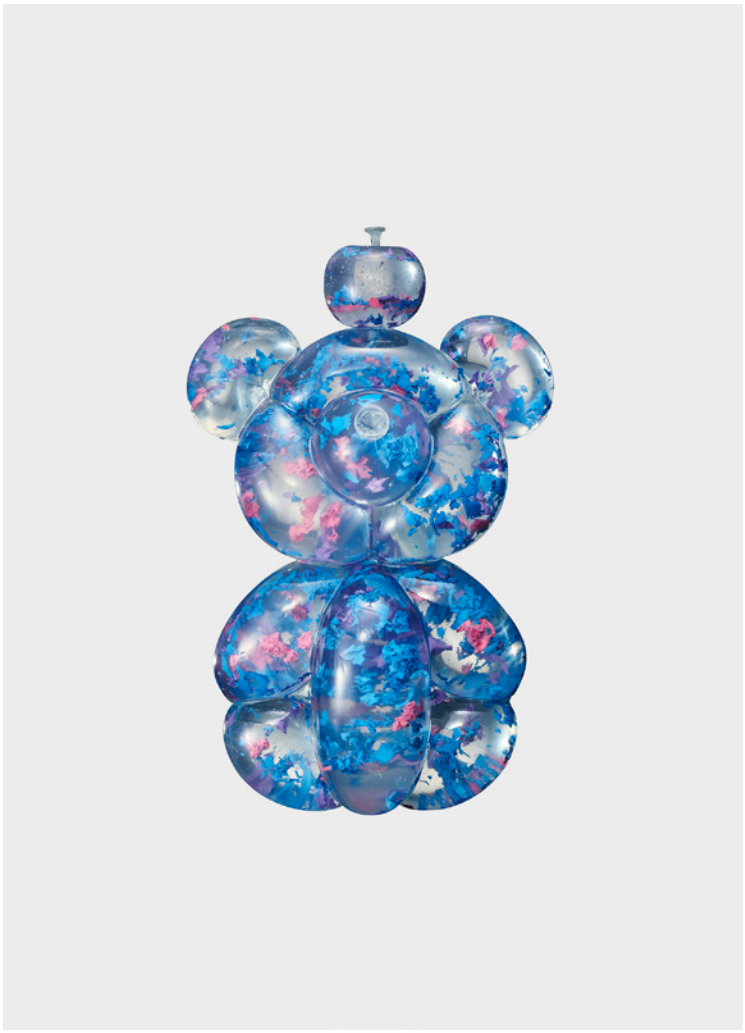
As Japan's first product line to provide a broad range of 40 shades in cool, neutral and warm undertones, Decorté's Zen Wear foundation makes it easy for visitors and residents alike to find a match for their skin. Being specifically developed for Japan's humid climate, Zen Wear solves many issues people find frustrating: The foundation excels in high temperatures and humidity and will stay on for 24 hours despite sweat or physical touch.

The series is inspired by the teachings of Zen and the belief that the mind and body should be in balance, where Zen Wear helps sync your physical appearance with your self-image. By achieving a harmony between the two, your true beauty can shine through from within. Brush it onto your skin in gentle strokes and marvel as it transforms you into your best self from within.

More info

Find your best Zen Wear match on Decorté's official website.

Web: *decorte.com/site/zenwear/r/r3037/*
Instagram: *@decorte_official*





空 Sora
#58B2DC

AIR

The air element symbolizes communication, spirituality and clarity of thought. It is often synonymous with movement and overcoming barriers. Despite being surrounded by it, air is intangible and invisible — a reminder that sometimes we need to look beyond the surface to see what's truly there.

Daisy Balloon's whimsical art goes above and beyond the balloon animals found at children's parties. Pieces like those in the **Apple Bear series** represent more than the bears' physical form, encouraging observers to dig deep into existential questions.

Read more on page 20.





Daisy Balloon's inflatable installations are inspired by life itself

Words by **Lisandra Moor**

Art That Goes Pop



"Invisible Wondar," Daisy Balloon for FemtechFes, 2022





Top: "D • E • A • U," a collaborative piece produced with visual designer WOW and musician Takeshi Kobayashi. Reborn-Art Festival, 2017.

Bottom: "Equilíbrio" (Balance), made with more than 9,000 balloons. Solo exhibition at Japan House São Paulo, 2020.

Rie Hosokai and Takashi Kawada's abstract creations are far from what most people would imagine when picturing balloon art. There are no colorful flowers or animal shapes here, but rather etheric installations that hope to spark curiosity.

Floating a Trial Balloon

Hosokai is a full-time artist who has made balloons her main medium of expression; Kawada is a trained graphic designer and art director with sky-high ambitions and imagination. Together, they create out-of-the-box works that defy expectations. It was Kawada who approached Hosokai about forming the creative unit that, in 2009, came to be Daisy Balloon. "Talking with Rie, the ideas I wanted to express through graphic design changed to three-dimensional ideas," he says. Since then, the duo has collaborated on dozens of projects exhibited around Japan at both art museums and commercial spaces.

Many of the works that Hosokai and Kawada create together spawn from life's greatest questions. While they didn't choose to work with balloons for any particular reason, the material doubles as an antithesis to their heavy subject matter, being as light as air itself. It's difficult not to associate balloons with birthdays or other celebrations, but Hosokai and Kawada hope that this unlikely exposition is exactly what will inspire people to think differently about the world around them: "We feel that when people are freed from these concepts, they can expand their sphere of thinking about all elements."

Top: A festive storefront installation for Ginza Six's holiday campaign, 2017.

Bottom: "Root: The Gathering of Life," an immense installation inside Hankyu Department Store Umeda Main Store. Osaka Art & Design, 2023. Courtesy of Hankyu Hanshin Department Stores, Inc.



Serendipitous Levitations

Working with balloons can be challenging, but what most people would consider a demerit, Hosokai and Kawada consider a blessing. Balloons can be inconsistent and unpredictable — unlike more malleable materials like paint or clay. "The rate of air loss varies depending on the environment, but sometimes the piece can transform into an unexpected state," they explain. "We call that phenomenon an error of nature, where visually it looks more like an element of failure." Hosokai and Kawada choose to see these serendipitous events as happy accidents and newfound potential for their art pieces.

Openness to change and the unexpected is very much a core value for the creative work that Hosokai and Kawada do together. Daisy Balloon doesn't discriminate when it comes to projects. The unit spends equal time and energy on art installations — notably their contributions to the last couple of iterations of Roppongi Art Night — and on commercial storefronts at shopping complexes like Ginza Six and Omotesando Hills. It's rare to have artists who swiftly shift between personal and professional projects. Daisy Balloon sees this as a challenge — and a necessary one at that. Working on a wide array of projects allows Hosokai and Kawada to better understand others and the context for their art. "It is not easy to move between the two," they say, "but it's also a welcomed challenge as creative people."





Drifting Onwards

Daisy Balloon's latest exhibited work was featured during Roppongi Art Night 2023, held in late May. Titled "Turbulence," the piece was Hosokai and Kawada's combined interpretation of the festival's theme, "Urban Life Encyclopedia," and hung from the Roppongi Hills Metro Hat for all commuters to see. On the event website, the artists share their aspiration for this massive installation: "The aim of this work is not to blame injustice and absurdity, but to quietly reflect on our inner conflicts and to instill the hope that we can adapt ourselves freely to the unpredictable turbulence of our world."

The future of Daisy Balloon remains open and flexible, much like Hosokai and Kawada's evergoing dance between subject and object. "We are changing ourselves and being guided by others, and we are also undergoing a great deal of internal and external change in social and natural change." One thing is certain: The unit's upcoming works will be the product of pure passion, inquisitiveness and the desire to make the world a better place.



Above: Daisy Balloon's "Turbulence" in Roppongi Hills. Roppongi Art Night, 2023.

Right: "Harmony," a 14-meter long installation presented during Asahikawa Design Week, 2018.

More info

For more information on upcoming exhibitions and events at the Daisy Balloon gallery and other venues, visit *daisyballoon.com*.

AgainG (Again Gallery)
6-38-10 Minamiikuta, Tama-ku, Kawasaki city, Kanagawa Prefecture

Such Great Heights

A short introduction to Japan's three grand giant kite festivals

Words by **Lisa Wallin**



Photo courtesy of Saitama Prefecture Products & Tourism Association

Sometimes size does matter — at least when it comes to giant kites that are set to soar the open skies of Japan. Often romanized as oodako, which translates literally to "giant kite," these behemoths can weigh several hundreds of kilos and measure in the double digits in both breadth and width. Depending on the size, design and region, constructing just one of these can take about two to three months.

To Fly a Kite

The custom of flying mega kites is said to have started during the mid- to late Edo period as a way to celebrate Children's Day (then known as Tango no Sekku, an event to wish for the health and strength of male children) in early May. People became more skilled and more competitive, constructing larger kites with each passing year, eventually maxing out in size around the mid-Meiji era. Several regions maintain their kite-making prowess, but three areas — Higashiomi, Sagamihara and Kasukabe — are unrivaled as Japan's premier kite-flying trio.

We Have Liftoff

It's important to note that getting these colossal kites airborne is no small endeavor. It takes several teams of up to 100 skilled kite wranglers located at various points of the kite — the tail, the main body and the control ropes — to avoid tangles and ensure a safe takeoff. Even with all this manpower, a kite still needs a good gust of wind to get it up into midair, meaning there's often a waiting game for the right conditions. However, when the wind finally hits and the kite soars into the sky — seemingly defying at least some laws of physics — it's an awe-inspiring sight.

Kasukabe Big Kite Raising Festival

Kasukabe's festival features hundreds of kites, both of the giant and standard variety, made using washi paper and bamboo. They are sent up into the air with the wish that the young children who are celebrating their very first festival season live long, healthy lives.

When: May 3 & 5, 2024
Where: Edogawa riverbed, 83 Nishinohoshubana, Kasukabe city, Saitama Prefecture
More Info: *bit.ly/KasukabeKites*



Sagami Giant Kite Festival

The Sagami Giant Kite Festival's Shindo team is said to have Japan's largest kites, which weigh in at 950 kilos and measure 14.5 by 14.5 meters. Kites from the remaining three teams — Kami-isobe, Shimo-isobe, and Katsusaka — are no less impressive as they sail gracefully over the Sagamigawa riverbed.

When: May 4–5, 2024
Where: Shindo Sports Open Space, Sagamihara city, Kanagawa Prefecture
More Info: *www.sagami-oodako.com/e/*



Higashiomi Giant Kite Festival

Using traditional measurements, Higashiomi's larger kites span about 100-tatami mats (about 13 meters by 12 meters) while the smaller ones measure about 20 tatami mats. If you miss the festivities here, you can still enjoy kites up close at the World Kite Museum Higashiomi Oodako Hall year-round.

When: The last Sunday of May
Where: Fureai Sports Park, Higashiomi city, Shiga Prefecture
More Info: *http://oodako.net*

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FIRE

Often considered a symbol of divinity and purity, fire represents light, energy and transformation. It has the power to both create and destroy, and often serves as a catalyst for change and renewal.

猩猩緋 Shoujouhi
#E83015



Installation view with Kaga metal inlay works by **Nakagawa**. Photo by Yukie Mikawa.

Read more on page 28.





With multiple eruptions causing high death tolls, **Mount Unzen** is Japan's most deadly volcano. It also remains one of Nagasaki's most popular hot spring destinations.

Read more on page 38.

Mamoru Nakagawa: The Alchemist

This living national treasure carries the torch for the centuries-old art of Kaga metal inlay

Words by **Jennifer Pastore**, photos courtesy of **Panasonic Shiodome Museum of Art**



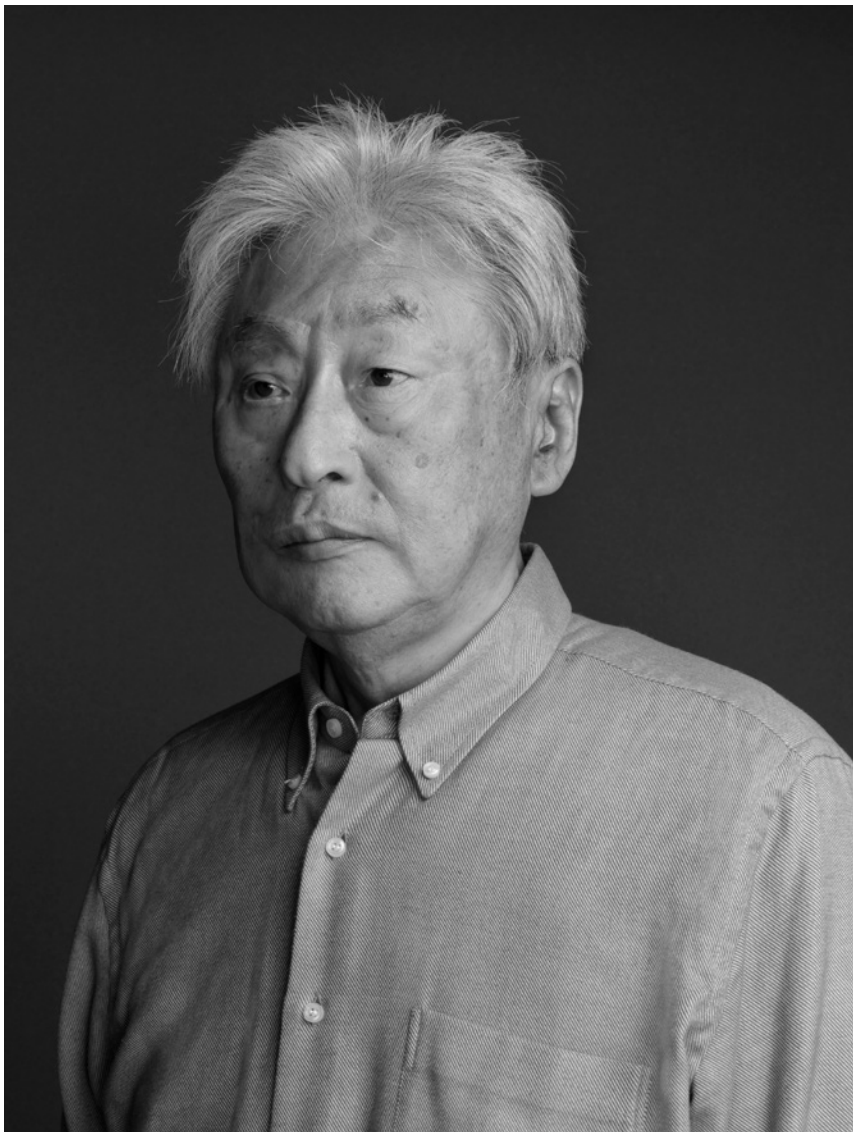
Mamoru Nakagawa, Peacock-shaped Censer, 2017. Private collection. Photo by Takao Oya.

The clinking sound of hammer hitting chisel rings through the workshop of Mamoru Nakagawa, an artisan in his mid-70s. He taps persistently with fierce concentration, carving grooves in a smooth alloy surface. Nakagawa practices Kaga metal inlay, or Kaga zogan in Japanese, a craft that once thrived in the area known today as Kanazawa, Ishikawa Prefecture. Metal inlay entails inserting ultra-thin pieces of soft metal, sometimes less than a millimeter thick, into cavities cut into a harder base. The finished works are astounding objects of gleaming beauty that look entirely as if their decorative designs were painted or printed, rather than painstakingly engraved and embedded by hand. Nakagawa has honed his art over nearly half a century, leveraging an industrial design background to unite a traditional craft with modern aesthetics. For its 20th anniversary exhibition, Panasonic Shiodome Museum of Art in Tokyo chose to spotlight this living national treasure, a former Panasonic employee.

"Nakagawa Sensei creates remarkable artworks, but in many ways his life is relatable, since he started out as a company worker," curator Yuko Kawakita notes. "We also believe his design-centered approach could make the lofty-seeming world of metalcraft more accessible."

Dressed in a blue blazer with a shock of white hair, Nakagawa exudes a candid, affable air. "I was a real Tom Sawyer as a kid, always building tree forts and flying toys," he says.

Industrial design was a natural career choice. After studying it at the Kanazawa College of Art under modern design icon Sori Yanagi and Good Design Awards founder Takuo Hirano, Nakagawa joined Matsushita Electric Works (now Panasonic) in Osaka as a product developer. Projects from his university and company days, including a best-selling hair dryer and sketches for electric razors, demonstrate a clean sharpness of lines still found in his metalwork.





Encounters with Craft

"I would've stayed at Matsushita if I hadn't had family obligations as the eldest son," Nakagawa explains. His mother's illness took him back to his hometown of Kanazawa at age 26, but he continued to pursue design. He worked for the Industrial Research Institute of Ishikawa, experimenting with materials and advising makers of traditional crafts on how to create items suited to the contemporary market. Among his covetable collaborations is a lacquer sake set for New Year's featuring a spinning top for its lid. "The creative process is the same for craft and industrial design," he stresses, pointing out a mutual requirement that form follows function with an end user in mind. "Craft," he continues, "is art with technique."

Above: Mamoru Nakagawa, 2022. Photo by Takao Oya.

Left: Stirrups with "No-no-Ji" Looped Design in Metal Inlay, Inscription: "Made by Zenzaemon Nagakuni of Kanazawa" 17th century Kaga-Honda Museum.
Photo by Takao Oya.

The lines between art, craft and design are generally blurry, but the discussion is especially complex in Japan, where craft traditions predate Western hierarchical ideas of "fine" and "applied" arts imposed during the Meiji era. It was an exhibition of Kaga metal inlay during its pre-Meiji golden era that first drew Nakagawa to the artform. After seeing Kaga zogan stirrups — strikingly chic even by today's standards — made for samurai in the 17th century, he embarked on his journey of mastering and promoting this art with the essence of Japanese craftsmanship in its DNA.

Nakagawa became the last working apprentice of Kaishu Takahashi (1905–2004), a preeminent Kaga zogan artist whose exquisitely detailed works reflect tastes and motifs carried over from the Meiji period. Still, he pushed Nakagawa toward originality and innovation in his own designs. "He always told me, 'make it haikara' (high collar)," referring to the progressive fashions of a modernizing Japan. Like Takahashi, Nakagawa also sometimes incorporates archetypal Japanese motifs, but his pieces display a more streamlined style, often with hints from Art Deco.



Top right: Mamoru Nakagawa, Flower Vessel, "Dawn in the Northern Forest" 2016 Panasonic Holdings Corporation. Photo by Takao Oya.

Below: Mamoru Nakagawa, Flower Vessel, "Check and Checkered" 2017 Kanazawa Yasue Gold Leaf Museum. Photo by Takao Oya.



A Legacy of Sophistication

Kanazawa is known for its rich craft heritage even within Japan. In addition to metal inlay, Wajima and Yamanaka lacquer, Kutani porcelain, and Kaga yuzen silk dyeing are a few of its creative disciplines. Kaga Province was incredibly wealthy during the Edo period, to the point of seeming like a potential rival to the shogunate. Kaga channeled its vast resources into cultural rather than military development in part to allay Tokugawa suspicions.

While Kaga zogan follows the basic process of metal inlay that flourished in Anatolia some 5,000 years ago, the technique was refined in Japan, with a focus on employing alloys for greater color variety. Nakagawa favors a hazily silver-toned blend of copper and silver, known as oborogin, for his base pieces inspired by forms from everyday life. His advanced skills allow him to practice the complex art of multilayered kasane zogan, which requires extreme precision and an intricate understanding of metallic reactions.

"Dawn in the Northern Forest" (2016) exemplifies his process and style. He first sketched an early morning landscape observed in Sweden, then translated the image into metal by carving his design into an oborogin vase using self-made chisels. Next, he fastidiously set and hammered in pieces of gold, silver, copper and alloyed metals, composing a scene of lines and triangles to express trees reflected in water. Finally, the piece was given a steaming chemical bath for patination and polished with grated daikon radish. This particular work was donated to Panasonic, but others of its caliber have been exhibited at institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the British Museum. Nakagawa created "Check and Checkered" (2017), combining tartan and Japanese ichimatsu checker motifs, at the suggestion of a British Museum curator.



Looking to the Future

Reflecting on design since Japan's postwar "economic miracle," Nakagawa laments diminished enthusiasm for older practices, commenting that kogei (craft) fell by the wayside as Japanese technology underwent reforms. "You don't often hear mingei (folk crafts) mentioned in industrial design now, but I'd like to see traditional Japanese techniques used more often. To me, that's where the real 'Cool Japan' is."

With this in mind, he is actively nurturing the next generation of artisans and spreading knowledge of Kaga metal inlay through global travel, teaching and research. The Panasonic show presents recent applications of metalcraft in fields such as jewelry and architecture, along with works by artists following in Nakagawa's footsteps. His collaborators include Noritaka Tatehana, best known for the Heel-less Shoes worn by Lady Gaga. Together they produced two new pairs for the exhibition, with Nakagawa supplying spur-like pieces attached to Tatehana's embossed leather uppers. Tatehana observes: "It is rare for a living national treasure to be willing to collaborate with young artists, but traditional crafts will fall into disuse if they are merely regarded as cultural assets to be preserved. Mr. Nakagawa's gaze is always fixed on the future, while also reflecting on the past."

His designation as a living national treasure in 2004 recognized not only Nakagawa's artistry, but also his contributions to furthering the practice of Kaga metal inlay. Interpreting the award as a call to continue advancing his art, he embodies the principle that tradition lives on by seeking out the new.

Above: Mamoru Nakagawa, Noritaka Tatehana, Heel-less Shoes "Downtown I" 2022. Private collection. Photo by Takao Oya.

Below, right: "Nakagawa Mamoru: Design and the Lustrous Beauty of Metal" exhibition. Installation view. Photo by Yukie Mikawa.

More info

Find more of Mamoru Nakagawa's work at the "Nakagawa Mamoru: Design and the Lustrous Beauty of Metal" exhibition, currently being held at Panasonic Shiodome Museum of Art.

20th Anniversary Exhibition
Nakagawa Mamoru: Design and the Lustrous Beauty of Metal
Where: Panasonic Shiodome Museum of Art, Higashi-Shimbashi, Minato-ku, Tokyo
When: Until Sep 18
More info: *bit.ly/MamoruNakagawa23*





Seibuen Amusement Park, 2022. Photo by Keiko Sakuta.

Painting the Night Sky

Exploring the explosive traditions and innovations of Japanese fireworks displays

Words by **Kim Kahan**
Photos courtesy of **Nihonbashi Marutamaya Co., Ltd.**

It's said that the first person to witness a firework in Japan was none other than Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first shogun of the Tokugawa Shogunate, over 400 years ago in 1613. The technology had traveled east from China and possibly Italy during the Sengoku period, and gunpowder experts developed into keen pyrotechnicians.

It wasn't until 1733, after a cholera epidemic had eviscerated much of the capital's almost 1-million-strong population, that fireworks were shared with commoners. Ieyasu's descendent, Tokugawa Yoshimune, arranged a spectacular fireworks display on the Sumida River to ward off the plague and pray for those already succumbed to the disease. This event proved pivotal in the history of Japanese fireworks, forever weaving fireworks into the fabric of Japanese culture and tradition.

In the modern age, fireworks shows have become elaborate productions that can takes months of planning. In recent years, with the advent of new technology, increased competition from overseas, and a wider awareness of sustainability, the industry has changed more than ever before. We spoke to one of its top players, Toshikatsu Ogatsu, president of Nihonbashi Marutamaya, who flies the flag for Japanese fireworks around the world.

Ogatsu has been working with fireworks for over 45 years, even traveling around the world to share Japanese fireworks; he's seen more shows than he can count. He oversaw the fireworks for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games and was the subject of a documentary on TBS.



Toshikatsu Ogatsu, CEO of Nihonbashi Marutamaya Co., Ltd. Photo by Kim Kahan.



Minatomirai Smart Festival, 2022. Photo by Yutaro Inoue.

The Perfect Formation

Originally, Ogatsu didn't want to follow his father into the fireworks business. He rebelled by studying business at university and then joining an import company upon graduation. "I worked selling Spanish products to department stores. I've never been to Spain, but I enjoyed it," he says.

"But then I saw fireworks at a fair — I forget which one — and I was impressed. I decided to join the industry. It was easy for me because I'm part of a fireworks family and my father had been encouraging me," he continues.

A jovial man, Ogatsu laughs frequently and his passion for fireworks is unmistakable. He constantly talks up his employees, who are all busy working on show designs for the upcoming fireworks season. "I'm just an old man," he jokes, "but they're all great at thinking of ideas."

He introduces one of his employees, Rei Shimano, who, he says proudly, also played the piano for one of the performances they synchronized to music for a planetarium event at Yebisu International Festival for Art & Alternative Visions.

He proceeds to show me the display from that event, which, even though it is shown on a flat screen, is still impressive. It could be a simulation; each firework seems too perfect. "Everything you see there is real," he confirms.

Ogatsu shares something I'd never considered — the idea that each firework can be perfectly formed. This is a major hallmark of a typical Japanese fireworks display. At competitions in Japan, fireworks are scored based on a series of criteria, including the highest point at which the firework explodes, the size of the explosion, and its symmetry. Other countries, such as Canada and Italy, will judge based on factors such as height and shape.

The global fireworks scene is full of variety. Italy is famous for its rocket fireworks, while Germany uses different chemicals, making them sparkle for an especially long time. Japan, on the other hand, is famed for its spherical fireworks, each type with its own corresponding name. The names often have floral connotations, with chrysanthemum and dahlia being two of the most well known.



Tokyo Bay Grand Fireworks Festival, 2015. Photo by Keiko Sakuta.



Tokyo Bay Grand Fireworks Festival, 2015. Photo by Keiko Sakuta.



Hanabirium, 2018.

Destined for a Sparkling Ever After

Back when it was established in 1990, Nihonbashi Marutamaya pioneered the use of computer systems to synchronize fireworks to music. “We still use pretty much the same system. It’s just owned by a different country now,” Ogatsu says.

These days, Marutamaya is moving towards using drones more. In fact, it was one of the first domestic companies to use them together with fireworks. The company recently arranged a display over FC Tokyo’s soccer field, with drones spelling out the club name while fireworks painted the sky around them.

Ogatsu is keen to use drones, as they are similar to fireworks. “Painting the sky with lights — I know how to do that,” he says. “You could use them for announcements, like showing people where the exits are.”

He does admit, though, that drones will take some time to master. “With fireworks, you can reach a height of 300 meters with one. But drones, they’re tiny,” he says. The company currently has 400 drones with another 400 on the way, confirming that they are part of the move forward.

Striking a Balance for Sustainability

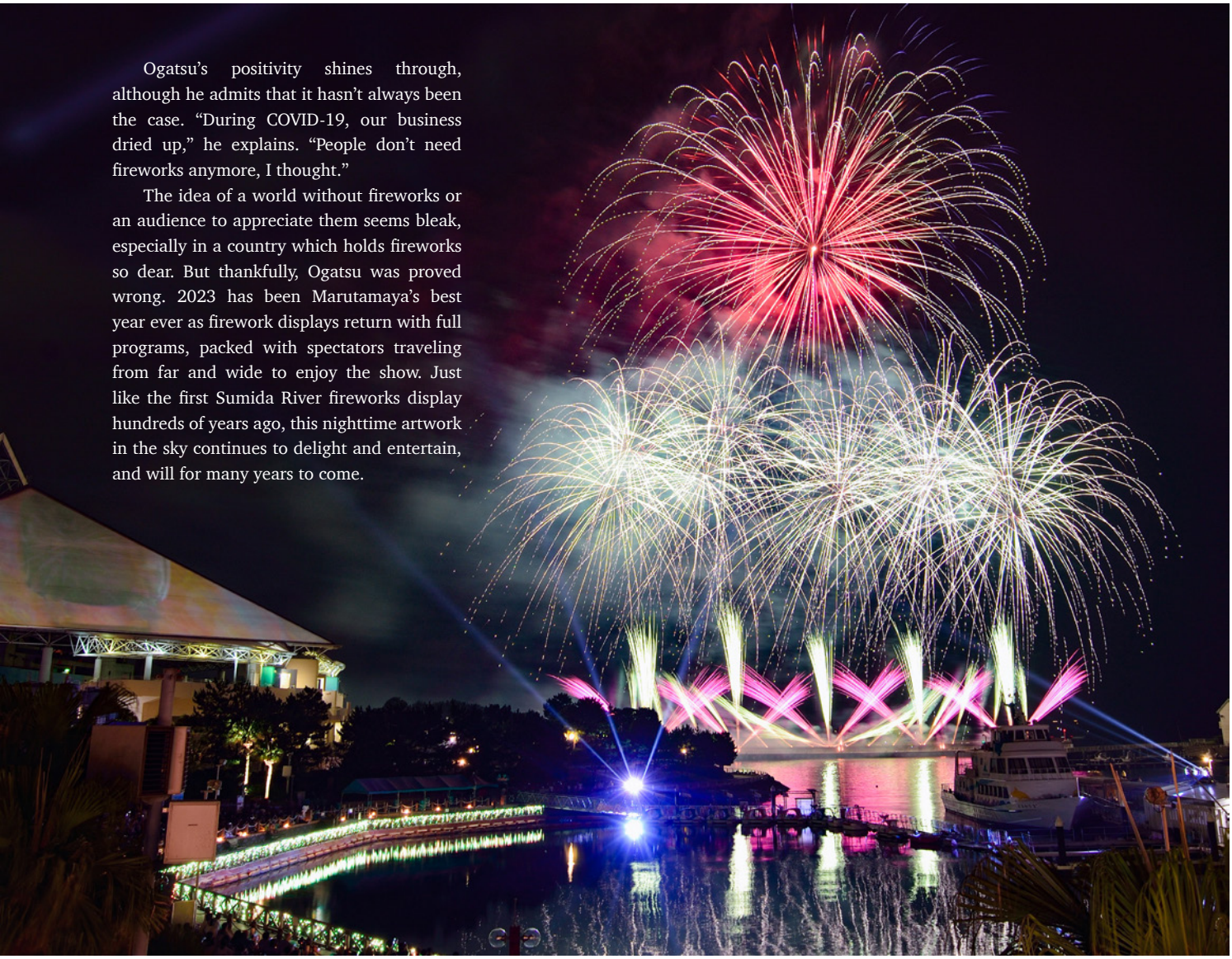
New technology brings up new considerations, such as sustainability. Fireworks leave a not-insignificant carbon footprint, making low- and no-emission fireworks a critical next step. Ogatsu orchestrated the fireworks for all four ceremonies of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, which were required to have no-debris fireworks. He shows me a video of the display filmed from above the stadium. Although it was scaled back from the original plan because of COVID-19 restrictions, it's impressive. "The next stage is smokeless fireworks — from autumn," he says. "It's hard because we have to make them safe. But we will do it."



Above: Setting up tower fireworks in Narita, 2018.
Below: Fireworks Symphonia at Yokohama Hakkeijima Sea Paradise, 2018. Photo by Keiko Sakuta.

Ogatsu's positivity shines through, although he admits that it hasn't always been the case. "During COVID-19, our business dried up," he explains. "People don't need fireworks anymore, I thought."

The idea of a world without fireworks or an audience to appreciate them seems bleak, especially in a country which holds fireworks so dear. But thankfully, Ogatsu was proved wrong. 2023 has been Marutamaya's best year ever as firework displays return with full programs, packed with spectators traveling from far and wide to enjoy the show. Just like the first Sumida River fireworks display hundreds of years ago, this nighttime artwork in the sky continues to delight and entertain, and will for many years to come.



Autumn Brilliance

Five fireworks festivals going off with a bang this fall

Words by **Kim Kahan**



Numata Hanabi

This local event brings the city to life with stalls selling street food lining the walkways of the park and touting festival favorites like takoyaki and choco banana sticks. Reserved seats are available for a fee to witness this 45-minute musical fireworks spectacle.

When: Sep 9
Where: Numata City Sports Park, Gunma Prefecture
More Info: *numatahanabi.com/show.html*

Left and below: Photos by Hiroyuki Hatano





Sanriku Fireworks Competition

With two versions of this event — one in spring and one in autumn — per year, the Sanriku Fireworks Competition promises multiple opportunities to catch some of Tohoku's finest traditional and contemporary art performances, as well as sparkling showers in the sky.

When: Oct 8
Where: Takata Matsubara Sports Park, Iwate Prefecture
More Info: *sanrikuhanabi.com/en.html*



Left and above: Photos courtesy of Fireworks Co., Ltd



Tsuchiura All Japan Fireworks Festival

Originally held to celebrate the end of the harvest season, this event attracts pyrotechnicians from across the country aiming to win the grand prize for the most exquisite fireworks.

When: Nov 4
Where: Sakuragawa Riverside, Ibaraki Prefecture
More Info: *www.city.tsuchiura.lg.jp/page/page006275.html*



Narita Fireworks Festival

Held over Lake Imaba, Narita Fireworks Festival is the first fireworks show in the world to win the prestigious Good Design Award — earned in part due to its breathtaking synchronization of music and light displays.

When: Nov 4
Where: Narita New Town Sports Square, Chiba Prefecture
More Info: *naritahanabi.com*



Kawaguchi Fireworks Festival

The third edition of one of Japan's newest fireworks festivals takes place next to the Arakawa River and boasts a host of Japanese pop and rock medleys playing to the rhythm of the fireworks.

When: Nov 11
Where: Arakawa Sports Park, Saitama Prefecture
More Info: *1110hanabi.com/about2023/*

Volcanic Vacations

Explore five of Japan's prominent — and potentially violent — geological features that continue to shape the land and culture

Words by **Helen A. Langford-Matsui**



Sakurajima, Kagoshima Prefecture

There are a myriad of ways to get to know this extremely active volcano. Start your exploration at the Sakurajima Visitor Center before heading out to observe how ecosystems recover post-eruption by visiting Sakurajima's five visible lava flows.

Several observation decks provide different angles from which to admire the volcano, which is known to rumble, so keep an ear open. Other activities to consider include sightseeing flights, nighttime eruption cruises on the bay, volcanic ash pottery classes and pizza making in ovens made of solidified lava.

More info: *www.kagoshima-yokanavi.jp/en/feature/sakurajima2*

Japan ranks as one of the world's most volcanically active countries. In fact, it's home to over 110 active volcanoes, which is approximately 10% of the world's total. Incredibly, many of them are accessible to the public. Here, we introduce five of those volcanoes, each of which provides a rich experience for travelers keen to encounter the geological forces at work beneath Japan.

Mount Aso, Kumamoto Prefecture

A close-range view of a smoking crater and bright green crater lake awaits those who make the trek to Mount Aso. Of the mountain's five peaks, only one, Mount Nakadake, is currently active. How close you can get will depend on the volcanic alert level and your health.

Take in the area's wider volcanic splendor by hiking, horseback riding, rappelling the caldera walls, paragliding, hopping aboard a helicopter or small plane, or admiring the view from afar from a tethered hot air balloon.

More info: *www.asocity-kanko.jp/en/*



Nakadake, Mount Aso



Unzen Jigoku, Mount Unzen

Mount Unzen, Nagasaki Prefecture

A ghastly history hangs over Unzen Jigoku, a series of steaming fumarole fields on the slopes of Mount Unzen. Between 1627 and 1631, around 33 Christians were martyred here for refusing to renounce their religion.

Explore the fields by walking the footpaths, being sure to stop for a snack of onsen tamago — eggs cooked in hot springs — and for a foot soak in the ashiyu foot bath.

Those keen to dive deep into the area's volcanic history should explore the Unzen Volcanic Area UNESCO Global Geopark.

More info: *www.unzen.org/e_ver/*

Mount Fuji, Shizuoka and Yamanashi Prefectures

Mount Fuji may not be smoking, but it is indeed an active volcano. Not interested in reaching the summit? No worries: Trails crisscross the lower slopes while guided tours will take you to the Mount Hoei crater, the main site of the 1707 eruption.

Skip a taxing hike entirely by exploring one of Mount Fuji's lava caves, like the always-chilly Fugaku Wind Cave and Narusawa Ice Cave, formed during a ninth century eruption. Or, tour the lava tree molds at the Ken-Marubi lava flow.

More info:
www.japan.travel/en/fuji-guide/



Mount Hoei on Mount Fuji



Owakudani Valley, Mount Hakone

Mount Hakone, Kanagawa Prefecture

Mount Hakone's Owakudani valley, accessible via ropeway, features steaming volcanic gas and incredible views over Hakone and, on a clear day, Mount Fuji. Although the nature trail through the Owakudani Volcanic Steam Zone is generally off-limits these days due to increased volcanic activity, tours of the zone led by safety guides are held several times a day.

Cap off your visit with a meal of kurotamago — an onsen tamago with sulfur-blackened shells said to extend your lifespan by seven years per egg.

More info: *hakone-japan.com*



Self-care comes in all shapes, sizes and even scents. Hot spring **bath powders** make bathtime a luxurious mini getaway from daily life.

Read more on page 48.

水 Mizu
#81C7D4

WATER

Water covers over 70% of the Earth and makes up about 60% of the human body, making it vital to sustaining life. Associated with endurance, adaptability and fluidity, this element also respresents the harmony between the mind and the body.

Denkiyu is a much-loved local institution in Kyojima.



Soaking in Tradition

Tokyo's sento bathhouses find new purpose as times change

Words by **Manami Okazaki**, photos by **Toshihiro Oshima**

It's the afternoon in Kyojima. Outside a small corrugated iron shutter stand a dozen people, mostly elderly standing around waiting. They carry small plastic baskets with shampoo and conditioner, and have towels wrapped around their shoulders. At 3 o'clock on the dot, the shutter opens and they bustle into the entrance of their local bathhouse, Denkiyu. The chamber of the sento is flooded with light, the ceiling, painted in pastel blue and orange stripes, is incredibly high, allowing the moisture from the bath to vaporize. Soaking in the hot waters allows the body to completely relax. The patrons slip deeper into the water, immersing themselves, letting out a sigh.

Sento Sensibilities

The culture of sento developed in the Edo era, where sento were initially meant as places to wash, as individual homes didn't have their own bathrooms. They are still found in mostly residential urban areas, and serve as places to



Denkiyu's retro vibe and strong community culture are part of its old-school charm.

wash and soak despite 98% of residences in Japan being fitted with bathrooms now. They have taken a new role as a way to relax, to rejuvenate the spirit and luxuriate in the retro vibe, unique architecture and design.

Sento also provide an egalitarian, unpretentious space where, for around ¥500, one can enjoy a community where anyone, regardless of status and age, can communicate and engage in small talk. While the joys of sento — bathing, chatting with random strangers and relaxing with a coffee milk afterwards — are familiar pleasures and rituals for those in the know, sento are an increasingly rare sight in urban metropolises across Japan. In Tokyo, around 100 sento closed within six years — an alarming rate considering there are fewer than 500 left.

The Historic Bathhouses of Edo

The first sento is said to have been established at old Edo's Zenigame Bridge in 1591. Around that time, the population in the capital exploded to over a million, with an influx of workers moving to the city from across Japan. Alongside the growth was urban development and infrastructure to support the population. Most commoners lived in wooden houses, which were vulnerable to fires. Woodblock prints of the Edo era often feature aspects of firefighting culture as there was the perpetual risk of a blaze consuming entire villages.







As such, townsfolk living in downtown Tokyo were prohibited from having their own firewood heated baths, so sento were established to cater to these people and hence became part of the daily life of Edoites. The peak of sento usage, however, came much later in the post-war period: By 1968, there were over 18,000 sento in Japan.

Takarayu was established in 1927 and survived World War II. It remains one of the most popular historic bathhouses in the city, affectionately dubbed the King of Sento for its impressive structure and vast gardens. It sports a temple-like form called miyazukuri, with a karahafu curved gable, giving it a transcendent atmosphere and separating it from the ordinariness of daily life. Owner Koichi Matsumoto says, "The building is all wooden, but I think that is why we survived for so long. There were many lumberyards in this area of downtown and a plethora of woodworking factories, companies to do with wood products such as pencils. They were using the Sumida and the Arakawa waterways to transport goods. It was really difficult to get materials to burn so quite often sento could be found near places where you could get combustibles. All the lumberyards have gone now and we use gas now to heat the water.

"There were 36 sento in this area. Although only six of these now remain, at its peak in 1971, in the whole of Adachi ward, there were 154 baths. But now there are only 20 or so. The last 10 years, it became a place for old people; primary schools closed, too. However, we survived because in the place of these schools, universities opened campuses. In Adachi there were no universities and now there are six. It suddenly became a student town, so we get a lot of youths. For instance, Teikyo University of Science students come for a soak after judo matches.

This page: Takarayu is often used for movie and TV sets, such as *Kamen Rider* and the upcoming American TV series, *Sunny*.





Left: Takarayu has a resplendent garden owing to the fact that the current owner's grandfather was a gardener.

Below, top: Many of Daikokuyu's bathers are tourists who are in the area to see Tokyo SkyTree.

Below, bottom: Koganeyu's DJ events and sleek design draw a younger set.



"Customers come here every day — it is part of their lifestyle. For elderly who live on their own, it is better than being trapped in their homes. Actually 7,000 to 8,000 die at home in their baths — more than in car accidents — and no one notices for days. Because the bath here is large, it doesn't get cold like the bath at home where the body temperature lowers the bath water temperature. You can relax in the garden with a beer or coffee milk."

Hipster Bathers Lead the Revival

It's not just granddads and grannies going for a wash, and sento is experiencing a bit of a moment right now. Sento branded goods are flourishing, as are events and sento-themed art shows. Kai Tanaka runs Osentou magazine on Instagram. The account boasts over 10,000 followers and is one of many dedicated to Japan's bathhouse culture. Tanaka says his followers are 55% female and 45% male and overwhelmingly made up of young people in their 20s.

"It is a bit trendy to go to them. Young people perceive it as something fresh, not nostalgic. It reminds us of our grandma's house but it isn't something we feel an immediate familiarity with. I think they are artistic, beautiful and otherworldly; it is something like a new culture. It isn't entirely mainstream kids that are into this; it is more like the types that like vinyl and coffee at Doutor. It is also aligned with sauna fandom, as that is really big at the moment," he says.

Tanaka suggests that one of the large sparks that lit the sento fire among the younger crowd is Kosugiyu in Koenji. He says, "It is really famous among young people. It is really accessible, cute and they have themes like lemon milk baths that draw young women."



Tanaka observes that the young people around him want to experience "healing" and the term "iyasareru" (to be comforted or healed) is a current trend. "There is also a tendency to bottle things up inside. Everyone is busy and there are a lot of lonely people. Also, within their personal lives and also at work, everything is digital, digital, digital," he explains.

Daikokuyu and Koganeyu are two incredibly hip sento close to Kinshicho that are popular among young people. Open all night, Daikokuyu is a classic sento with Tokyo Skytree views and large open-air baths. Koganeyu, designed by Jo Nagasaka — also the architect for numerous Blue Bottle Coffee cafés — is one of the chicest sento in Tokyo, with a DJ booth and a space age-looking sauna. The sento often collaborates with brands like Converse.

Koganeyu owner Takuya Shinbo says, "Sento reset the sympathetic nervous system. I think contemporary people are too tired. They are always thinking too much. I think rather than us trying to transmit the sento boom and tell people what is good about them, it is something people should feel for themselves with their bodies."

Next page, top: Koganeyu's design incorporates contemporary elements that merge with its traditional structure.

Next page, bottom: Daikokuyu is open all night, making it a popular spot for night owls.


薬風呂


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女湯
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男生風呂で
SUKI SENTO SAUNA
営業時間
平日 15時～翌10時
土曜 14時～翌10時
日祝 13時～翌10時まで





Top left and right: Koganeyu is a building-type sento, in that it is part of an apartment block. It has several baths at varying temperatures, including an open-air cold plunge pool.

Bottom right: Current Denkiyu manager Katsuhito Okubo used to work at the United Nations writing policies — a job he gave up to take up his family's business.

Next page, top: Running a sento like Daikokuyu is hard work. Staff spend hours cleaning the bath areas every day.

Next page, bottom: An underwater scene, complete with seaweed, covers the tiled walls at Takarayu.



Still Struggling to Survive

Running a sento is, basically, a lot of hard work. Shinbo explains that they clean until 3am and then again at 10am. "We work two times more than regular people, and we have to continue that for decades. We have staff, but most places can't afford them. You need perseverance to do it."

Even a popular sento like Denkiyu, the building of which is owned by manager Katsuhito Okubo's grandmother, struggles. Okubo admits, "If I had to pay rent, it would be impossible."

Under Okubo's supervision, Denkiyu went from 90 customers a day to 250, and on average 3,000 per month. One reason is that Okubo himself facilitates a sense of community. He hosts events and exhibitions — lounging around the sento rest area is like a communal living room for the creators of Kyojima. However, the reality of owning a sento is that it costs around ¥700,000 a month to heat it. Although he receives subsidies, making it closer to ¥400,000, there are still staff fees, utilities, renovations, painting and other costs to consider.

Sento Dashi is a group of architects, urbanists and a ceramicist who made a dashi float from parts amassed from defunct sento. They go around Tokyo as part art installation, part transmission vehicle. They have the doleful task of archiving sento that have closed in their neighborhood of Bunkyo ward. Urban designer and architect Masaya Sammonji says, "There were 12 sento here and now there are only four. Even within Tokyo, the decrease is large. Over the last 11 years, we've surveyed them before they disappeared: We take photos and architectural scans and publish them in a magazine. We also receive architectural parts like the tiles and lockers. There was no point just amassing these things, so we made a mobile sento that we use to garner attention to sento culture. We want people to know about them."

Architect Haruka Kuryu explains that Bunkyo ward is particularly challenging since it's a high-end residential area with a demand for apartments, and it is much more lucrative to develop than run a bathhouse. However, she sees the value of a sento as many times more substantial than commerce alone.

Sharing Public Spaces

Ultimately, sento occupy an unusual semi-public place, which is unlike a café or a park. On top of that, let's not forget people are naked: This means that they are removed from the usual signifiers of social prestige such as fashion, makeup and jewelry, making sento a place free of status. Sento Dashi member and ceramicist Yuki Murata says that sento are at the liminal space between "public" and "private," but ultimately it is the community and others that make sento an important institution for a locality.





"While there might be a tendency for younger people to go for individualistic reasons, too, because they are fun and refreshing. As a gathering space, a sento is the ultimate place for the community," Kuryu explains. "There aren't that many places where people of different generations gather. If you are living in apartments, you don't really know who is living next door and you have no connection with the locality. If you go to the sento, regular grannies talk to you and you see the faces of the people you live with.

"Old school sento are about coexisting with others, knowing others, sharing space — it is really important to emphasize 'others.' If there isn't a place like this, life really is about oneself only."

Seeking Sento

Start or revisit your sento adventures by checking out these Tokyo bathhouse landmarks.

Denkiyu
A much-loved local institution in Kyojima, Denkiyu enjoys a strong base of neighborhood clientele.
More info: *denki-yu.studio.site*

Takarayu
Adachi ward's "King of Sento" boasts high ceilings and a beautiful garden. It's also a popular filming location for TV shows and movies.
More info: *slowtime.net/takarayu/*

Daikokuyu
Open all night, this sento with real onsen water is a popular spot for tourists visiting nearby Tokyo SkyTree.
More info: *www.daikokuyu.com*

Koganeyu
Partially funded by crowdfunding, Koganeyu is popular with the young hipster demographic.
More info: *koganeyu.com*

Osentou Magazine
Posting regular content on the charm and appeal of sento, this online magazine shares some of the best tips for Tokyo bathhouses.
Instagram: *@osentou.jp*

Sento Dashi
A touring shrine to sento and its culture. Check the group's Instagram for up-to-date info on future ventures.
More info: sento-dashi.tokyo
Instagram: *@sento_dashi*





Just Add Hot Water

Recreate the experience of Japan's famed hot springs at home using fragrant bath powders

Words by **Lisandra Moor**
Photos by **Anna Petek**

Forest Bathing

You may see ryokan and hotels boasting wooden bathing tubs made of hinoki, or Japanese cypress. Not only is it durable, hinoki also releases a distinct fragrance often used in aromatherapy. The flora-inspired Bath Room series is designed to bring the best of the outdoors, inside. One of the range's strongest contenders, the "Alighting on the Green Forest" bath powder, highlights hinoki alongside other medicinal herbs, transporting you to the fresh and earthy woods of Japan.

More info:
shorturl.at/xEOZ7

Sense of Place

As much as your first visit to a hot spring resort town may shape your onsen experience, once you get acquainted with the vast range of hot springs across Japan, you'll soon find one that suits your preferences best. The Meitou Hyakkei series captures the unique particularities of well-known onsen and bundles them into convenient single-use packets so bath lovers can relive their favorite soak from the comfort of their homes. Currently, the lineup comprises 21 locations, including famed spots such as Noboribetsu, Kinugawa and Beppu.

More info:
goshu.co.jp/product/gm/







Milky Way

Onsen water is naturally clear, but sulfuric springs have a milky white color to them. This is because the hydrogen sulfide in the water oxidizes, transforming it from translucent to opaque. While many powders on the market will turn your bath water milky white, it can come at a cost: a less-than-pleasant aroma reminiscent of rotten eggs. To get the creamy look complete with added skin benefits, try Ishizawa Lab's Rice Bath "Moist" powder, made with rice bran oil. You can also buy the series trio, which includes salt and baking soda bath powders for an at-home hot spring tour over a long weekend.

More info:
ishizawa-lab.co.jp/onsen_nadeshiko/

Lemon Up

It's common knowledge that citrus fruits are a great source of Vitamin C, but did you know that you can also spruce up your bathwater with them? Yuzu fruits are often added whole to baths and hot springs in winter and can be seen bobbing merrily on the surface of the water. Though the Japanese citrus is highly seasonal, you can find lemon-scented powders to turn your bath into a fresh fruit haven. The Onsen Japon Japon range has a lemon-scented powder that's perfect for year-round soaks. Pro tip: These palm-sized packets of happiness make excellent thank-you gifts and Christmas stocking stuffers.

More info:
charley-zzz.com/en/products/onsen-japon-japon

Sauna Effect

Saunas are a hot topic right now: There are sauna retreats, sauna centers and in-house saunas popping up all over Japan. For those who don't want to shell out on a full sauna experience regularly, or don't like the oppressive heat in sauna rooms, Ofu Off may have a solution. This bath salt pack recreates the comforting warmth of a sauna at home, but without the steam or scalding hot wooden benches. Using a white birch fragrance, it gives a nod to Scandinavian and Eastern European sauna whisks, which are often made of birch leaves. The coarse salt, imported from Australia, makes this bath additive especially rich in minerals.

More info:
bathclin.co.jp/products/ofu_off/



Aquatic Adventures in Shonan

Explore the seaside sanctuary by boat or by board for a relaxing day on the water

Words by **Helen A. Langford-Matsui**

Shonan is more than just an area; it's a vibe and, for many residents, a lifestyle. Think laid-back, ocean-oriented, nature-loving. Stretching from Yokosuka to Yugawara, it's home to well-known spots such as Zushi, Kamakura and Enoshima Island, as well as smaller communities like Miura, Hayama and Manazuru.

In Shonan, you'll find thalassophiles of every sort, from surfers and windsurfers to sea fishing aficionados. And as you might expect, watersport schools and outfitters are plentiful.

Dive into Shonan with one of the following activities — but know that this is just the beginning of what the area has to offer.



Surfing

Surfing in Shonan is possible year-round, though winter is said to bring better waves. If you have a board of your own, the coast is your oyster, but be warned that locals can be territorial. Avoid awkward encounters by sticking to beaches west of Enoshima, like Fujisawa's Katase Nishihama and Chigasaki's Southern Beach.

If you're new to the sport, a lesson is in order — and gentle waves. Head to Fujisawa, where you can take lessons on Katase Higashihama Beach to the east of Enoshima.

Stand-up Paddleboarding (SUP)

SUP is popular across Shonan, and many shops offer equipment rentals. If you're a beginner, however, it's best to hire an instructor. Most programs start on the sand, where you'll practice before entering the water.

Where the lesson goes from there depends on the conditions and your abilities. Wherever you go, though, be sure to look down: The marine creatures of Shonan are diverse and sometimes colorful. Rocky reefs like those found in the waters off Hayama are your best bet for spying sea life. SUP yoga and family plans are also on the activity menu at many shops.



Sea Kayaking

Though outfitters and schools are located all along the coast, you'll notice that many lessons take place in Zushi and Hayama. Both areas feature gentle waters and, on clear days, spectacular views of Mount Fuji. Hayama also boasts a small vermillion torii gate rising from a tiny island off the charming Morito Beach. You'll find half-day and full-day plans and, in some cases, a choice between a sit-in and sit-on-top kayak.

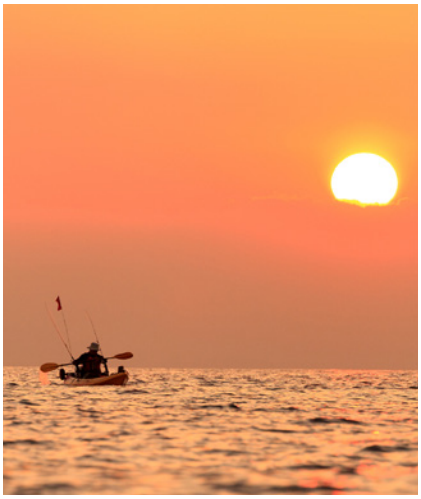
Windsurfing

On windy days, the seas of Shonan are bestrewn with vibrant sails zipping across the whitecaps. Not surprisingly, there are plenty of shops offering lessons and rentals. Beginners will want to stick to semi-protected areas like Zushi Beach, Kamakura's Yuigahama and Zaimokuza beaches and Katase Higashihama Beach.



Sea Fishing

A fair few fishing vessels take clients out on the water at ports all along the Shonan coast. Equipment is generally provided, whether for free or for a small fee. Fish to hook include horse mackerel, red sea bream, yellowtail and skipjack.



Finding an Outfitter or School

A lack of English on business websites, combined with a hesitancy to accept reservations from non-Japanese speakers, can make booking a reservation a challenge. Luckily, there are a few English-language websites and online booking sites that facilitate the process.

Feel Shonan

A tourism website from the Kanagawa Prefectural Government. While the site doesn't provide booking services, it does have a searchable database of outfitters and schools.

More info: *feelshonan.jp/*

Activity Japan

This booking site, searchable by area and activity, shares a wealth of information on each activity provider, including details on cancellation, payment and what to bring on the day. Activity Japan is a National Parks of Japan Official Partner.

More info: *en.activityjapan.com*



Nikko: Whispers of Water

Time flows like a gentle stream at The Ritz-Carlton, Nikko

Words by **Cezary Jan Strusiewicz**

There is a Japanese saying that goes, "Never say you're satisfied until you have seen Nikko." This historic mountain town in Tochigi Prefecture, just north of Tokyo, is surrounded by beautiful nature and houses multiple historical treasures. But travelers searching for peace, tranquility and the height of hospitality won't be satisfied until they travel westwards to the secluded highlands of Oku-Nikko, where The Ritz-Carlton, Nikko can be found by Chuzenji, the closest lake to the skies in Japan.

Overlooking the Tears of God

The Ritz-Carlton, Nikko opened its doors on July 15, 2020. It's made up of three buildings housing 94 guestrooms and suites offering calming views of the green mountains of Oku-Nikko and the vast blueness of Lake Chuzenji. With an elevation of 1,269 meters, Chuzenji is the highest lake in Japan. Its vast depth of 163 meters makes it seem like it swallows up all surrounding sounds, gifting the hotel with a still, almost hallowed atmosphere. Victorian explorer Isabella Bird noticed the same thing when she arrived in Oku-Nikko in 1878. She noted in her journals that the lake lies asleep at the foot of Mount Nantai, a mirror of peace.

Mount Nantai, a volcano towering above the body of water, is considered a deity in Japan's mountain-worship traditions and is the creator of Chuzenji, having forged it in an eruption over 20,000 years ago. But sharing the shadow of an ancient god with the majestic lake is just one example of The Ritz-Carlton, Nikko's connection to the nature of Oku-Nikko.





The Color Purple

A trail leading up Mount Nantai is open to hikers between May and October, but those staying at The Ritz-Carlton can experience the spiritual side of Nikko all year round in a variety of ways. One of these is the omamori amulets the hotel distributes to its guests as parting gifts to wish them a safe journey home. The charms change yearly, with a purple one introduced on July 15. Purple has a long and exalted history in Japan.

For centuries, it was the color worn by royalty, high priests, the echelons of the aristocracy and actors portraying gods in traditional theater plays. Both formidable and beautiful, the color was chosen by the hotel for its historical association with female empowerment and ties to contemporary feminism. It also commemorates the G7 Ministerial Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, which the hotel hosted in June 2023.

Purple additionally celebrates local flora like the purple togoku mitsuba tsutsuji azaleas (Rhododendron wadanum) found around Lake Yuno and Yumoto Onsen further north. Yumoto Onsen's hot spring is also the source of the hotel's therapeutic thermal waters that guests can enjoy in indoor and open-air baths, the first such amenity in the Ritz-Carlton portfolio.

With a little luck, bathers may catch sight of purple clouds above them, which, as legend goes, was the sign to first settle the area sent from the heavens to the founder of Nikko. For a cooler endeavor, be sure to join a morning zazen meditation session guided by a Chuzenji Temple monk to purify the body and the soul, held on the lawn outside the hotel.

The Power of Nikko Waterfalls

It's only a 5-minute walk from the hotel to Kegon Falls, a torrent of white water plummeting 97 meters down in a mesmerizing display that, from a distance, resembles a thread of silk cutting through the greenery of Oku-Nikko. All it takes is one look to understand why Kegon is considered one of Japan's three great waterfalls. Two more spectacular water displays are easily accessible from The Ritz-Carlton, Nikko. Yu Falls, which visitors can get up close to, is at the southern edge of Lake Yuno and only a short drive from the hotel. Ryuzu Falls, whose name translates to "dragon head," rages over lava formations that bring to mind the mountains of Oku-Nikko before ending in a roar of cascading water, leaving no doubt as to how Ryuzu got its name.

To visit these natural treasures with ease and make memories that last a lifetime, book a stay at The Ritz-Carlton, Nikko.









More info

The Ritz-Carlton, Nikko
482 Chugushi, Nikko, Tochigi Prefecture
Web: *bit.ly/RitzCarltonNikko*

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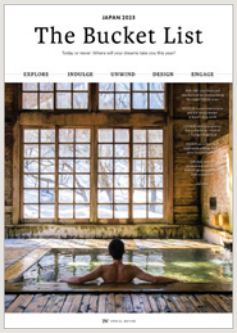
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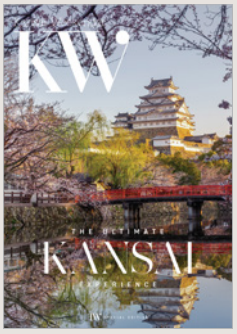
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