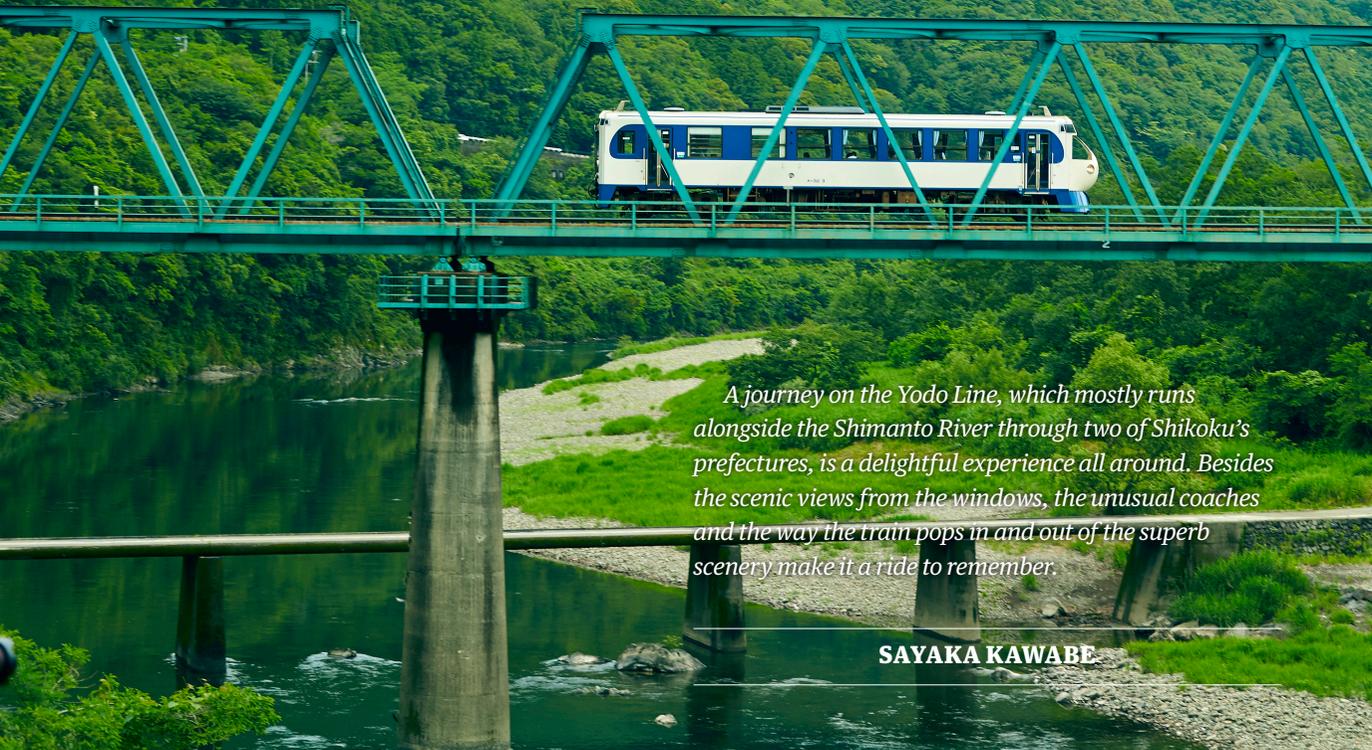


Riding the Rails Along a Clear-Running River



A journey on the Yodo Line, which mostly runs alongside the Shimanto River through two of Shikoku's prefectures, is a delightful experience all around. Besides the scenic views from the windows, the unusual coaches and the way the train pops in and out of the superb scenery make it a ride to remember.

SAYAKA KAWABE

O PENED in 1914, the Yodo Line connects the town of Shimanto in Kochi Prefecture and Uwajima City in Ehime Prefecture, and travels the 76.3-kilometer distance in about two hours and fifteen minutes. The line has a trio of unique trains: the local Railway Hobby train, modeled after first-generation bullet trains, the Kaiyodo¹ Hobby Train—which showcases displays of figurines² in the coaches—and the “Shiman-Torocco,” a trolley made from remodeled freight cars that started running in 1984. The latter was the first of its kind in Japan.

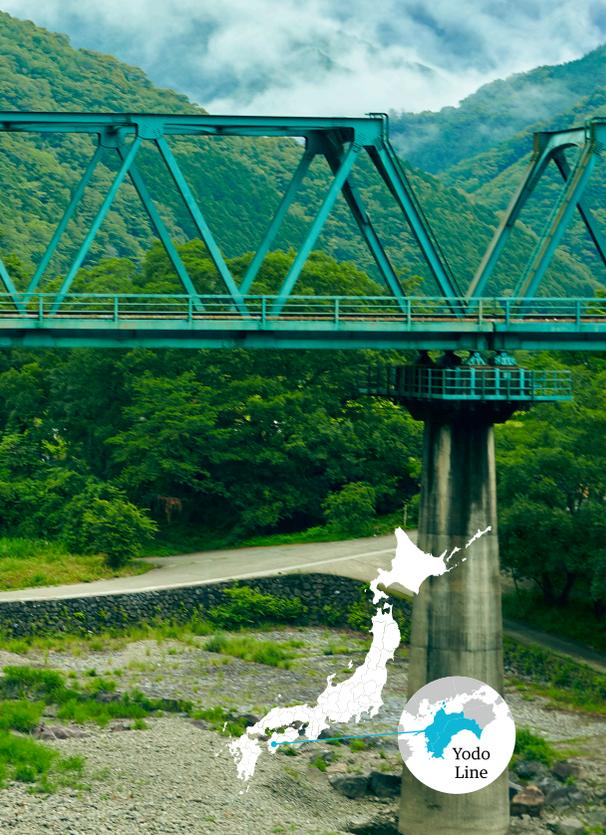
There are two ways to enjoy the Yodo Line. If you are heading there from Kochi Prefecture, take the JR Dosan Line express train from Kochi Station—which takes one hour—get off at Kubokawa Station and change platforms for the Yodo Line. If you are coming from Ehime Prefecture, take the JR Yosan Line limited express from Matsuyama Station—

which takes about one hour and twenty minutes—and then change at Uwajima to the local train bound for Kubokawa. You can start your Yodo Line journey from the next station, Kita-Uwajima.

The Yodo Line shadows the Shimanto River for almost its entire run through Kochi Prefecture. The train offers some of the best views of what is often called “the last clear stream in Japan.” The stretch between Tosa-Taisho and Ekawasaki stations is especially scenic, as the train appears to cut through the meandering river, and you can enjoy ever-changing views of the waters from both the right and left sides whenever you exit a tunnel. The landscapes from the train windows are so varied and dramatic that you hardly dare blink.

To feel even closer to the magnificent scenery and feel the wind in your hair, ride the Shiman Torocco trolley, which only runs on spring and autumn weekends and holidays, Golden Week³, and during

Sweeping views of the Shimanto River from a bridge



The popular Shiman Torocco trolley



Kaiyodo Hobby Train (left) and Railway Hobby Train (right)



Tosa-Taisho Station's building is delightfully retro

summer holidays. Since this little train can only hold forty people, it is best to book your spot in advance.

Many distinctive railway stations dot the route. In Kochi Prefecture, Tosa-Taisho Station's building, for example, resemble a wooden mountain lodge. Built in 1974, its retro appearance matches the peaceful mountain landscape around it perfectly.

At Ekawasaki Station in Kochi, local trains stop for five to twenty minutes to make time adjustments. During that interlude, the drivers are busy answering questions from passengers and snapping souvenir photos. Their warm customer service is considered another of the line's attractions.

If you're lucky, by the way, you might see two of the Yodo Line's three famous trains stopped at this station at the same time. About a ten-minute walk from Ekawasaki, you'll find "Yotte Nishi-Tosa," a

roadside station where you can buy local agricultural products. At the station there are bicycles for rent, so you can take a relaxing bike ride to enjoy nature around the Shimanto River.

In front of Matsumaru Station in Ehime Prefecture there is a footbath, which is free of charge and perfect for banishing any travel fatigue. For a small fee you can also enjoy the "Mori no Kuni Poppo Onsen" hot spring on the second floor of the station building.

A journey on the Yodo Line, chasing and crossing the clear stream of the Shimanto River and rolling through the pristine wilderness of Mother Nature, gets full marks both on and off board. 7

- 1 Kaiyodo is a figurine and garage kit manufacturer renowned worldwide for its advanced modeling technology.
- 2 Figurines: Three-dimensional models of characters from cartoons, movies, animations and games.
- 3 Golden Week: a period of national holidays which stretches from late April to early May