

# HIGHLIGHTING *Japan*

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HEISEI HIGHLIGHTS



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THEME FOR **APRIL:**

**HEISEI  
HIGHLIGHTS**

As the Heisei Era begins a classy fadeout full of pomp, circumstance and a touch of mystery, we wanted to throw a spotlight on some notable changes that have marked Japan's past three decades. Besides becoming one of the world's hottest and coolest tourist destinations—including nearly two-dozen World Heritage Sites—we'll tell you about pivotal transformations in work-life balance and the country's first female astronaut.

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**ON THE COVER**

Heisei Highlights

Photo: Daiichi Omori

# TPP COMMISSION

Photograph of the group photo session



On January 19, 2019, Prime Minister Abe attended the First Trans-Pacific Partnership Commission held in Tokyo.

In his opening address, the Prime Minister said, "I would like to offer my heartfelt welcome to the representatives of the TPP 11 (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) countries on your visit to Japan. On December 30 last year, the TPP 11 agreement entered into force. I am very pleased that Japan is holding the First TPP Commission and I have an opportunity to say a few words for you on this occasion.

An enormous economic zone with a population of 500 million people and GDP of 10 trillion dollars will be born. The TPP is the dawn of the century of the Asia-Pacific; historians in the future will certainly evaluate it in that way. I express my deep respect for the efforts being made until today by all of the people involved since more than ten years ago when the TPP was envisaged.

At this point, several member countries are still processing their designated domestic procedures for the entry into force of the agreement. I expect that these processes will be accelerated and the TPP 11 will be completed at the earliest possible time.

We must continue to move forward. We should actively spread the high-level, free and fair rules incorporated in this agreement to the world.

I wish to take a big step forward in this milestone First TPP Commission. I hope that the procedures for new members to join the TPP will be thoroughly developed.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to call on the world to take action; our doors are open to all countries and regions that agree with our principles and are ready to accept the high standards of the TPP. I hope many countries that seek free and fair trade will participate in this agreement.

I am determined to make every effort to work together hand-in-hand with all of the TPP partners gathered here as a standard-bearer for free trade going forward. Please, let's open up a new era of free and fair trade together."



Photograph of the Prime Minister delivering an address





# Heisei Highlights

This special issue of *Highlighting Japan* focuses on the momentous and event-filled Heisei Era that concludes this year. During the past three decades, Japan has been at peace with the world, and offered vital assistance to other nations in Asia and far beyond despite suffering major natural disasters at home. It has also blossomed into a dream destination blending technology, hospitality, artisanry and whimsy that draws tens of millions of travelers a year. We also talk to Japan's first female astronaut and fill you in on some of the era's most positive trends in work-life balance, particularly in the lives of Japanese fathers.

Photo by Fujisan World Cultural Heritage Council



# The Past and Future of World Heritage Site Mount Fuji

KATSUMI YASUKURA

*Japan's iconic Mount Fuji—which spans both Yamanashi and Shizuoka prefectures—was registered by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 2013. The path to achieving that status for the peak known as Fujisan and its environs took well over a decade. Here is how Japan made it happen, the twenty-five spots that the site encompasses, and their significance and future.*

ACCORDING to Hirofumi Irikura, director of the Fujisan World Heritage division of Yamanashi Prefecture's Resident Affairs Department, the process of nominating Mount Fuji as a World Heritage Site began around 2000.

“That year the council of the Agency for Cultural Affairs announced their strong desire to make the mountain a World Heritage Site, which required them to show that it is a cultural property. The Fujisan World Cultural Heritage Council was created in 2005 so that associated

organizations could consult each other. Around this time the administrations from Yamanashi and Shizuoka prefectures also joined forces to create drafts and come up with concrete ideas.” Mount Fuji's repeated eruptions had led people to consider it a god—although an angry one—and therefore sacred. From the Heian Period (794–1185) to the fourteenth century ascetics also used its environs as training ground, and by the Edo Period (1603–1867) many people gathered to worship Mount Fuji. That adulation continues to this day, and the mountain is mentioned in many historical documents such as the *Manyoshu* and *Kokinshu*. It is also frequently depicted in art, such as the *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* by ukiyo-e artist Katsushika Hokusai.

With this notable background in mind, those in charge began selecting key Shinto shrines, historical homes and beautiful landscapes with the assistance of experts, relevant ministries and agencies, and collecting information on how Fujisan became a place of worship and

Mount Fuji in early spring, sharing the spotlight with cherry blossoms  
Photo by Daiichi Omori





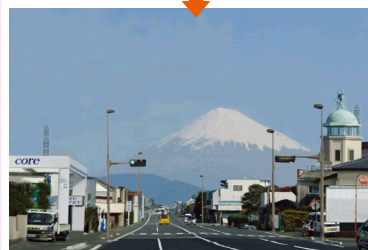
The waters of the Oshino Hakkai springs come from an underground reservoir beneath Mount Fuji | Photo by Fujisan World Cultural Heritage Council



Kitaguchi Hongu Fuji Sengen Jinja Shrine



Visitors can take pilgrimage tours to see the mountain's shrines and stay overnight at a pilgrim lodging house



Near Miho no Matsubara, one of the site's designated elements, utility poles are being removed to improve the scenery

Top photo: How the area once looked

Middle photo: The view at the moment

Bottom photo: How the area will look once the project is complete

had cultural and artistic value, and presented a document to the people concerned.

“Mount Fuji is an important place for Japan, so the recognition isn’t just due to the efforts of the two prefectures, but by Japan-wide efforts,” says Irikura.

A total of twenty-five spots—including four climbing routes, multiple shrines, Fuji five lakes, Oshino Hakkai springs and the seaside pine tree grove known as Miho no Matsubara—were designated. The official title became “Fujisan, sacred place and source of artistic inspiration.” Nearly 300,000 people climb to the mountain’s summit and around twenty million people visit the foothills of Mount Fuji each year. Even after recognition as a World Heritage Site, Associated organizations in the Heritage Council continue to maintain the environment and artistic value of Mount Fuji and its designated elements.

“Yamanashi Prefecture enacted new regulations which stipulate that businesses must forecast and evaluate impact prior to constructing new buildings, so as not to disrupt the natural scenery,” says Sadamitsu Kashiwagi, another member of Irikura’s division.

“To preserve the scenery, we’ve asked shops there to change their exteriors, removed advertisement boards and utility poles, and planted grasses to conceal rockfall protection walls.”

Both Yamanashi and Shizuoka also built Mount Fuji World Heritage centers. They showcase the natural wonders of the mountain and also explain why it is considered sacred, why it inspired so many works of art, and provide information about new discoveries. “Why have generations of Japanese people loved Mount Fuji?” Irikura asks rhetorically. “For visitors to get a better understanding,

we recommend taking part in pilgrimage tours where you can experience the traditional way of climbing the mountain. During the course, you get to visit shrines of the mountain gods, stay overnight at a pilgrim lodging house, try the cuisine the *oshi* priests ate, and trek on the ancient roads on the following day.”

Besides assisting in the pilgrimage tours, Yamanashi Prefecture has also made model itineraries based on historical pilgrimage routes. There are plans to create even more ways to experience the culture of Mount Fuji and get more visitors interested in its peak experience. 7



Chiaki Mukai, the first female Japanese astronaut  
Photo by JAXA/NASA

## Driven Aloft From Surgeon to Japan's First Female Astronaut

TAMAKI KAWASAKI

*The Heisei Era (1989-) has been notable for Japan's strides into outer space. Chiaki Mukai was the first Japanese female astronaut to join a space shuttle mission. Now the vice president of the Tokyo University of Science, she looks back on her career's unusual trajectory.*

THE Heisei years brought the birth of Japanese space exploration as well as the country's first astronauts. Toyohiro Akiyama traveled to space in 1990, followed by Mamoru Mohri in 1992. Chiaki Mukai made history as the first Japanese woman to explore the cosmos aboard the Space Shuttle *Columbia* in July 1994 and again in 1998 aboard *Discovery*. Her leap from cardiovascular surgeon to space traveler created a lot of buzz at the time. In her current role as the vice president of the Tokyo University of Science, Mukai focuses on internationalization and the promotion of women in the sciences. "But I'm not Superwoman," she says with a smile. "Becoming an astronaut was like winning the lottery several times."

In the early 1980s, Mukai was working at Keio University Hospital, the first female cardiovascular surgeon to graduate from the hospital's associated university. The National Space Development Agency of Japan, now Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), was focused on space shuttle research flights at the time, and was recruiting space technicians. Mukai thought, "This is my chance to see my hometown and Earth with my own eyes," and applied. Although Japan had no equal employment opportunity laws, there was nothing written about the job being limited to men. Mukai was a hard worker full of curiosity, so much so that when her coworkers and



Mukai is currently the vice president of the Tokyo University of Science and director of the institution's Research Center for Space Colony



superiors found out she'd applied, they simply remarked, "Of course, we knew it." Mukai knew that all she needed to do was improve her physical strength and English-language ability. She powered up by swimming every day, and although she found English difficult she studied the language intensively. She finally succeeded in her quest, being selected for the program in 1985.

After the Space Shuttle *Challenger* disaster in 1986, however, the entire program went on hiatus, and Mukai's training period was extended. "I lost friends on the *Challenger*," Mukai says. "Watching the cutting edge of human technology turn into a giant orange ball of flames made my knees shake. It felt like a slap in the face for our human arrogance, placing too much

faith in technology. If you look at satellite photos of the incident, all you can see is a little smoke above Florida. Looking up at something from below it seems so huge, but when you see it from the majestic expanse of space it seems minuscule. That shook me to the core, and certainly expanded my worldview."

Mukai's two spaceflights in 1994 and 1998 made use of her physiology expertise and medical experience. After that she was a visiting professor at the International Space University and a special consultant for JAXA. As Japan's first female astronaut, she received a huge amount of attention, but says: "I never thought of it like I was participating as a woman or as a Japanese person. That was my way of creating an escape

route. I'm the type of person who divides things in my mind into whether I can succeed at something or not based on my own hard work, not my background."

Consistently bright and positive, her voice and attitude energize those around her. She jokes that since she has a medical license and flight experience but no money, she'd like to work as a tour guide for private flights to the moon.

"Heisei was a diverse age, and led to a plethora of new possibilities," she concludes. "But we live in space, and Earth is very small when seen from the vastness of space. If humans don't work hard to coexist happily, we'll destroy ourselves. I hope the next era will teach people that." **7**

# Altering the Work-Life Balance of Japanese Dads



Fathering Japan organizes workshops to help fathers and their children interact through play

## TAMAKI KAWASAKI

*The word of the year in 2010 was definitely ikumen, meaning “men who care for children.” This was one of the latest signs of the massive changes occurring in the work sensibilities of Japanese people during the Heisei Era. What do these changes mean, and where are they taking the country?*



Tetsuya Ando, founder of the nonprofit organization Fathering Japan

THE way Japanese society perceives work has undergone a transformation over the three decades of the Heisei Era. Most recently, the Work Style Reform Law passed in 2018 set a cap on overtime hours and ensured mandatory personal time off, among other changes. It gave men in particular the leeway to go beyond their traditional role of breadwinner to become more active participants in the lives of their children.

Tetsuya Ando, founder of the nonprofit organization Fathering Japan, experienced this paradigm shift in work-life balance firsthand in 1997, when he got married and had a daughter. He quit his job at a publishing company and began working at a bookshop, maintaining a double-income household with his wife, who worked full-time. Making the most of having daycare, his home and the bookshop all within a fifteen-minute bike ride, in the evenings

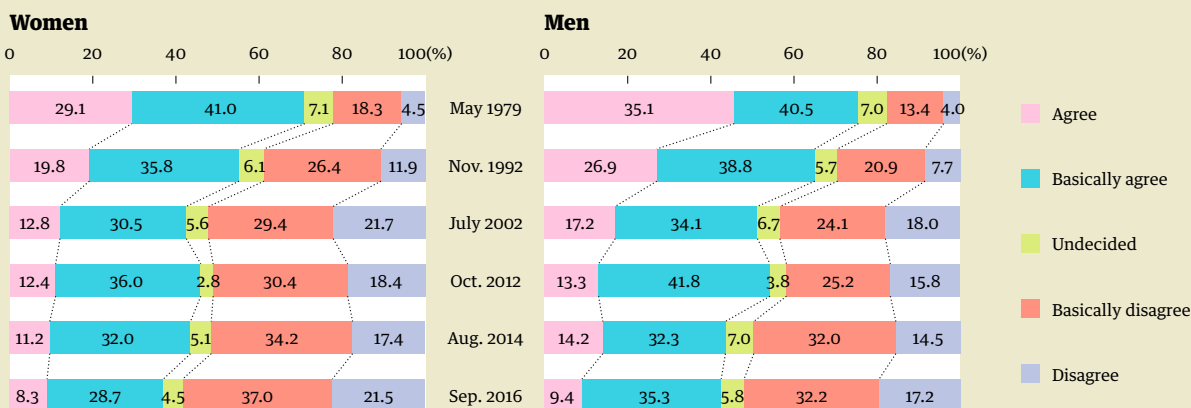
he would pick up his daughter at daycare and work the cash register with her strapped to his back before handing their daughter over to his wife. There were also times when he'd return to the store to finish up work after bathing and putting his daughter to sleep. “I respected my wife’s desire to keep working, and I wanted to try taking care of my kid myself, so the two of us pooled our resources and grew closer,” reflects Ando.

At that time twenty-two years ago, Japan didn’t have social structures in place to support dual-career couples. When the Andos started their family, only three fathers out of the hundred families using the Tokyo daycare their daughter attended picked up and dropped off their children. These dads were treated with cautious suspicion, as most people at the time were not used to seeing men handling childcare.

While having to rush to the daycare from work after



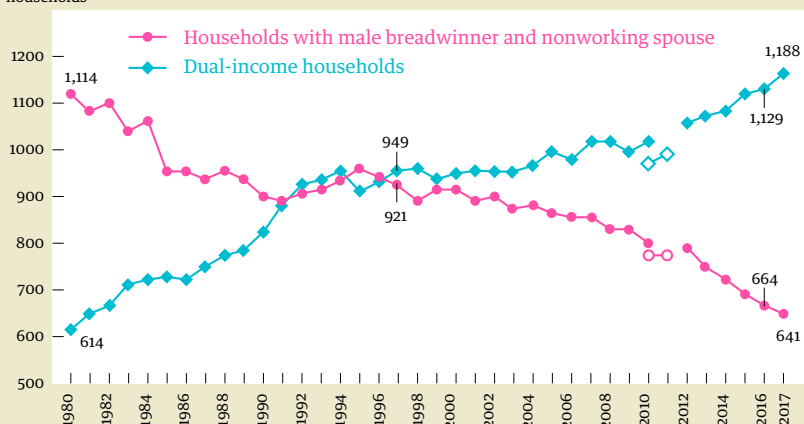
## Changes in Agreement with the Statement “Husbands should work and wives should look after the household”



1. Based on data from the Government of Japan Cabinet Office’s “Public Opinion Survey on Women” in 1979, “Public Opinion Survey on Gender Equality” in 1992, “Public Opinion Survey on a Gender-Equal Society” in 2002, 2012 and 2016, and “Public Opinion Survey on Women’s Advancement” in 2014. | 2. Data until 2014 is based on responses of participants 20 years of age and older, while data from 2016 is based on responses of participants 18 and older.

## Changes in numbers of dual-income households

Unit: ten thousand households



1. From 1980 to 2001, based on the Management and Coordination Agency’s “Labour Force Special Survey,” taken yearly in February, except for 1980 to 1984 when it was taken in March. From 2002 onward, based on the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications’ “Labour Force Survey (Detailed Tabulation).” Please be aware that there are some discrepancies between the methods and timing of the two surveys.

2. “Household with male breadwinner and nonworking spouse” refers to households with husbands who work outside agricultural industries and spouses who are part of the unemployed population.

3. The numbers shown below the blanks for 2010 and 2011 are countrywide results, excluding Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima prefectures.

hearing your child has a fever may be frustrating, there are also joys that can only be experienced by having kids. According to Ando, working mothers all know about that range of emotions, but many Japanese men don’t. In 2007, believing that if more men thought of being a father as something they consciously “do” and not something they just “are” that families and work life would change, he founded Fathering Japan.

Right around that time, the concept of work-life balance was gaining traction in Japan, and in 2010 *ikumen* (men who care for their children) was added to the cultural lexicon. So that it doesn’t just become a passing fad, Ando continues to tell the dads of Japan that active fatherhood would enrich both their families and their own lives.

“As a result of economic shifts, fathers are now in a society with a new structure, where it’s only natural

for both husbands and wives to work and men need to take care of their kids as well,” Ando says. “Seeing dads working hard as PTA presidents on the side has had a ripple effect, and the consciousness of bosses and managers has changed.” His nonprofit is now focusing on an awareness program called *iku-boss* (managers and bosses who recognize the worth of fathers participating in childcare).

Ando believes that work-life balance should not be like a set of scales where one side bears no weight, but more like a melting pot in which all the various elements in life blend together—children, work, study and caring for elder family members. Fathering Japan’s mission is to create a society where Japanese men caring for their children is so natural that the word *ikumen* fades from the lexicon, and Ando’s dream is to dissolve his nonprofit in another ten years because it has accomplished its purpose. **W**

# Japan's Three-Decade Tourism Boom

TAKAYOSHI YAMABE

*Visitors to Japan have increased elevenfold in number over the past three decades, and those travelers are increasingly going beyond major cities such as Tokyo and Kyoto to explore lesser-known regions as well. The Japan Tourism Agency discusses its strategy for attracting sixty million visitors to Japan by 2030.*



Takayama City in Gifu Prefecture created multilingual signs and walking maps so international visitors could get around with ease

According to the Japan Tourism Agency (JTA), 2.84 million international travelers were visiting Japan yearly by the beginning of the Heisei Era in 1989. By 2018, however, that number had jumped to 31.19 million—far more than the traditional crowds of Japanese people traveling abroad. After the Visit Japan Campaign started in 2003, the flow of visitors from various countries strengthened, hitting record numbers six years in a row since 2013. Arrivals from China, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore and other Southeast Asian countries grew rapidly, making up almost 84.5 percent of total arrivals in 2018.

Alongside this influx has come a change in the destinations international visitors choose. In 2011, 66.5 percent of tourists

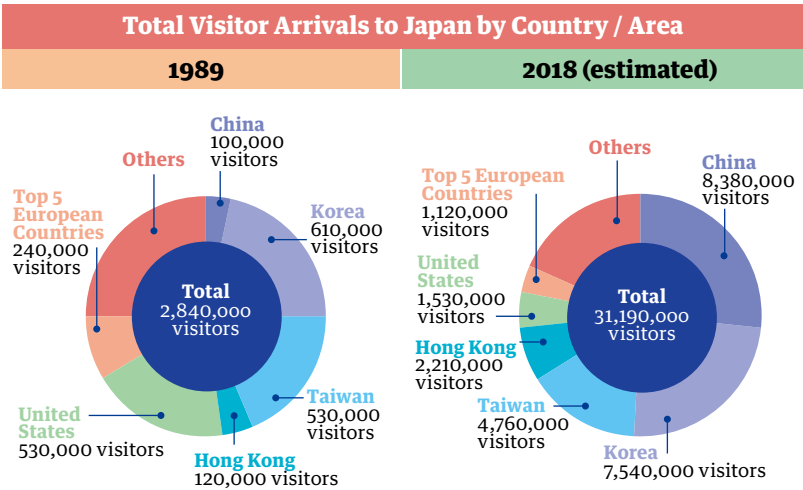
would cluster in well-traveled regions and cities such as Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba, Saitama, Aichi, Osaka, Kyoto and Hyogo, while 33.5 percent went to other regions. However, a JTA report shows that in 2017 fifty-nine percent of visitors from abroad stayed in major areas and forty-one percent sought out the charms of other regions.

In the midst of all these changes, in 2016 the JTA proposed a new policy called the “Tourism Vision to Support the Future of Japan,” developing various measures based on this vision of the country as a travel destination. One of the ideas was to strengthen promotions using information and communications technology. The data collected would include things such as big data and analysis of social media

related to inbound tourism, which would allow them to provide tourism information related to user interests and preferences more effectively. This information would also be used to introduce the charms of regions international visitors would be less familiar with. In addition, the agency is focusing on getting more tourists from potential growth regions like the Middle East and Central and South America.

To boost visitor satisfaction, the JTA is focusing on bringing more people to places where they can experience the charms of Japan's natural scenery and culture firsthand, which had been overlooked resources. Ideas include evening performances of traditional performing arts, nature experiences in forests, and visiting beaches in all seasons. There





After the Hokuriku bullet train began operating, Iiyama City in Nagano Prefecture boosted its activity sales by providing information centers and promoting dining experiences in *kamakura* snow huts.

Source: Japan National Tourism Organization

are also plans to start promoting “staycations,” where visitors stay in retro *kominka* traditional houses or *ryokan* inns as an experience in and of itself.

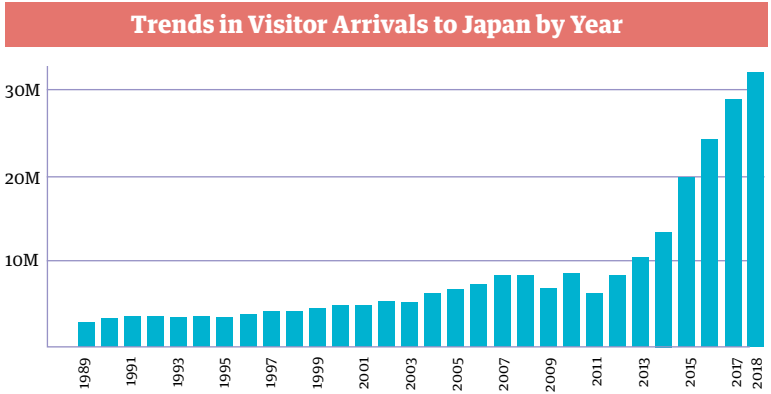
Takayama City in Gifu Prefecture was one of the pioneers in welcoming visitors. Their efforts to cater to international visitors—that included setting up tourist information centers and free Wi-Fi—resulted in a huge surge in visits, with over five hundred thousand visitors in 2017. After the Hokuriku bullet train began operating, Iiyama City in Nagano Prefecture doubled its activity sales by providing information centers and promoting dining experiences in *kamakura* snow huts.

In response to requests from visitors to Japan—such as shorter entry and departure procedures and more accessible public transportation from airports and harbors—the JTA plans on creating a stress-free and convenient travel experience by cutting down time at immigration with facial recognition or pre-registration, multilingual transportation assistance, and free Wi-Fi services. Starting in January 2019, some of these services will be funded by the International Tourist

Tax. They plan to use these funds to bolster the country’s tourism infrastructure so that payers will be satisfied.

The many new tourism programs created over the thirty years of Heisei have made it easier for travelers to experience Japan’s charms. With a new era and various projects coming up to showcase relatively unknown regions and cultural and culinary facets of the nation, Japan will continue to be a land people want to visit. **[7]**

Information in this article is based on data provided by the JTA.



Source: Japan National Tourism Organization

# 天皇陛下御在位三十年記念式典



On February 24, His Majesty attended the Commemoration Ceremony of the thirtieth Anniversary of His Majesty the Emperor's Accession to the Throne, held by the government.

## Celebrating the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Enthronement of His Majesty the Emperor



His Majesty the Emperor making his address

This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the enthronement of His Majesty the Emperor. On February 24, Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress attended the Commemoration Ceremony of the Thirtieth Anniversary of His Majesty the Emperor's Accession to the Throne held by the government at the National Theatre in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo. Approximately 1,100 people, including heads of the three powers, ministers, National Diet members, foreign ambassadors to Japan, local government heads, and representatives of various fields also attended this event.

During the ceremony Prime Minister Shinzo Abe delivered an address, in which he stated,





Their Majesties listening to the heartfelt speeches and performances

“Over the last 30 years, Your Majesty has devoted all your heart to each and every public function Your Majesty has attended as the symbol of the unity of Japan and the Japanese people, and has always stood in solidarity with the people of this nation. We have proceeded alongside Your Majesty for the past 30 years of the Heisei period with an aspiration that is described as ‘Internal soundness yields external peace.’”

As a representative of the people, Governor of Fukushima Prefecture Masao Uchibori gave an address expressing his gratitude to Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress for repeatedly visiting Fukushima after the Great East Japan Earthquake. “Your Majesties have provided the people of Fukushima Prefecture with words of consolation and encouragement. Those words gave us the courage to step up our efforts and to make progress in overcoming an unprecedented, multiple tragedy of earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident,” he noted. Also on behalf of the people, former member of the House of Councillors, Foreign Minister, and Minister for the Environment Yoriko Kawaguchi stated in her address, “Your Majesties held to the principles of selflessness, interacting wholeheartedly with the people at every opportunity. The commitment to the people that Your Majesties demonstrated overwhelmed me with happiness and pride in being a Japanese national,” referring to the occasion of accompanying them on their visit to Southeast Asia in 2006.

In the memorial performance, Okinawan singer Daichi Miura sang *Utagoe-no-hibiki* (Resonance of Singing Voices), a song written by His Majesty the Emperor and composed by Her Majesty the Empress, and soprano Yumiko Samejima sung *Omoigo*

(Endearing Child), a lullaby composed by Her Majesty the Empress.

In his address, His Majesty the Emperor stated “During the three decades of the Heisei era, Japan has been free of war for the first time in modern current history, supported by the strong desire of the people for peace. However, the thirty years was by no means an uneventful time as our country encountered many unanticipated challenges.”

He expressed his gratitude to the people of Japan by saying “I consider myself most fortunate to have always been able to perform my duties as the Emperor with the help of the people. The work that I have carried out was only made possible with the approval and support of various government organizations. I have been able to fulfill my duties thanks to the people of Japan, whose symbol of unity I take pride and joy in being, and the cultural level of this country which has been nurtured by the people of Japan over many years, from the past to the present.” Also, he said, “I would like to take this opportunity today also express my gratitude to the people of other countries who showed great concern when Japan was in the midst of suffering and sorrow. Countless countries, international organizations and regions gave us their gracious and kind assistance. To those people I offer my deepest heartfelt gratitude.”

His Majesty acknowledged that soon after the Heisei era began people all across Japan expressed their wish to build a peaceful Japan together with the Imperial family. “To this day, we remember and hold precious the messages that we received from across the country at the time, filled with the quiet but firm determination,” he continued, praying for peace and happiness of all the people in Japan and around the world.



Their Majesties waving to applauding attendees before leaving the venue

# The abdication of His Majesty the Emperor and the enthronement of His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince

April 30, 2019, will mark His Majesty the Emperor's abdication of the throne. The Ceremony of the Abdication of His Majesty the Emperor at the *Seiden State Hall (Taiirei-Seiden-no-gi)* will take place on the same day.

The Ceremony for Inheriting the Imperial Regalia and Seals (*Kenji-to-Shokei-no-gi*) will take place the following day, May 1, in which the new Emperor inherits the Imperial Regalia and the State and Privy Seals upon His accession to the throne. Following this is the First Audience after the Accession to the Throne (*Sokui-go-Choken-no-gi*), in which the new Emperor meets with the representatives of the people of Japan.

Later in the year on October 22, the new Emperor will proclaim His enthronement at the Ceremony of the Enthronement of His Majesty the Emperor at the *Seiden State Hall (Sokuirei-Seiden-no-gi)* and receive felicitations from representatives from both Japan and abroad. This will be followed by the Imperial Procession Following the Ceremony of the Enthronement (*Shukuga-Onretsu-no-gi*), in which His Majesty the Emperor travels by convertible from the Imperial Palace to His residence and receives congratulations from the general public along the way.

There will also be several Court Banquets (*Kyoen-no-gi*) after the Ceremony of the Enthronement on October 22, 25, 29 and 31, for His Majesty to receive congratulations from guests on His accession to the throne. Prime Minister and

foster a greater understanding of Japan by presenting displays of traditional Japanese culture.

Finally, the Ceremony for the Proclamation of the Crown Prince (*Rikkoshi-no-rei*) will take place on April 19, 2020, to proclaim the enthronement of His Imperial Highness Prince Akishino as the new Crown Prince.

## Ceremony of the Abdication from the Throne (Schedule)

Date	Name of Ceremonies	Description	Venue
Apr 30	<i>Taiirei-Seiden-no-gi</i> : Ceremony of the Abdication of His Majesty the Emperor at the Seiden (State Hall)	Ceremony to announce the abdication to the people and for the Emperor to receive in audience the representatives of the people for the last time before the abdication.	Seiden-Matsuno-Ma (State Room) Imperial Palace

## Ceremonies and Event related to the Accession to the Throne (Schedule)

Date	Name of Ceremonies	Description	Venue
May 1	<i>Kenji-to-Shokei-no-gi</i> : Ceremony for Inheriting the Imperial Regalia and Seals	Ceremony for the Emperor to inherit the Imperial Regalia (Sword and Jewel), which are treasures inherited together with the throne, as well as the State and Privy Seals, as proof of his accession to the throne.	Seiden-Matsuno-Ma (State Room) Imperial Palace
	<i>Sokui-go-Choken-no-gi</i> : First Audience after the Accession to the Throne	Ceremony for the Emperor to receive in audience the representatives of the people for the first time after the accession to the throne.	Seiden-Matsuno-Ma (State Room) Imperial Palace
Oct 22	<i>Sokuirei-Seiden-no-gi</i> : Ceremony of the Enthronement of His Majesty the Emperor at the Seiden (State Hall)	Ceremony to proclaim the enthronement and to receive felicitations from representatives from home and abroad.	Imperial Palace
	<i>Shukuga-Onretsu-no-gi</i> : Imperial Procession by motorcar after the Ceremony of the Enthronement	Procession to show the new Emperor to the people after the Enthronement Ceremony and to receive their good wishes.	From Imperial Palace to (Akasaka Imperial Grounds)
Oct 22, 25, 29, 31	<i>Kyoen-no-gi</i> : Court Banquets after the Ceremony of the Enthronement	Court banquets to celebrate the enthronement and receive the congratulations of the guests.	Imperial Palace
Oct 23	<i>Naikaku-Soridaijin-Fusai-Shusai-Bansankai</i> : Banquet hosted by Prime Minister and his / her spouse	Banquet for foreign heads of State, royals, prime ministers and other representatives, etc.	Hotel New Otani

## Ceremonies for Proclamation of Crown Prince (*Rikkoshi-no-rei*) (Schedule)

Date	Name of Ceremonies	Description	Venue
Apr 19, 2020	<i>Rikkoshi-Senmei-no-gi</i> : Ceremony for Proclamation of Crown Prince	Ceremony to proclaim that Prince Fumihito has become the Crown Prince and for the representatives from home and abroad to express felicitations.	Imperial Palace
	<i>Choken-no-gi</i> : First Audience	Ceremony for the Emperor and Empress to meet the Crown Prince for the first time after the Ceremony for Proclamation of Crown Prince.	Imperial Palace





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## Accession as the 125th Emperor of Japan

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*Sokuirei-Seiden-no-gi* (Ceremony of the Enthronement of His Majesty the Emperor at *Seiden*) in 1990

On January 7, 1989, upon the demise of Emperor Hirohito, posthumously known as Emperor Showa, His Majesty Emperor Akihito ascended to the throne as the 125th Emperor of Japan.

He inherited both the Imperial Regalia and the State and Privy Seals in the Ceremony for Inheriting the Imperial Regalia and Seals, which took place in the *Matsu-no-Ma* State Room of the Imperial Palace.

On January 9, 1989, in His Majesty's First Audience after the Accession to the Throne, He addressed the people for the first time as their Emperor. "I pledge to observe the Constitution of Japan, together with all of you, and will carry out my duties in accordance with the Constitution. It is my sincere wish that Japan will continue to prosper, that peace will prevail around the world, and that the welfare of people everywhere will be promoted."

The Ceremony of the Enthronement of His Majesty the Emperor took place on November 12, 1990, in which His Majesty proclaimed His enthronement in front of various representatives from Japan and the heads of state from 158 countries. "In accordance with the Constitution of Japan and the Imperial Household Law, I inherited the throne earlier. Today in this Ceremony of the Enthronement of the Emperor at the *Seiden* State Hall (*Sokuirei-Seiden-no-gi*), I proclaim myself the Emperor." In this way, the new Emperor announced His enthronement to the people both in Japan and abroad.

On November 22 and 23, the newly-enthroned Emperor Akihito participated in the Great Thanksgiving Ceremony (*Daijosai*), in which the new Emperor offers new rice to the Imperial ancestors and the deities of heaven and earth for the first time, in the *Yuki* Hall and the *Suki* Hall, two identical chambers of *Daijo-kyu*, a temporary hall built for the ceremony. The Emperor also partook of the new rice Himself, giving thanks and praying for peace and abundant harvest for the country and the people.



# Fostering Friendly Relations with Foreign Countries

Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress have fostered friendly relationships with countries around the world through Their visits abroad and Their meetings with members of royal families and heads of state. During Their first overseas trip in 1991 after the enthronement, They visited Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Since then, Their Majesties have paid

many visits to countries in Asia, Europe, and North and South America. From His Majesty's accession to the throne in 1989 to 2018, Their Majesties have made official visits to twenty-eight countries.

Their Majesties have forged international bonds by learning about the cultures of the countries They visited. They have deepened Japan's bonds with



Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress during a visit to Indonesia's ancient capital of Yogyakarta in 1991, where They were presented with beautiful local textiles | Photo : Kyodo News





Their Majesties at a State Banquet in honor of His Royal Highness Grand Duke Henri of Luxembourg on November 27, 2017

those countries by speaking not only with the members of the royal families and government leaders but also with local residents during Their visits abroad. They also met with Japanese nationals living in those countries as well as Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers working there and gave them words of encouragement.

In 2005, the sixtieth year since the end of World War II, Their Majesties started making overseas visits to pay tribute to those who lost their lives during the war by visiting Saipan. They also paid tribute to the war dead on Peleliu Island, Palau, in 2015, seventy years after the end of the war, as well as at Caliraya, Luzon Island, the Philippines, in 2016.

Their Majesties have also worked toward promoting international goodwill in Japan. At the Imperial Palace, They have hosted banquets for state guests, held meetings with foreign dignitaries, and invited foreign ambassadors in Tokyo for audiences and luncheons. In 2018, Their Majesties met with fifty-five state guests, including members of royal families and presidents, prime ministers, and chairpersons of national assemblies from around the world. They also met with foreign ambassadors in Japan from sixty-four countries whenever they assumed or left their post.



Dedicating flowers at the Monument of the War Dead in the Western Pacific on Peleliu Island, Republic of Palau, in 2015  
Photo : Kyodo News



# Visiting All Japan's 47 Prefectures



Their Majesties consoling survivors after the eruption of Mt. Unzen Fugen Peak in July, 1991 | Photo: Kyodo News

Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress have visited all Japan's forty-seven prefectures. Their frequent travels within Japan include annual appearances at three events—the National Sports Festival, the National Arbor Day Festival, and the National Convention for the Development of an Abundantly Productive Sea—in addition to appearances at international academic conferences and inspection visits to different regions to gain insights into local conditions. On these occasions, Their Majesties also visit the region's welfare, cultural, industrial and other facilities where They show appreciation to those participating in such work. In addition, every year around the Week for Disabled Persons, They pay visits to facilities for the disabled.

His Majesty the Emperor attended the opening and closing ceremonies of the Nagano Winter Olympics

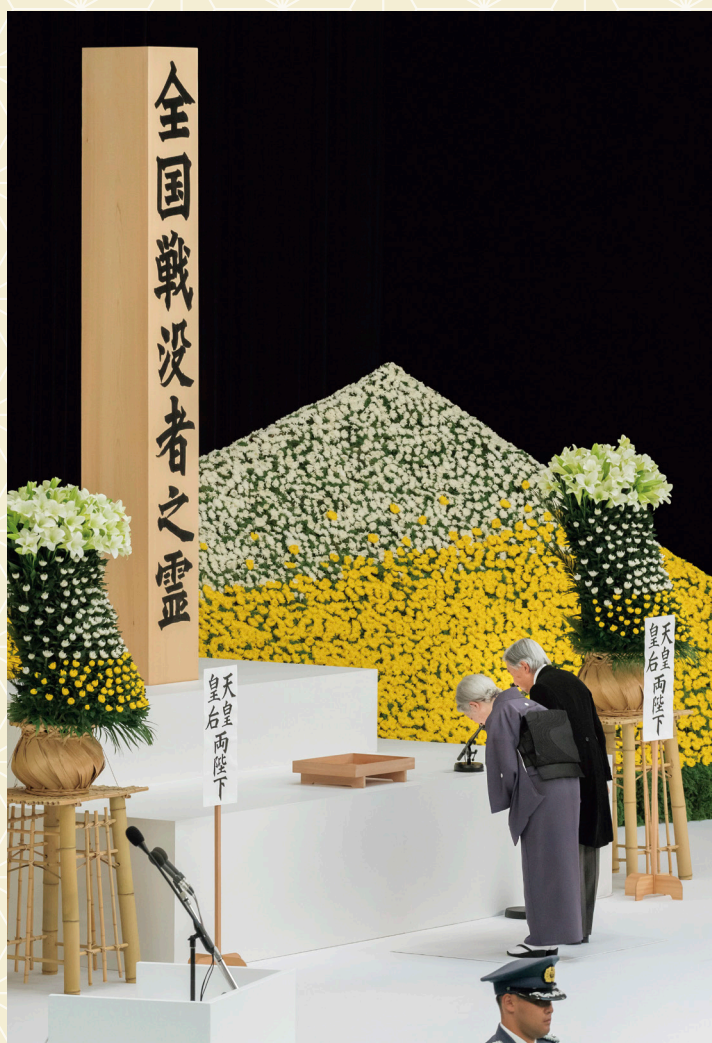
in February 1998 as honorary president, accompanied by Her Majesty the Empress. In March, He visited Nagano again to watch the Paralympic Games.

In the event of major natural disasters, Their Majesties visit the affected regions to mourn the victims, console the survivors, and show appreciation to those participating in relief work. They visited the affected areas as soon as possible after the eruption of Mt. Unzen Fugen Peak in 1991, the Hokkaido-Nansei-Oki Earthquake in 1993, the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995, the eruption of the volcano on Miyakejima island in 2000, the Niigata Chuetsu Earthquake in 2004, the Niigata Chuetsu-oki Earthquake in 2007, the Great



East Japan Earthquake and the North Nagano Earthquake in 2011, the torrential rains in Hiroshima in August 2014 and in Kanto and Tohoku in September 2015, the Kumamoto Earthquake in 2016, the torrential rains in northern Kyushu in 2017, the heavy rains in July 2018, and the Hokkaido Eastern Iburi Earthquake in September 2018. In particular, after the Great East Japan Earthquake, Their Majesties visited the evacuation centers and the afflicted areas for seven consecutive weeks from March to May to comfort those affected by the disaster. Before visiting each area, They spoke with the local governors visiting Tokyo to fully understand the situation regarding the scope of the damage, the progress of the rescue operations and the state of reconstruction.

Prior to the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War Two, Their Majesties paid tribute to the war dead on Iwojima, Chichijima and Hahajima islands in 1994. In 1995, the fiftieth year, They visited Nagasaki, Hiroshima and Okinawa to pay Their respects as well as Tokyo Irei-do Memorial Hall. In 2015, the seventieth year since the end of World War Two, They visited Takao Mikoromo Rei-do, a temple dedicated to the commemoration of the victims of industrial accidents since 1945, Tokyo Irei-do Memorial Hall, and the Monument for the Seafarers Who Died on Duty in Kannonzaki Park in Kanagawa Prefecture, a monument dedicated to sailors killed during the war.



Their Majesties at the Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead in 2018



Photo: The Mainichi Newspapers/Pool photo

A tea reception at the Imperial Palace for prizewinners of the Sochi 2014 Paralympic Winter Games





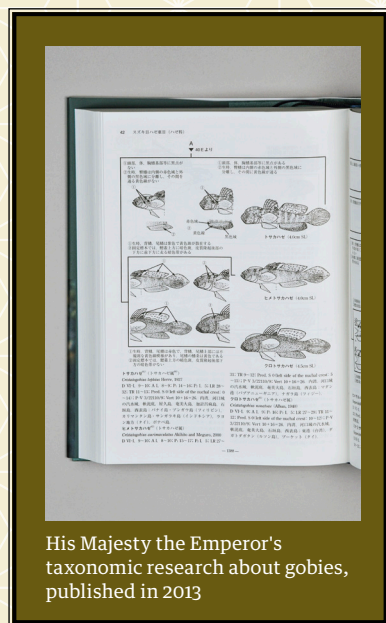
The Imperial Family celebrating the New Year in 2019

## The Importance of Tradition, Research and Family

A highly valued tradition in the Imperial Family is *waka*, a form of Japanese poetry, and Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress compose *waka* poems on various occasions. Every year in January, *Utakai Hajime*, the Imperial New Year's Poetry Reading Ceremony, a ceremony said to date back to the mid-Kamakura Period (1185-1333), takes place at the Imperial Palace. Ten *waka* poems selected from across Japan are presented on that occasion, along with the *waka* poems composed by Their Majesties and other members of the Imperial Family.

Since the cultivation of rice is central to the agriculture culture of Japan, His Majesty the Emperor has continued the practice of rice cultivation passed on from Emperor Showa. He sows the seeds, plants the seedlings and harvests the crops Himself. Her Majesty the Empress carries on the sericulture tradition passed down from Empress Dowager Shoken by raising silkworms, which She feeds with mulberry leaves, at the Sericulture Center on the Imperial Palace Grounds.

His Majesty the Emperor has engaged in taxonomic research about gobiid fishes for many years. He has discovered eight new species of



His Majesty the Emperor's taxonomic research about gobiid fishes, published in 2013





Enjoying the daily lilies blooming in the gardens of the Imperial Residence in 2013



Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress playing tennis in November 2013



Utakai Hajime, the Imperial New Year's Poetry Reading Ceremony

gobies and published more than thirty papers for academic journals as a member of the Ichthyological Society of Japan. Based on these achievements, He was elected as one of the foreign members, limited to fifty, of the Linnean Society of London in 1980, and was later elected as an honorary member of the Society in 1986. His Majesty is also a research associate of the Australian Museum, as well as an honorary member of the Zoological Society of London and a lifetime honorary member of the Research Institute for Natural Science of Argentina. In 1998, He became the first recipient of the King Charles the Second Medal from the Royal Society of London, an award established to honor those heads of state who have made outstanding contributions to the advancement of science.

Her Majesty the Empress finds time in between Her official duties to enjoy literature and music. She has written the text for *My First Mountain*, a children's picture book that has been published in Japanese and several other languages. She also translated eighty poems by Michio Mado into English, which led to the poet receiving the Hans Christian Andersen Author's Award in 1994. Her Majesty also plays the piano, sometimes performing in ensembles with world-class artists.

Their Majesties also play tennis in addition to taking early morning walks around the palace grounds to enjoy the changes of the seasons.

Their Majesties value family bonds deeply and raised Their three children close to Them at home. His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince married Masako Owada in 1993 and welcomed the arrival of Princess Aiko in 2001. Prince Fumihito married Kiko Kawashima in 1990 and they have three children, Princess Mako, Princess Kako, and Prince Hisahito. Princess Sayako married Yoshiki Kuroda in 2005 and left the Imperial Family.

As of April 2019, Their Majesties will have been married for sixty years.

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**BIFUE USHIJIMA**

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*Of our five basic senses, the hardest to digitize is our sense of smell. Now there's a technology that can detect scents with a high degree of sensitivity and create a visual representation of them. One day it may be possible to select a wine, make jobsites safer and more by simply checking an image depicting their olfactory profile.*

Shunichiro Kuroki, chief executive officer of Aroma Bit, holding an aroma sensor

## PORTRAIT OF A SCENT

**W**HEN we eat or drink something and it tastes delicious, we don't just sense it with our tongues. Our perception of taste is also influenced by scent. However, aromas are difficult to pin down, and how something smells and how to describe the aroma varies from person to person. While these factors make digitizing smells tough, a Japanese startup company called Aroma Bit, Inc. has succeeded at creating a way to "see" scent.

"Of our five primary senses—sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste—sight and hearing were the first to be digitized. The process of digitizing touch and taste is also becoming a reality, leaving the sense of smell last in line. I thought that if we could digitize smell, we could contribute to the world in an entirely new way," explains CEO Shunichiro Kuroki of Aroma Bit as he describes what led to devising an aroma sensor.

Using gas sensors to detect aromas is an

established method, but these sensors work completely differently from the human nose. For instance, while a gas sensor picks up a scent and judges it to be "approximately ten percent ammonia," humans are more intuitive, describing the same scent as "smelling kind of sharp." Kuroki wanted to create a sensor that was closer to how humans judge odors.

Instead of a device that measures the composition and substances of a smell, he developed an "odor receptor membrane" modeled on the olfactory receptors of living creatures. It captures the chemical changes that occur when scent particles stick to and separate from this membrane, and recognizes them as scent patterns.

Aroma Bit's aroma sensor is a small, two-square-centimeter chip loaded with five types of odor receptor membranes. When you place their proprietary device that analyzes the chip near the



Their proprietary analysis device uses a fan to send scents to a chip loaded with five types of odor receptor membranes



THE TWO-SQUARE-CENTIMETER CHIP CAPTURES SMELLS AND TURNS THEM INTO A “SMELL PATTERN”



## EXAMPLES OF AROMA CODES

### SAKE EXAMPLES



*Junmai ginjo*  
(sake made from rice with a 60% polishing ratio, with no additives)



*Ginjo*  
(sake fermented at lower temperatures)



*Tokubetsu junmai*  
(sake made with highly polished rice)

### WINE EXAMPLES



Red wine



White wine A




White wine B

origin of a smell, the fan starts to spin, taking in air and detecting the scent.

Humans are said to have roughly four hundred types of olfactory receptors. Aroma Bit has currently developed thirty-five types of scent elements, with a sensitivity close to that of humans. Aroma Bit’s method for visualizing captured scents is also original. The scents the sensor captures are assigned numerical values, then given labels—“aroma codes” that represent the smell by dot size. If two label patterns are similar, it means the scents are similar as well, making scent something that can be visualized. Even if people can’t actually smell a product in person—such as when purchasing online—they can look at the label and choose their preferred fragrance. Companies that make wine, cheese, sake and coffee are already introducing aroma codes for their products.

Aside from luxury food and drink, the aroma sensor is also being considered as a method for

analyzing industrial oil odors in factories. For example, an odor sensor could catalogue all the common, day-to-day odors from a jobsite. If the system detects an odor out of the ordinary, the sensor could send out an alert. Unlike a gas sensor designed to detect only gas changes, the system could react to potential and unforeseen dangers. The odor sensor could also help in verifying the safety and shelf life of products, since it can detect the slightly sour smell of milk just as the product is starting to turn.

“Even when we’re just breathing, we are unconsciously influenced by our sense of smell, and it’s said that smell has a big role in compatibility with romantic partners,” says Kuroki, with high hopes for the possibilities of scent sensors. “And if we can create an even more advanced sensor, it could take in the survival scents given off by plants and insects, and we could decode nature’s messages.” 





# FUTURE DREAMS OF AN EGYPTIAN DOCTOR IN JAPAN

1

KATSUMI YASUKURA

*“Is there a challenge there?” Osama Ibrahim has followed this way of decision making at every fork in his life. A successful ophthalmologist who passed Japan’s national exam for medical practitioners, Ibrahim discusses the path he has walked and his dreams past and future.*

**O**SAMA Ibrahim’s inspiration for coming to Japan was the protagonist of a spy novel that thrilled him as a child. “He spoke multiple languages, was amazing at sports, and flew around the world in planes that he piloted himself. I wanted to become a pilot in the air force because I admired him, but my mother was strongly opposed to the idea, so I had to change my role model to a different character in the novel—an internationally successful doctor,” Ibrahim explains. He enrolled in Alexandria University’s Faculty of Medicine with the intent of becoming an ophthalmologist, a highly respected medical specialty in Egypt.

After graduating, he decided to study abroad to learn medical practices of a global standard. The

United States and United Kingdom are common destinations for Egyptian doctors, but Ibrahim wanted somewhere different. “Comfortable environments do not interest me,” he notes. “Japan immediately came to mind. While studying in Italy I’d met a Japanese woman—who would later become my wife—and became interested in the country. I practiced karate as a child, which made me feel close to Japan, an economic superpower that rebuilt itself rapidly after the war. Another reason was Japan’s world-class medical technology in the field of ophthalmic treatments.

“I hardly understood Japanese at the time, but during my four years in graduate school I committed myself to attaining the language skills needed to practice medicine,” he continues. “I



- 1 Ibrahim discussing his path to becoming a doctor in Japan and his dream of sharing his skills
- 2 He seeks to reassure every patient with his calm demeanor and clear explanations
- 3 The ophthalmologist says that there are still so many things he wants to learn
- 4 Many of Ibrahim's colleagues ask him for advice

wanted to tread a path that no Egyptian had walked before by passing Japan's national exam for medical practitioners."

Despite being busy with outpatient support, research, and preparation for academic conferences during his time at Keio University's graduate school, Ibrahim studied Japanese for two hours every night before going to bed. He completed graduate studies that usually take four years in just three, and also earned the N1 certification on the tough Japanese-Language Proficiency Test. He received approval to take the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's national exam for medical practitioners and passed in 2016.

While Ibrahim speaks calmly and everything seems to have gone smoothly when he summarizes his past, his days were tough emotionally and physically. At times in Japan he had trouble seeing how he could actually become a doctor here. "However, Japanese volunteers helped me learn the language over Skype, I gained public speaking skills through my side job on an NHK Arabic language course, and I found ways to affirm that I was improving little by little," he says with a smile.

He says he rediscovered Japan's virtues after he started working as a doctor. "From hospital directors to the cleaning crew, staff members take pride in their roles and responsibilities. This is why the entire system works smoothly, which allows doctors to focus on healthcare without any extraneous worries."

Ibrahim currently works at Tokyo Dental College's Ichikawa General Hospital, which is known for its top-class outcomes for corneal transplants. "Here I want to learn the delicate and secure corneal transplant techniques that Japan is known for. Eventually I'd like to save patients in the Middle East who struggle with cataracts and other eye diseases. In addition, I receive many emails from medical students from Egypt and various other countries seeking advice on how to succeed as a doctor in Japan. I hope that sharing my experiences with them serves as the bridge that connects them to Japan," Ibrahim says with a twinkle in his eye.

And his dreams outside of the medical field? "Well, I still cannot give up on my dream of becoming a pilot," he muses. For Ibrahim, who consistently makes good on his commitments, obtaining a license to fly is a highly likely event. **1**



# A CRAVING FOR NOODLES: BRINGING UDON TO THE WORLD

TAMAKI KAWASAKI

*Japanese udon noodles were already widely known throughout Asia. Recently, however, these noodles have been gaining fans throughout the world. With branches in fourteen regions, udon purveyor Marugame Seimen reveals their globalization tactics and localized menus, as well as the many reasons for the popularity of these noodles outside of Japan.*

**S** ATOSHI Suga, general manager of the International Business Planning Department at TORIDOLL Holdings Corporation, says that the overseas expansion of their *sanuki udon* restaurant chain Marugame Seimen began with a hunch on the part of CEO Takaya Awata. The company already had overseas expansion plans when in 2011 they came across an empty shop on a popular street in Hawaii. They grabbed the spot and were blown away by the positive reception. That Hawaii branch continues to grow—with lines of patrons waiting to sample the firm's popular *udon*—and remains the top earner of all their overseas branches. Deciding to jump in quickly instead of spending money on marketing research, the company opened test shops in various countries and regions. From 2012, they swiftly expanded into Thailand, China, Korea, Indonesia, Oceania,

Russia and the United States, and currently have shops in fourteen regions.

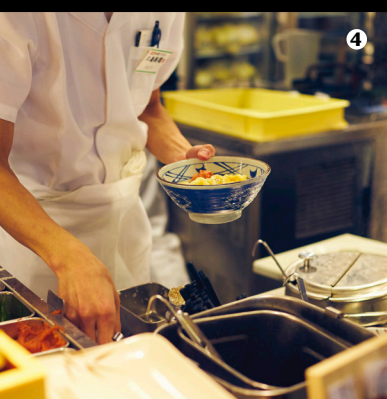
“While the ramen craze was in full swing, it seems many people were seeking something less oily and with a healthier image,” Suga says about *udon*'s popularity overseas. Compared to ramen, *udon* is also less expensive—another reason for its popularity.

While long tables bearing toppings to customize your *udon* are quite common in Japan, Suga notes that before opening shops in many countries they received feedback that this layout looked too much like a cafeteria. They decided to stick with the self-serve system, however, which ultimately captured the interest of customers and boosted popularity.

According to Awata, the key to expanding overseas is flexible product creation. He mentions that while half of their overseas menus feature classic dishes, the other half is adapted to suit local tastes. He finds







- 1 Customers waiting to get into a popular branch in Los Angeles
- 2 The beef and egg-topped *Nikutama Udon* is the most popular dish at the Hawaii branch
- 3 Marugame Seimen's self-serve system allows customers to choose their own toppings
- 4 The staff serve many different types of *udon* quickly and efficiently
- 5 Satoshi Suga, general manager of the International Business Planning Department
- 6 The chain localizes their dishes to fit each market, for instance offering Thai-style *tom yum udon*

it interesting to see what new combinations this flexible approach creates.

Of course, concocting new products is not an easy task. For instance, the strength and taste of the *dashi* broth had to be adjusted to match local food culture and preferences. The Chinese branches have a tomato-based soup, for example, while in Indonesia they offer chicken broth; in Thailand, customers can enjoy *udon* in a sour-spicy *tom yum*-based soup. In the Philippines, the savory and sweet Sukiyaki Ninja *udon* with beef and egg was an unexpected hit. The free toppings are also tailored to each country. For example, in Vietnam they offer cilantro, and chopped chili peppers at their Indonesian branch.

While there are limits to shop sizes and food handling regulations, regardless of where the shop is located, the chain sticks to their policy of making noodles from scratch in-house. Each country's *udon*

comes out differently depending on the water and the type of flour used. Every time the company opens a shop in a new country, they experiment repeatedly to find the perfect consistency for the noodles, making product creation the most crucial step.

The company now has six hundred shops overseas. Of these, Marugame Seimen is their largest brand. With *udon* as their core product, they plan to focus on expanding in the United States, and are considering moving into Europe and the Middle East. "We believe we can call ourselves a global franchise with more branches overseas than in Japan," Suga expounds firmly. "We'd like to be the pioneers of this idea."

Whatever other ingredients accompany these noodles, customers overseas clearly welcome the firmness and flexibility that Japanese *udon* offers. ■



# Riding in a Farmhouse through the Heart of Shikoku

YUKIKO ISHIKAWA

Shikoku  
Mannaka Sennen  
Monogatari  
sightseeing train

*Running across the prefectures of Kagawa and Tokushima on the island of Shikoku, the charming sightseeing train known as Shikoku Mannaka Sennen Monogatari has a cozy interior done up like a traditional Japanese farmhouse. It takes you on a three-hour ride through mountains, along rivers and past a thousand years of culture, and offers cuisine made with local ingredients.*

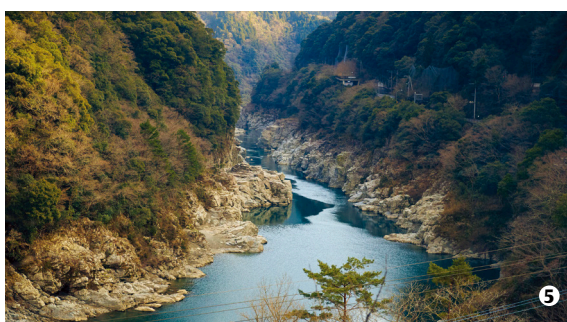
SHIKOKU Railway Company's Shikoku Mannaka Sennen Monogatari sightseeing train operates between Tadotsu Station in Kagawa Prefecture and Tokushima Prefecture's Oboke Station. This three-car train got its name because it runs on the Dosan Line—which crosses the middle (*mannaka* in Japanese) of Shikoku—and the spectacular temples and shrines along the way, such as Kotohiragu Shrine and Zentsuji Temple, that boast over a thousand years (*sen nen*) of history.

Designed in a wonderfully Japanese style, the train's look also reflects the passage of the four seasons. The first car's color scheme is based on the color green and is called Haruakari no Sho (Spring Chapter). The second car is the blue Natsusugashi no Sho (Summer Chapter) on one side and white Fuyusugashi no Sho (Winter Chapter) on the other, while the third car is the reddish Akiminori no Sho (Fall Chapter). The Winter Chapter side of the second car is only visible at Tadotsu and Oboke stations while stopped.

The train's interior decor is inspired by *kominka*—traditional farmhouses—and full of decorative details. The walls are lined with *sugi* (cedar) panels produced in Tokushima, the walls above the windows are sloped to resemble the eaves of a house, and the latticed ceiling is designed to resemble a fire shelf above an *irori* hearth. The deck has a display of locally produced crafts such *Kagawa shikki* (lacquerware) confectionery trays and *mima wagasa* (Japanese paper umbrellas) from Tokushima, as well as an Otani ware ceramic sink. Each table is set with *Awa Shijira-ori* woven luncheon mats on the trip between Oboke and Tadotsu stations, and *Sanuki norizome* dyed mats on the opposite route. You can drink locally brewed sake using drinking vessels crafted by Living National Treasure Yoshito Yamashita. One of the train's greatest charms, in fact, is the opportunity it gives passengers to discover Shikoku's traditional crafts and other products.

This sightseeing train is limited to just one round trip per day on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays. Meals can be booked when making





- 1 The train's design reflects the colors of the four seasons, including fresh spring green, summery blue, the reddish tints of fall and icy white of winter.
- 2 The interior of each of the train cars is unique. The first car offers comfortable window-side sofas from which you can enjoy the view
- 3 You can reserve Japanese-style meals served in beautiful handmade boxes, accompanied by jewel-like wagashi desserts
- 4 The 7-meter-long bench of seats in the second car recreates the atmosphere of sitting around an irori hearth
- 5 Visitors can take a sightseeing boat ride down the Yoshino River through Oboke Gorge, a natural marvel known for its dramatic rock formations

a reservation. The menu is Western on the trip from Tadotsu to Oboke, and Japanese on the return trip. All the dishes are cooked with pride by local chefs using locally produced ingredients.

There are various sightseeing spots along the way. Recommended in particular is Kotohiragu Shrine. Also affectionately called Konpirasan, this shrine has attracted visitors from all over Japan since ancient times. Although its foundation date is unknown, the oldest remaining record of the building's reconstruction dates back to 1001. The stone stairway from the entrance to the main shrine has 785 steps, while getting to the rear shrine takes 1368 steps. Though you should never overexert yourself, the sense of exhilaration when you are finally on top of these stairs is exceptional. Another stunning spot is Oboke Gorge. Shaped over 200 million years, this natural marvel is located near Oboke Station, where the train tour route ends. You can enjoy beautiful views of the valley from the train windows.

Looking out the windows of Shikoku Mannaka Sennen Monogatari, you'll see smiling locals waving

handmade flags at the train. At Awakawaguchi Station, you will receive an enthusiastic welcome from people dressed as *tanuki* (raccoon dogs), which the area is known for.

"The wonderful thing is that the local people came up with these ideas on their own," says Toshiji Tsuta, general manager of the Shikoku Railway Company's Shikoku Mannaka Sennen Monogatari project. Many passengers say they were touched by the hospitality of the locals, with some even moved to tears.

"We can only provide services within the train," Tsuta says. "Local people add to the experience in ways we couldn't. Without their support, we wouldn't have that unique 'Shikoku Mannaka Sennen Monogatari experience' our passengers love."

In recent years the line has been transporting many more passengers from other countries, so it is now well prepared with services in English. A trip on this elegant train is a wonderful way to experience over a thousand years of culture and a warm Shikoku welcome. **1**





# KAKUNODATE CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL

Located on the Senboku Plain in Akita Prefecture, the old castle town of Kakunodate has countless historic buildings—such as its famed samurai residences—and is often called the “Little Kyoto of Michinoku.” Kakunodate’s famed cherry blossom festival runs from the end of April through the beginning of May.

Festival highlights include the weeping cherry blossoms that line the street of the samurai residences and the two-kilometer-long cherry blossom tunnel of Hinokinaigawa Tsutsumi, an Edo Period (1603-1867) townscape with some four hundred cherry trees. Spring is one of the best times to visit as Kakunodate bathes in delicate pink petals.

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