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Communicating the Wonders of Bonsai Abroad

THEME FOR **FEBRUARY:**
JAPAN’S COOL TRAIN STATIONS

Since the opening of Japan’s first railway 150 years ago (1872), train stations have played a major role in the nation’s modernization, especially in urban development. Today, many stations in Japan function not only as transportation hubs but also as shopping and cultural centers, while some serve as destinations in themselves owing to the sights and facilities that can be enjoyed there. In this month’s issue, we introduce some of Japan’s fun-to-visit train stations.

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ON THE COVER
Onagawa Station (top); Kishi Station (left); Mizunuma station (right)
Photos: Courtesy of Miyagi Prefecture Tourism Promotion Division; Sato Kumiko; TAKE

EDITORS’ NOTE
Japanese names in this publication are written in Japanese order: family name first, personal name last.

JAPAN-U.S. SUMMIT VIDEO TELECONFERENCE MEETING

On January 21, 2022, Mr. Kishida Fumio, Prime Minister of Japan, held a Japan-U.S. summit video teleconference meeting with the Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr., President of the United States of America. The overview of the meeting is as follows.

The two leaders shared the intention to coordinate closely under the strong Japan-U.S. Alliance and to deepen cooperation with like-minded countries such as Australia, India, ASEAN, and Europe, toward realizing a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific.” In this regard, Prime Minister Kishida expressed his intention to host the Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (QUAD) Summit Meeting in Japan in the first half of this year by inviting President Biden to Japan, to which President Biden expressed his support.



Japan-U.S. Summit Video Teleconference Meeting

The two leaders exchanged their views on the recent regional issues.

- The two leaders opposed unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the East and South China Seas and any economic coercion, and shared the intention to coordinate closely in addressing various issues related to China. In addition, the two leaders underscored the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and encouraged the peaceful resolution of cross-strait issues. Furthermore, they shared serious concerns about the situation in Hong Kong and the human rights situation in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.
- Based on the common understanding that North Korea's nuclear and missile activities, including the ballistic missile launches in January this year (2022), pose a threat to the peace and stability of Japan, the region and the international community, the two leaders shared the intention to continue close coordination between Japan and the United States as well as among Japan, the United States and the Republic of Korea toward the complete denuclearization of North Korea in accordance with the UN Security Council resolutions. In addition, Prime Minister Kishida asked for continued understanding and cooperation toward the immediate resolution of the abductions issue, to which President Biden offered his renewed support. Prime Minister Kishida and President Biden affirmed the importance of close cooperation among Japan, the United States, and the ROK in addressing common challenges, and underscored the imperative of a strong trilateral relationship between Japan, the United States, and the ROK.
- Regarding the situation around Ukraine, the two leaders shared the intention to continue coordination between Japan and the United States. The leaders committed to work closely together to deter Russian aggression against Ukraine. Prime Minister Kishida pledged to continue close coordination with the United States, other allies and partners, and the international community on taking strong action in response to any attack.

Endorsing the Joint Statement of the Japan-U.S. Security Consultative Committee (“2+2”) held on January 7 this year, in light of the increasingly severe security environment in the region, the two leaders shared the intention to further strengthen the deterrence and response capabilities of the Japan-U.S. Alliance. Prime Minister Kishida expressed his determination to fundamentally reinforce Japan's defense capabilities by newly formulating the National Security Strategy, the National Defense Program Guidelines, and the Mid-Term Defense Program, and President Biden expressed his support to it and underscored the importance of sustaining vital investments in defense over time. In addition, President Biden reaffirmed the U.S.'s unwavering commitment to the defense of Japan and extended deterrence, including the application of Article V of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty to the Senkaku Islands. Furthermore, the two leaders confirmed their intention to advance cooperation on space and cyber, information security and advanced technology. The two leaders agreed to continue working closely together to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including by aligning efforts in and around U.S. facilities and areas in Japan.

Prime Minister Kishida explained the idea of “New Form of Capitalism,” and the two leaders shared the view to deepen discussions on new policy initiatives toward realizing sustainable and inclusive economy and society at the next summit meeting. In addition, the two leaders confirmed their close coordination on economic security. Furthermore, the two leaders concurred on the launch of the ministerial Japan-U.S. Economic Policy Consultative Committee (the Economic “2+2”), and shared the intention to expand and deepen bilateral economic cooperation and mutual exchanges based on the “Japan-U.S. Competitiveness and Resilience (CoRe) Partnership.” The two leaders also confirmed that they will expand the bilateral economic cooperation to the Indo-Pacific region, and Prime Minister Kishida welcomed the U.S.'s commitment to the region including an Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF).

Prime Minister Kishida illustrated his idea of nuclear disarmament grounded in realism, to which President Biden expressed his support, and the two leaders confirmed their intention to work together toward a world without nuclear weapons. In addition, the two leaders underscored the significance of the Japan-U.S. Joint Statement on the NPT released on January 21. Besides, the two leaders confirmed the strong determination to lead the international community in addressing global issues such as COVID-19 and climate change.

Based on the common understanding of the importance of multilayered people-to-people exchange, the two leaders confirmed their intention to continue promotion of such exchanges, including the Mansfield Fellowship Program, the KAKEHASHI Project and the Quad Fellowship, and build bridges that support the future of the two countries.

The two leaders shared the intention to continue their close communication, including in-person meetings.

The digital signage at Square Zero, Tokyo Station
Photo: Courtesy of JR East



Shimonada Station in Futami-cho, Iyo City, Ehime Prefecture
Photo: Courtesy of Iyo City Tourism Association



Japan's Cool Train Stations



A fox walks alongside the drift ice near Kitahama Station, Hokkaido
Photo: Courtesy of Muramatsu Taku



Nitama, the current stationmaster of Kishi Station, Wakayama Prefecture
Photo: Courtesy of Wakayama Electric Railway Co., Ltd.

S

ince the opening of Japan's first railway 150 years ago (1872), train stations have played a major role in the nation's modernization, especially in urban development. Today, many stations in Japan function not only as transportation hubs but also as shopping and cultural centers, while some serve as destinations in themselves owing to the sights and facilities that can be enjoyed there. In this month's issue, we introduce some of Japan's fun-to-visit train stations.



Urban Development Centered Around Stations



Kishii Takayuki, Project Professor in the College of Science and Technology, Department of Civil Engineering at Nihon University
Photo: Courtesy of Kishii Takayuki

SINCE the opening of Japan's first railway 150 years ago, stations¹ have played a major role in the modernization of Japan, most notably in the development of its cities. We spoke with Kishii Takayuki, Project Professor in the College of Science and Technology, Department of Civil Engineering at Nihon University, about the relationship between urban development and railway stations in Japan.

Since the opening of Japan's first railway line in 1872 connecting Shimbashi in Tokyo and Yokohama in Kanagawa Prefecture (a distance of 29 km), railways have spread across the country and the number of railway stations has increased. What role have railway stations played in the development of cities?

When railways began to spread in Tokyo at the end of the nineteenth century, tracks were laid in the periphery of the city where land could be secured, avoiding densely populated areas. So railway stations were also established in the city outskirts. Compared to now, Tokyo's areas of dense population were very small, and stations such as Shinagawa, Shibuya and Shinjuku, which are now part of the metropolis, were originally located in areas with few residents or buildings.

¹ According to the Japan Geographic Data Center, as of January 2022, there are 9,171 stations in Japan

In other words, when the history of railways began in Japan, the pattern was that a station would open and then a town would naturally form around it. However, Kobayashi Ichizo (1873-1957), the founder of the railroad company Hankyu Railway based in Osaka (where Expo 2025 will be held, see p. 25), drastically changed this model. In 1911, the company opened the Takarazuka Line connecting Umeda Station in the center of Osaka City in Osaka Prefecture, with Takarazuka Station in the suburbs of Takarazuka City in Hyogo Prefecture. Kobayashi developed numerous business ventures along the rail line, including residential developments, department stores, and entertainment facilities such as hot springs, theaters and amusement parks. Kobayashi created a business model by which railway companies, in addition to building railways and train stations, stabilize their own operations by operating real estate and retail businesses along their rail lines to generate profits.

This business model also spread to Tokyo. After the city-center sustained massive damage from the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, various private railway companies constructed railway lines extending from the city center to the suburbs and conducted urban development along those lines.

Please tell us why urban development in Japan was centered on railroad stations?



A Hankyu Railway train passes in front of Takarazuka Grand Theater in Hyogo Prefecture
Photo: bee/PIXTA



View of Tokyo Station from the Marunouchi side
Photo: momo/PIXTA

In the United States, the use of automobiles became widespread in the 1920s, while in Japan, trains and buses were the chief means of transport until the 1970s. So, urban development happened mainly around railway stations where a higher concentration of people could gather. In the early 1990s, the American architect Peter Calthorpe proposed the concept of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD). The idea was to concentrate housing and commercial facilities around railway stations as a measure to mitigate environmental and energy problems caused by an over-reliance on motor vehicles. TOD went on to attract international attention, but the concept had been practiced in Japan for more than a century. Calthorpe himself identified Japan as a good example of TOD.

What are some features of recent large-scale redevelopment projects at major railway stations in Tokyo?

Major stations in central Tokyo were serviced by multiple railway companies, with each company undertaking independent development projects around its own station. As a result, the layout of the stations and their surrounding areas was very complex. However, more recent redevelopment projects being carried out at stations such as Tokyo, Shibuya and Shinjuku are being planned in cooperation with multiple railway companies, local governments, residents, and other concerned parties in order to increase the value of the stations and the areas around them. This has enabled the integrated design and comprehensive redevelopment of infrastructure such as railway facilities, station buildings, station front-plazas and parking lots.

Shibuya Station undergoing redevelopment
Photo: northsan/PIXTA



An example is Marunouchi, on the west side of Tokyo Station, which functioned mainly as an office district. In 2012, construction work was completed to restore the Tokyo Station building to its original 1914 form, and in 2017, large pedestrian-friendly station front-plazas and an expansive pedestrianized space leading to the Outer Garden of the Imperial Palace were completed. These redevelopment projects have transformed Marunouchi into a neighborhood with fresh appeal. Various construction projects are also underway at Shibuya and Shinjuku Stations, including the relocation of platforms, the reconstruction of station buildings, and the construction of plazas and walkways to connect areas that had been divided by railway tracks. This is being achieved by land readjustment, altering the shape of parcels of land through the reorganization of landowners' property rights. Shibuya and Shinjuku will be transformed into pleasant neighborhoods where everyone can transit and change trains safely and comfortably.

These projects go beyond just TOD to what may be called TODM (Transit-Oriented Development and Management), by involving all of the parties concerned in managing the development of the urban community. In order to sustainably increase the value of the area, it is important for railway stations, station front-plazas, and areas around stations to be designed and managed in an integrated manner.

Please tell us how stations in the suburbs of major cities and rural areas will change.

Until now, stations in the suburbs of major cities and rural areas have been transit points used by residents to travel between their homes and city centers or by people visiting

sightseeing spots. However, as a result of social changes such as the advent of the super-aged society and the development of information and communication technology (ICT), stations and their surrounding areas where public transportation is concentrated must now provide multiple functions to support activities in the communities. Facilities are needed to provide daily-life services that include not only commercial facilities such as shops but also nursery centers, facilities for the elderly, remote working offices, community centers and other places like libraries, art galleries, and concert halls where various people gather, interact and share cultural experiences and the history of the community.

One example of a station in the rural area that communicates a sense of local culture and history is Nagano Station in Nagano Prefecture, for which I was involved in the redevelopment planning. Nagano Station is around an hour and a half from Tokyo by Shinkansen train and is a gateway to Zenkoji Temple, which boasts a history that goes back around 1,400 years. The temple's Main Hall is a large wooden structure that is designated a national treasure, and Zenkoji attracts large numbers of people to worship throughout the year. Many people participated in the redevelopment, including railway company officials, experts and citizens, with the aim of transforming the station and station front into an iconic local feature. Completed in 2015, the station front-plaza has a canopied facade consisting of twelve columns and deep eaves built using locally produced wood, echoing the design of the Main Hall at Zenkoji. There is a public space on the third floor of the station building from the windows of which visitors can see the station front-plaza with its eaves and columns. The station communicates a sense of Nagano's nature, culture, history and life, to both locals and visitors to Zenkoji Temple alike.

How do you think Japan's expertise in using railway stations for urban development can contribute to overseas development, particularly in developing countries?

In cities in developing countries, automobiles became widespread before railway networks were developed, which has led to serious problems such as traffic accidents, traffic congestion and air pollution. As a result, Japan's initiatives to promote urban development that puts emphasis on railways is generating great interest not only from developing countries themselves but also from the United Nations and the World Bank.

In order to respond to the needs of such developing countries, Japan is supporting urban development in major

cities using railways, with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) playing a central role. One such example is Thailand, where JICA provides various kinds of support, including creating systems related to railroad construction and urban development. For example, JICA experts supported the drafting of a law on land readjustment that was passed by the Thai parliament in 2004. Land readjustment is essential to the construction of railways and associated urban development, so a law was needed to establish procedures and regulations for this. JICA experts did not transfer the Japanese law without modification, but made every



Nagano Station before redevelopment
Photo: Courtesy of Kishii Takayuki



Nagano Station after redevelopment
Photo: Courtesy of Kishii Takayuki

effort to draft a law that was aligned with Thai society and culture. Since the law was passed, there has been a movement to integrate railway stations with development in surrounding areas, mainly in Bangkok.

In the face of serious environmental and energy problems, the world is moving toward urban development that incorporates public transportation. The model of urban development integrating railway networks established by Japan over many years is set to become increasingly important for the world. ■

Interview by SAWAJI OSAMU

The Closest Train Station to Drift Ice

Kitahama Station on the Senmo Line

Drift ice viewed from Kitahama Station

Kitahama Station, located in the northeast region of Hokkaido facing the Sea of Okhotsk, is a popular place to experience drift ice.

SASAKI TAKASHI

KITAHAMA Station in Abashiri City faces the Sea of Okhotsk in northeast Hokkaido, the northernmost of Japan's four main islands. It is known as the station closest to drift ice and is one of Hokkaido's most popular winter spots.

The Sea of Okhotsk stretches down to 45 degrees North latitude, the lowest latitude for seasonal sea ice formation in the world. The peak drift ice season occurs in late February to early March, when the whole of the sea is covered with ice floes.

Kitahama Station on the JR Hokkaido (Hokkaido Railway Company) Senmo Line is a wooden station building located just 20 meters from where the Sea of Okhotsk breaks on the shore. From the moment passengers get off from the train and stand on the platform, they are met with a panoramic view of the sea. Depending on the time of year, drift ice may be seen. The sea can also be viewed from the window of the waiting room. Visitors can walk from the station to the beach, where

they can actually touch the drift ice and listen to the *ryuhyo nari*, the creaking sound of the ice floes pushing against each other. Right next to the station building is an observatory deck offering a view of the sea from up high.

“When the drift ice arrives, the sea turns pure white all the way to the horizon and in the distance you can see the



Kitahama Station and observation deck (left)

Shiretoko mountain range, which is a World Natural Heritage site. The view from Kitahama Station is a magnificent spectacle you won't see anywhere else in the world."

So says Hayakawa Junichi, head of the Hokkaido branch of the Tetsudo Tomo no Kai (Japan Railfan Club), a nationwide organization of railway enthusiasts with a history of over sixty years. The JR Hokkaido Senmo Line is 166.2 kilometers long. Starting from Abashiri City, it runs along the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk for around 40 kilometers, then southward through Akan-Mashu National Park and Kushirohitsu-gen National Park, registered as wetlands under the Ramsar Convention, and ending at Kushiro City on the Pacific coast. Kitahama Station was opened in 1924, but with the development of road transportation networks and a fall in population, passenger numbers started to decline and by 1984 it had become an unmanned train station.

According to Hayakawa, however, it was around that time that Kitahama Station started to become more popular. Before the station became unmanned, the stationmaster at the time had placed a notebook in the station waiting room for visitors to write down their memories of their trip, and purchasers of a "platform ticket" that only allowed them to enter the station precincts were given a shell from the beach as a "pass." The station's reputation for its unique customer service gradually spread. Its growing popularity was also helped by its role as a filming location for numerous movies and TV dramas from the 1960s onward. In particular, the station was used in the filming of the 2008 Chinese hit movie *If You Are the One*, after which many tourists from China visited.

Visitors' business cards and the tickets they purchased are stuck to the walls and ceiling of the waiting room at Kitahama Station. The room is full of the thoughts and feelings of those who traveled specially to Kitahama Station.

The station's office in the unmanned station building was remodeled to create the Café Teishaba (*teishaba* means station), which opened in 1986 and serves dishes using plenty of local seafood in a retro atmosphere created by using old train seats and other vintage items. The café is said to be popular with local people as well as tourists.

Says Hayakawa, "The Senmo Line has a clear view of the Sea of Okhotsk, and the bright blue of the sea and sky, known as Okhotsk Blue, fills the train windows. While visitors can enjoy the unique spectacle of the drift ice in winter, at other times of year they can take in picturesque scenery from the train, such as meadows full of flowers in early summer and beautiful lakes where swans gather. So I'd urge people to visit Kitahama Station by train rather than by car," says Hayakawa.

Hokkaido in February and March is bitterly cold. But the cold makes the view from Kitahama Station of the sea covered with drift ice all the more captivating to those who visit. 📷



The Shiretoko mountain range and a Senmo Line train



Business cards and tickets cover the walls and ceiling of the station waiting room



A fox walks alongside the drift ice near Kitahama Station



The Onagawa Station building following its opening in March 2015
Photo: Courtesy of Miyagi Prefecture Tourism Promotion Division

Onagawa Station, a Symbol of Recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake

Onagawa Station in Onagawa Town, Miyagi Prefecture, was severely damaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011. It was rebuilt four years later and has become one of the symbols of the town's reconstruction.

SAWAJI OSAMU

ON March 11, 2011, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake occurred in the Pacific Ocean off northeastern Japan. Shortly afterwards, a huge tsunami hit the Pacific coast of the Tohoku and Kanto regions, causing severe damage in many locations.

One of the hardest-hit areas was Onagawa Town in Miyagi Prefecture. At the time, Onagawa Town was a port town with a lively fishery and seafood processing industry, home to about 10,000 people living mainly around Onagawa Port. However, a tsunami about 15 meters high destroyed most of the town and left more than 800 people dead or missing.

Onagawa Station on the JR Ishinomaki Line, about 200 meters away from Onagawa Port, was a small station with a single-story building, but it played an important role for

tourists visiting the area and residents commuting to work and school. Moreover, the town hall and other public facilities were located near the station, making it a central location for the town. Yet, the station building was washed away without a trace by the tsunami. Also lost was the hot spring facility adjacent to the station, Onagawa Onsen Yupo'po, which was a popular place with locals and tourists alike.

Six months after the earthquake and tsunami disaster, Onagawa Town Office had come up with a recovery plan and reconstruction began. Onagawa Town aims to be a safe and vibrant town with the station as its center, and so plans were developed to raise the land around Onagawa Station further above sea level and to concentrate public, commercial and tourist facilities there.

In March 2015, Onagawa Station opened as a symbol of the new town to coincide with the restoration of the entire Ishinomaki Line. To prevent damage from any future tsunami, the reconstructed station is located about 200 meters further inland than the previous location and on land that has been raised by nine meters. The three-story station building was designed by world-renowned architect Ban Shigeru. The large



Onagawa Station in 2007, before the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011
Photo: Courtesy of Muramatsu Taku



The Seapal-Pier Onagawa commercial complex and sea beyond, viewed from Onagawa Station
Photo: Courtesy of Miyagi Prefecture Tourism Promotion Division



A bath at Onagawa Onsen Yupo'po in the Onagawa Station building featuring beautiful tile art on the walls
Photo: Courtesy of Onagawa Town



Aerial photo of central Onagawa Town. The building with the white roof in the middle is Onagawa Station. A brick road extends straight from the station to the sea.
Photo: Courtesy of Onagawa Town

white roof was designed to evoke the image of a black-tailed gull flapping its wings. The second floor houses Onagawa Onsen Yupo'po, its bathhouse walls decorated with beautiful tile art recreating paintings of Mt. Fuji and deer in the forest by world-renowned Japanese artist Senju Hiroshi and others. The designs are intended to reflect visions of the bright future of Onagawa Town. From the observation deck on the third floor, visitors can look out over Onagawa Town and Onagawa Port, and in winter watch the sun rising from the sea. A foot-bath in front of the station building can be enjoyed for free. (Onagawa Onsen Yupo'po is currently closed for repairs [February 2022].)

“When I first visited Onagawa Station in 2007, there were so many buildings around the station that you couldn't see the sea from the station or from the platform,” says Muramatsu Taku, who works for a company in Tokyo and spends his days off traveling to stations across Japan that are situated close to the sea. He presents his photographs and observations on his

website, “Stations from Where You Can See the Sea.”

Muramatsu visited Onagawa Station again in 2017, ten years after his first visit. Following the post-earthquake reconstruction, the scenery had changed completely. When leaving through the station's ticket gate, he proceeded down a straight brick road leading straight to Onagawa Bay, with the sea appearing at the end of the road's gentle downhill slope. The road passes by a commercial complex called Seapal-Pier Onagawa where there are restaurants and stores selling household goods and other things, and which he found busy with tourists and local residents.

“Although the devastation caused by the tsunami far exceeded the imagination, I felt sad that nothing looks like it used to,” says Muramatsu. “But at the same time, I was very happy to see the bustle of the town and am looking forward to seeing how it develops in the future.”

Town development centered on the station has opened the future for Onagawa Town. 



The Station with a Spa

Mizunuma Station on the Watarase Keikoku Railway

Mizunuma Station, which is located in Kiryu City, Gunma Prefecture, approximately 100 km from central Tokyo, is unique for a train station in Japan in that it also has hot spring facilities. This station with a spa is cherished as a place of relaxation both by local residents and visitors.

SUGIYAMA MAMORU

KIRYU Station in Kiryu City, Gunma Prefecture, can be reached by train from Tokyo in as little as round 2 hours. From Kiryu Station, passengers can take the scenic Watarase Keikoku Railway toward Nikko in



View over the tracks to the Mizunuma Station Spa Center entrance
Photo: Joe / PIXTA

Mizunuma Station with Mizunuma Station Spa Center on the platform (right)
Photo: TAKE

Tochigi Prefecture, an area famed for its hot springs, temples and shrines, in particular the national treasure Nikko Toshogu Shrine (see *Highlighting Japan*, September 2017).

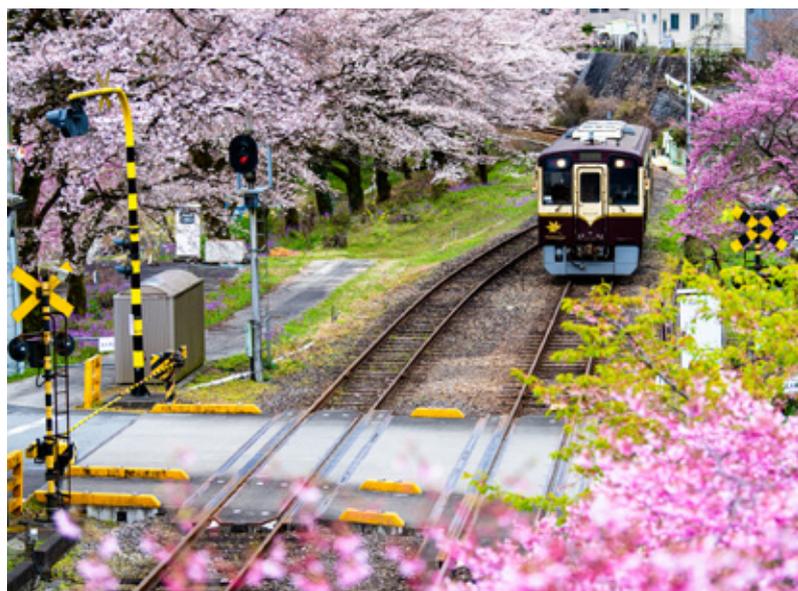
Located about 40 minutes from Kiryu Station on the Watarase Keikoku Railway is Mizunuma Station, which is unique for a train station in Japan in that it also serves as a hot-spring center. A ride on the line is thus perfect for fans of local railways, who can not only enjoy the spectacular views from the train but also have a dip in the local hot spring waters without even having to leave the station.



The open-air bath
Photo: Courtesy of Mizunuma Station Spa Center



A Watarase Keikoku train, pulled by an old diesel locomotive, passes beneath weeping peach (left) and cherry trees (right)
Photo: katsumi / PIXTA



The peach and cherry blossoms attract many passengers to Watarase Keikoku sightseeing trains in the spring
Photo: denkei / PIXTA

Mizunuma Station Spa Center opened in December 1989 as a part of efforts to attract sightseers to the Watarase Keikoku Railway at a time when the number of passengers was in decline. The spa building is long and narrow, extending about 100 meters along the length of one of the station platforms. Spa users can watch the trains arriving and departing through the windows on the track side of the building, which is exciting even for those who would not normally consider themselves railway fans. Mizunuma Station also affords fine views over the valley of the Watarase River, and spa users can enjoy the beautiful seasonal landscapes through the bathhouse windows facing the valley. There are about 300 cherry trees of nine different types and more than 1,000 weeping peach trees on the “Sayado-Ohata Peach Blossom Road” near Mizunuma Station. When the trees start blossoming in early April, the banks of the Watarase River turn a delicate pink, a

scene which can be enjoyed while soaking in the spa’s open-air bath.

The spa draws spring water from the Sarukawa hot spring on the slopes of nearby Mount Akagi via a 8-km-long pipe. Kamiyama Noboru of the Mizunuma Station Spa Center says, “The spring water is soft on the skin and is good for treating digestive disorders and arteriosclerosis. We also have saunas and indoor baths. The facilities are free for local residents aged 60 or over, so it’s used as a place of relaxation not just for tourists but also for local residents.”

The spa center also has a restaurant and a banquet room. Highlights on the menu include dishes that use local ingredients such as *Maito* salmon¹ and “mountain eel,” a local name for nutritious and sticky Japanese yam.

Watarase Keikoku Railway first operated as a private railway from 1912 called the Ashio Railway, transporting copper from the Ashio Copper Mine in Tochigi Prefecture, which was one of the biggest copper mines in Japan. It was later nationalized, but the decision was made to close the line when the mine was shut down in the early 1970s and the population living along the line decreased dramatically. However, thanks to a passionate citizens’ movement to keep the trains running, in 1989 the line started running again. Today, the Ashio Copper Mine Ruins are among a number of popular tourist destinations in the area, and are easily accessed from Mizunuma Station on the Watarase Keikoku Railway.

Mizunuma Station meanwhile is itself a popular local attraction, combining the appeal of the beautiful natural surroundings, relaxing hot spring water, and delicious local foods. **7**



The Kappa bath, named after the character of legend (see statue) said to live upstream from the spa center
Photo: Courtesy of Mizunuma Station Spa Center

i *Maito* salmon, also known as Yashio trout, is a type of rainbow trout produced through selective breeding in Tochigi Prefecture.



Tokyo Station

Another Face of Tokyo Station, Japan's Terminal Station

Tokyo Station is the center of Japan's railway network and serves an average of about 460,000 passengers every day (FY2019), with about 3,000 daily train arrivals and departures, including railways connecting major cities across the nation, such as the Tokaido Shinkansen and the Tohoku Shinkansen. Tokyo Station continues to evolve not only as a terminal station but also as a shopping destination.

SUGIYAMA MAMORU

IN recent years, new commercial spaces have opened one after another, mainly in major stations in urban areas, where you can enjoy shopping and eating and drinking in specialty stores. These commercial spaces, or malls, which have been developing rapidly since the 2000s, are called "ekinaka,"

and their main characteristic is that they are located inside the ticket gates.

While there are many ekinaka at JR Tokyo Station, the gateway to Tokyo, more than 200 stores can be found in four ekinaka as follows: Gransta Tokyo, which opened in August 2020; Ecute Tokyo and Ecute Keiyo Street (currently under renovation) of Ecute, an ekinaka brand which can be found in East Japan Railway Company (JR East) stations in the Tokyo metropolitan area; and Gransta Marunouchi outside the ticket gates. These facilities are filled with all sorts of stores, including fashion brand stores, shops where you can buy dinner side dishes to bring back home, and sophisticated Japanese



The Ecute Tokyo ekinaka mall



Example of souvenir sweets on sale at Tokyo Station (inspired by the station's bricks)



The digital signage at Square Zero



An exhibition of Aomori Nebuta Festival-related artwork at Square Zero. (See “Rousing Summer in Tohoku,” *Highlighting Japan* September 2011)

and Western confectionery stores. This is why the station has become an attractive place for shopping for people, not just a place to take the train. In the past, people would hurry to work in the morning and rush to get home again in the evening. Now, if they have a little time to spare, they stay and enjoy the ekinaka on their way home. (The ekinaka are all implementing rigorous anti-COVID-19 measures at this time.)

A PR officer at JR East says, “Gransta Tokyo, whose slogan is ‘TRY NEW TOKYO ST.,’ is Japan’s largest ekinaka with about 150 stores. Not only can you have meals at long-established and famous restaurants from all over the country, but you can also find many new Tokyo souvenirs that are only available here, so we’ve had a great response.”

One thing that makes Tokyo Station attractive is the many restaurants using fresh seafood and vegetables acquired

that same morning from all over Japan thanks to the Shinkansen and other parts of the high-speed logistics network that goes to Tokyo. Ecute Tokyo, which is close to the Shinkansen platforms, has plenty of souvenirs and *ekiben* (lunch boxes to eat on the train). Moreover, Ecute Keiyo Street, with its many restaurants and shops geared to commuter needs, is designed to be a relaxing space like a park. In the passageways of Gransta Tokyo, traditional crafts such as Edo *kiriko* (glassware), Tokyo cloisonné (enamelware) and Edo *noren* (room dividers/curtains) are displayed as decorations, casually creating a Tokyo-esque atmosphere. Meanwhile, Square Zero, whose creation coincided with the opening of Gransta Tokyo, is a multipurpose event space with an atrium. Here various types of information are disseminated through digital signageⁱ about 6.9 meters high, and a variety of events such as farm shops and presentations of Japanese culture are organized to make this a new interactive space at Tokyo Station, where people are given opportunities to meet and connect.

The JR East PR officer describes the future vision of Tokyo Station as follows.

“With the evolution of ekinaka, the station has changed from being a transit point for travelers and commuters to

a place where people gather. Further, based on the concept ‘Tokyo Station Becomes a City,’ Tokyo Station City Management Council aims to further enhance the appeal and value as ‘Tokyo Station City’ which is one large town that is centered on the station and connects surrounding areas like Marunouchi, Yaesu and Nihonbashi.”

The station used to focus on quick-service stores such as kiosks and fast-food places to meet the needs of people just passing through but has now been transformed into a place with many attractive shops that is a shopping destination in its own right. There is also an art museum inside the station, while concerts of various genres are held on a station plaza, allowing people to enjoy cultural events as well as shopping.

In 2001, IC cards were introduced that could be used not only for paying for rail fares, but also for shopping. Taking advantage of this, Tokyo Station has been creating rich, enjoyable spaces that connect people beyond the station’s function as a key transportation hub by expanding the ekinaka. Tokyo Station is developing its various services and continues to evolve. **7**

ⁱ General term for media that conveys information using displays and other electronic imaging devices in transportation facilities, public spaces, and other locations

Okuoi Kozyo Station viewed from the observation deck on the opposite bank of the lake
Photo: Courtesy of Oigawa Railway Co., Ltd.

“The Station on the Lake” Okuoi Kozyo Station on the Oigawa Railway’s Ikawa Line

A remote station on the Oigawa Railway’s Ikawa Line attracts many people to its scenic location in the middle of a lake.

KATO KYOKO

THE Oi River (Oigawa), a Class A river¹ that flows through central Shizuoka Prefecture on the Pacific coast in the middle of Honshu, has its source in 3,000-meter-high mountains and flows 160 kilometers before emptying into Suruga Bay. Running alongside the Oi River in this remote mountainous area is the Oigawa Railway’s Ikawa Line, a 25.5 km line known for its many tunnels and bridges, and for its magnificent views.

The Ikawa Line runs from Senzu Station to Ikawa Station

and has fourteen stations in all. Okuoi Kozyo Station, which is a little over an hour’s ride from Senzu Station, is an especially popular stop on the line and is known as “the station on the lake.” In fact, the station is located at the tip of a peninsula that juts out into Sesso Lake, an artificial lake created after the construction of a dam. This section of the Ikawa Line became submerged, so the 70-meter-high Oku-oi Rainbow Bridge was built over the lake with the peninsula at its halfway point. Viewed from the observation deck on the opposite bank of the lake, the contrast between the deep green lake surface and the red iron bridge is vivid and impressive.

Okuoi Kozyo Station opened on the peninsula in 1990. Nii-bori Eri of the Oigawa Railway Corporate Planning Office says, “Currently, there are no houses in the vicinity and most of the people using the station come just to see it.”

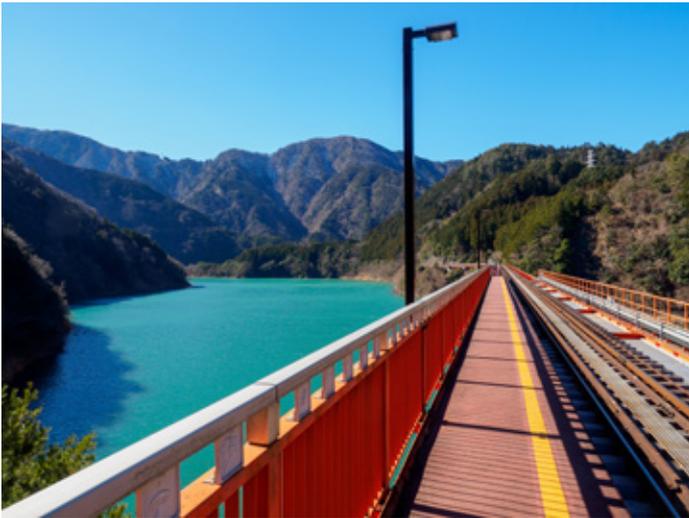
Okuoi Kozyo Station became famous in Japan about ten years ago when the superb views from



Okuoi Kozyo Station
Photo: Courtesy of Muramatsu Taku



Okuoi Kozyo Station platform sign
Photo: Courtesy of Muramatsu Taku



A promenade for pedestrians runs parallel to the tracks on the bridge across the lake
Photo: Courtesy of Muramatsu Taku



Nagashima Dam, which led to the formation of Sesso Lake
Photo: Courtesy of Muramatsu Taku

the station and the beautiful colors of nature surrounding it were featured in a TV program. After that, more and more people posted pictures of it on Instagram and it became popular as an “Instagrammable place.” Then, in 2019, Okuoi Kozuyo Station became the first location in Shizuoka Prefecture to be awarded the COOL JAPAN AWARD by the COOL JAPAN Council, which has foreign examiners from all over the world certify COOL JAPAN that has global appeal. This attracted international attention, and since it was before the spread of COVID-19, the number of foreign tourists increased for a while.

“The observation deck on the opposite bank to the station can be reached in about 15 minutes after crossing the bridge,” says Niibori. “The view from there is truly majestic. The appearance of the mountains changes with the seasons and the color of the water has infinite variety. You never tire of seeing the threefold harmonious view of rugged mountain gorge terrain, skyline uninterrupted by human-built structures, and the deep shades of the lake.”

As a remote mountainous location with no houses or other sources of light pollutionⁱⁱ, the station area is ideal for stargazing. To take advantage of this, Oigawa Railways is running a special “Starry Sky Train” every Saturday and Sunday, except at the beginning of the year, for a limited time from November in 2021 to February in 2022.

“The train arrives at Okuoi Kozuyo Station shortly after 6 pm, from when passengers can observe the starry sky for nearly an hour. It’s a cold time of year, but the stars shine that much brighter, so astronomy fans love it,” says Niibori.

Day and night, many people are attracted to remote Okuoi Kozuyo Station and its wonderful views. 



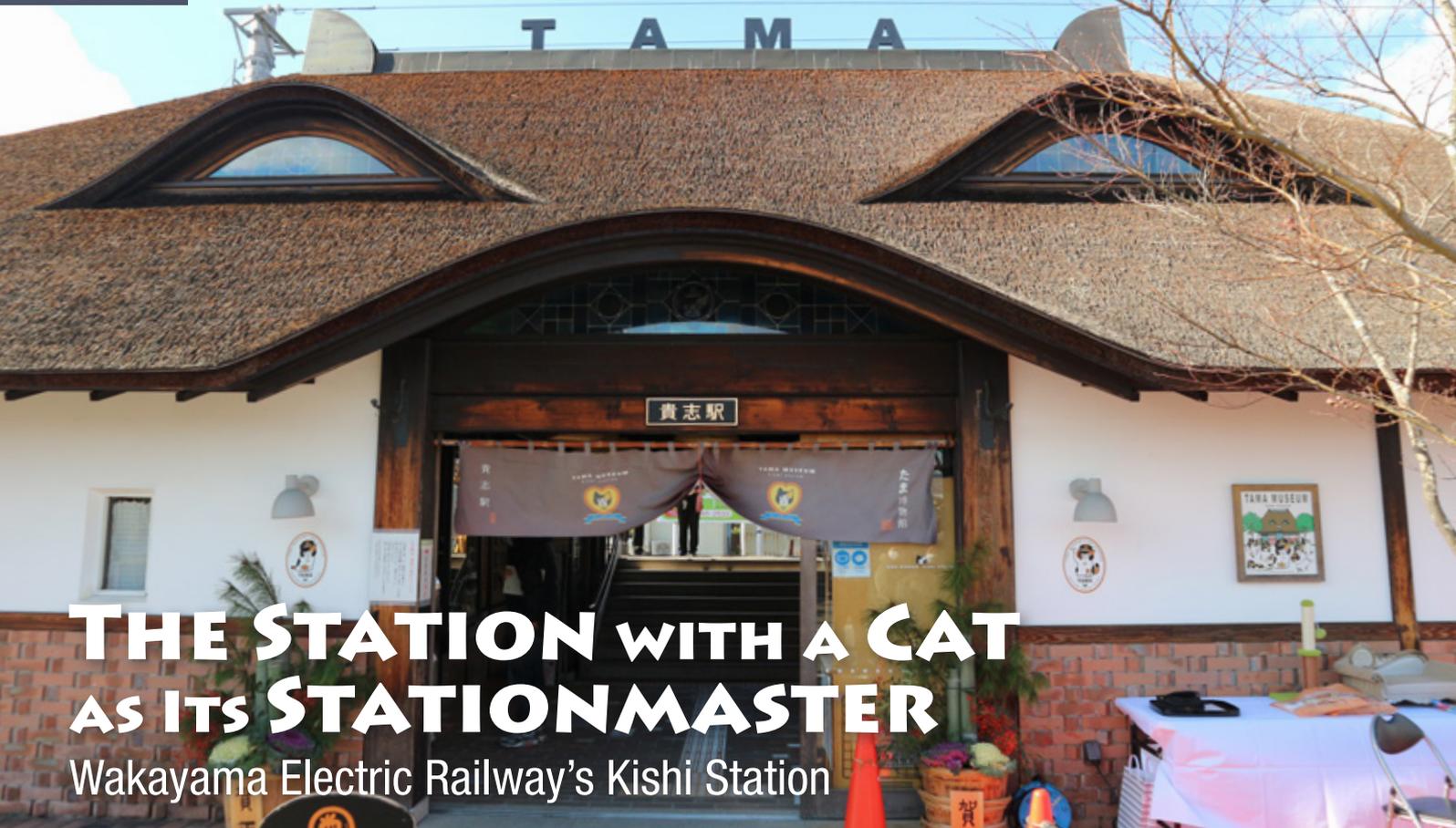
The starry sky over the Okuoi Kozuyo Station bridge
Photo: Courtesy of Oigawa Railway Co., Ltd.



The Starry Sky Train
Photo: Courtesy of Oigawa Railway Co., Ltd.

i River systems deemed important for the national economy and people’s lives are designated as “Class A river systems” (MLIT)

ii Light pollution is artificial skylight (as from city lights) that interferes especially with astronomical observations.



THE STATION WITH A CAT AS ITS STATIONMASTER

Wakayama Electric Railway's Kishi Station

Tama Museum Kishi Station, with its distinctive roof incorporating a cat design (Designed by ELJI MITOOKA + DON DESIGN ASSOCIATES)
Photo: Sato Kumiko

Kishi Station on the Wakayama Electric Railway Kishigawa Line is famous for its stationmaster cat.

SATO KUMIKO

CATS have been kept from time immemorial in Japan and around the world for their useful ability to catch rats and mice. It is known that, in the United Kingdom, cats have been officially employed as Chief Mouser to the Cabinet Office since 1924.

In more recent times, cats in Japan like many other countries are less often used as rat catchers, instead being kept almost exclusively as pets. However, since 2007, a cat has been serving as stationmaster at Kishi Station on the 14-kilometer-long Wakayama Electric Railway Kishigawa Line, which connects Wakayama City and Kinokawa City in Wakayama Prefecture in the Kinki region.

The historic Kishigawa Line opened in 1916, but the number of users gradually declined over time, and in 2004 a decision was made by the then operator to close the railroad line. However, backed by local residents who were eager to keep the line, the local government called for a company to take over. As a result, Okayama Electric Tramway Co., Ltd. of the Ryobi Group in Okayama Prefecture established the new Wakayama Electric Railway Co., Ltd. and took over the operation of the Kishigawa Line from 2006.

One issue that arose when the new company was developing its operating structure was the cats, which had up to then been taken care of by the people who ran a store next to Kishi Station. The house on the public road next to the store where the cats lived had to be moved due to the land development around the station. The owner of the store approached Kojima Mitsunobu, the president of Wakayama Electric Railway, to see whether there was any way the cats could stay in the station.

“When the president actually met the cats, he felt that the eyes of a female calico cat (a cat with a three-colored coat) called Tama conveyed a sense of purpose as strong as any of his employees’—call it his businessman’s intuition if you like. So he decided to let Tama stay in Kishi Station as the stationmaster and let the other two cats remain as her assistants,” says Yamaki Yoshiko of Ryobi Group’s Public Relations Department.

News of the unprecedented event of a cat assuming the post of stationmaster instantly spread across Japan, and many passengers began to visit Kishi Station to get a look at the dignified and adorable stationmaster cat in her miniature stationmaster hat. The story was also picked up by the international media, and Tama the stationmaster cat began to attract fans from overseas.

The stationmaster and her assistants generally worked the daytime shift Monday through Saturday, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in winter and 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. in summer. Tama sat at her favorite ticket gate, greeting and seeing off



The late Tama, the first stationmaster cat
 Photo: Courtesy of Wakayama Electric Railway Co., Ltd.



Tama Jinja shrine on the platform at Kishi Station
 Photo: Sato Kumiko

passengers. After a year in the job, the reputation of the stationmaster cat spread and even more people came to visit Kishi Station to see the cats. This led to the remodeling of the station in 2010. The new station building had a distinctive roof shaped like a cat, and included a stationmaster's office for Tama.

Tama's ability to attract customers far exceeded the company's expectations and she received promotion after promotion. In 2008, she was knighted and awarded the title of the first Wakayama de Knight (a pun on "It's got to be Wakayama" in Japanese) by the Wakayama prefectural governor, in recognition of her contribution to promoting local tourism. Likewise, in 2011 she was awarded the title Wakayama Prefecture Tourism Mascot Daimyojin (great deity). In 2013, Tama became Acting President of Wakayama Electric Railway, and in 2014 Ultra Stationmaster. Tama passed away in 2015, mourned by her many fans. She was given the posthumous title Honorary Eternal Stationmaster.

Tama's successor as stationmaster was a calico cat known as "Stationmaster Tama II" or Nitama (literally "Tama the Second"), who had graduated from the Training School for Cat Stationmasters. The training school is a facility of Okayama Electric Tramway, where cats live comfortably and spend time with tourists. The cats do not receive specific stationmaster training. Rather, they are assessed for their aptitude for the role, such as being able to get on with various types of people and being able to tolerate wearing a hat. Cats that are suitable are assigned to a station.

Nitama had been working at Kishi Station as a substitute stationmaster on Sundays, which was stationmaster Tama's day off. However, after Tama's death, she was promoted to stationmaster. Nitama has performed the stationmaster's duties

admirably and is just as popular as Tama. At the beginning of this year (2022), she received a letter of promotion to the position of acting president. Since 2018, a calico cat named Yon-tama ("Tama Four") has been serving as the stationmaster at Idakiso Station. Like Nitama, her aptitude for the role of stationmaster was discovered at the training center.

The spirit of Tama, the first stationmaster cat, is enshrined in the Tama Jinja shrine on the platform of Kishi Station, her final abode. From here, she continues to watch over the work of her successors. 7



Nitama, the current stationmaster of Kishi Station
 Photo: Courtesy of Wakayama Electric Railway Co., Ltd.

The Station by the Sea

Shimonada Station on the Yosan Line

An unmanned station situated close to the beautiful Seto Inland Sea attracts many people for its wonderful views.

SASAKI TAKASHI

SHIMONADA Station is an unmanned station on the Ehime Prefecture stretch of the JR Shikokuⁱ (Shikoku Railway Company) Yosan Line, which connects the major cities of the island of Shikoku. Only eighteen trains a day stop at this station in Futami-cho, Iyo City, but many passengers get off here, attracted by the wonderful views from the platform.

Shimonada Station opened in 1935. Until 1981, when the coastline adjacent to the station was reclaimed to build a highway, it was called “the closest station to the sea in Japan.” Even today, the station platform is perched above the road like an observation deck, so visitors can see the sea up close. Standing on the platform while listening to the sound of the waves, the beautiful sea and sky just open up in front of you. Because of this unique view, the station has been chosen as a filming location for many movies and TV series.

The station’s popularity as a sightseeing destination was sparked by Japan Railways posters. These advertised JR lines’ “Seishun 18 Ticket”ⁱⁱ and featured Shimonada Station three years in a row from 1998 to 2000.

Tomita Satoshi, representative of the JR Shikoku Shimonada Station Field Museum Management Committee, explains, “Railway fans who particularly like photography, so-called *toritetsu-san*, started coming to visit Shimonada Station because they were attracted by the scenery on the posters. The station quickly became famous because these railway fans showed photo after photo of it on social media.”

Nevertheless, the number of local users of Shimonada Station and the Yosan Line has been decreasing year by year. In 1986, a new inland route opened, so the number of trains decreased and eventually Shimonada Station became an unmanned station. People living locally even began to worry that the station would be closed. It was around that time that the idea for a “Sunset Platform Concert” came up. The idea arose from discussions between local government officials

All photos: Courtesy of Iyo City Tourism Association



Shimonada Station in Futami-cho, Iyo City, Ehime Prefecture



The sunset at Shimonada Station



A single-car Yosan Line train



Performers at the (online) 2021 Sunset Platform Concert

and youth organizations about maybe finding a way to use the station's unique beauty to make it a tourist resource. They persuaded what was then the Japan National Railways (JNR), which had expressed concerns about safety, and raised funds from local residents.

In 1986, the first Sunset Platform Concert was held. The event attracted a large audience of nearly 1,000 people, far exceeding the organizers' expectations. With the help of JR Shikoku and other local stakeholders, the event was held annually thereafter. Due to COVID-19, however, in 2020 and 2021 it was streamed online without a live audience. The organizers say that many people enjoyed the stunning sunset over the Seto Inland Sea and the concert at Shimonada Station through the video.

Although it is an unmanned station, those who have visited this place and those who have seen it in the videos now have Shimonada Station engraved in their minds along with the scenery and sounds of the waves of the Seto Inland Sea. 

i JR Shikoku is one of the seven rail companies established under the Japan Railways (JR) Group in April 1987 following the privatization of Japan National Railways (JNR).
 ii A discount ticket for unlimited rides on all JR lines that can be used by anyone regardless of age, sold for a limited period of time spring, summer, and winter. The ticket can be used only on local trains and rapid trains, not for express and Shinkansen trains.

The impressive Japan Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai with a façade that expresses the links between Japan and the Middle East, and a water feature that has a cooling effect

Photo: Expo 2020 Dubai JAPAN PAVILION

Where ideas meet

Japan Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai

The Japan Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai, held from October 2021 to March 2022, presents a diverse range of Japanese contents by using cutting-edge technologies under the theme of “Where ideas meet.”

SAWAJI OSAMU



EXPO 2020 Dubai is being held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from October 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022. Various organizations and a total of 192 countries are participating in Expo 2020 Dubai, which is being held under the theme of “Connecting Minds, Creating the Future.”

Among the distinctive pavilions at the Expo venue is the Japan Pavilion, which is exhibiting under the main theme of “Where ideas meet.” The building’s white façade with its three-dimensional latticework is striking. Expressing the links between Japan and the Middle East, the motifs for the façade are the arabesque

patterns of the Middle East, the *asanoha* (hemp leaf) patterns of Japan, and geometric Japanese origami. The water feature installed in front of the building reflects the façade and, by making use of the heat of vaporization, cools the breezes that pass through the building.

According to the website of the Japan Pavilion, its vision is as follows: “Since ancient times, encounters with external influences have played a key role in the development of Japanese culture and learning, as ideas from the outside have been embraced and reinterpreted to create something new and uniquely Japanese. Moving towards the future,



Exchanges between personalized avatars created based on what visitors did at the Pavilion (Scene 5)

Photo: Expo 2020 Dubai JAPAN PAVILION

Japan will continue to be a place where ideas from around the world meet. And by bringing these ideas together to spark new innovation, Japan will work to create a better tomorrow.”

The exhibition is divided into six “scenes.” Scenes 1 and 2 use cutting-edge technology to introduce the nature, culture, and history of Japan through impressive images and sounds. Scene 3 uses miniatures incorporating *mitate*, a time-honored Japanese method in which one thing is represented via another, to represent 128 examples of solutions that have emerged out of the meeting of ideas in modern Japan. Scenes 4 and 5 in the second half of the exhibition present the global issues that Japan cannot solve alone, encouraging action and telling visitors that bringing together ideas from people with different backgrounds is linked to resolving the issues. As the first step of taking action, it is possible to post



One example of a miniature using *mitate* that express some of Japan’s solutions based on the meeting of ideas: “Cutting-Edge Beanbags” (Scene 3)

Photo: Expo 2020 Dubai JAPAN PAVILION

Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan

Period April 13 to October 13, 2025
Venue Yumeshima Island, on the waterfront of Osaka City
Theme Designing Future Society for Our Lives
Concept People's Living Lab

- The Expo will endeavor to give a realistic picture of a future society not just through thought but also through action. This endeavor will begin before the Expo, by inviting diverse participants to come together with various initiatives in their respective positions and tackle challenges whose solution will help achieve the SDGs at or outside the Expo venue.
- Positioning the Expo venue as a laboratory where new technologies and systems will be verified, the Expo will raise it as a platform that will trigger the creation of innovations by diverse players and apply those innovations to real society.

URL <https://www.expo2025.or.jp/en/>



Credit: Japan Association for the 2025 World Exposition



The first floor of the Japan Pavilion conveys the appeal of Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai and the Kansai region. The JUNKAN Platform for posting messages and global issues is installed here (Scene 6)

Photo: Expo 2020 Dubai JAPAN PAVILION

issues and ideas for solutions on the JUNKAN online platform (described below) in Scene 6. The exhibition also features a display that communicates the outline and attractions of Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai planned for 2025.

The exhibition space is filled with cool, ultrafine mist. Visitors can enjoy an immersive experience in a space that combines mist with vivid images.

As a new form of challenge to impart the message that the actions of individuals are important, the Japan Pavilion lends a smartphone to every visitor. The device collects data to track what visitors have shown interest in at the pavilion, then creates a personalized avatar based on their interests. Through exchanges with other avatars, the climax of the experience unfolds differently for each visitor.

Visitors can also enjoy sushi, ramen, miso soup and other traditional Japanese foods at the Japan Pavilion Restaurant. The menu has been specially created for the Japan Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai. All ingredients are halal, so Muslim visitors can also enjoy the restaurant at their leisure.

JAPAN DAY

During the Expo, each country organizes a national day to celebrate its participation. Japan Day was held on December 11, 2021. Representatives from the UAE and Japan gave speeches at the official ceremony attended by delegates from Japan and the UAE. Various locations at the Expo venue hosted events introducing Japanese culture including a Japanese *taiko* drum performance, a demonstration of the Japanese martial art of



Nanchu Soran (dance) performance by students at the Japanese School in Dubai at the official ceremony on Japan Day

Photo: Expo 2020 Dubai JAPAN PAVILION



Participants parading on Japan Day with a banner promoting Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai

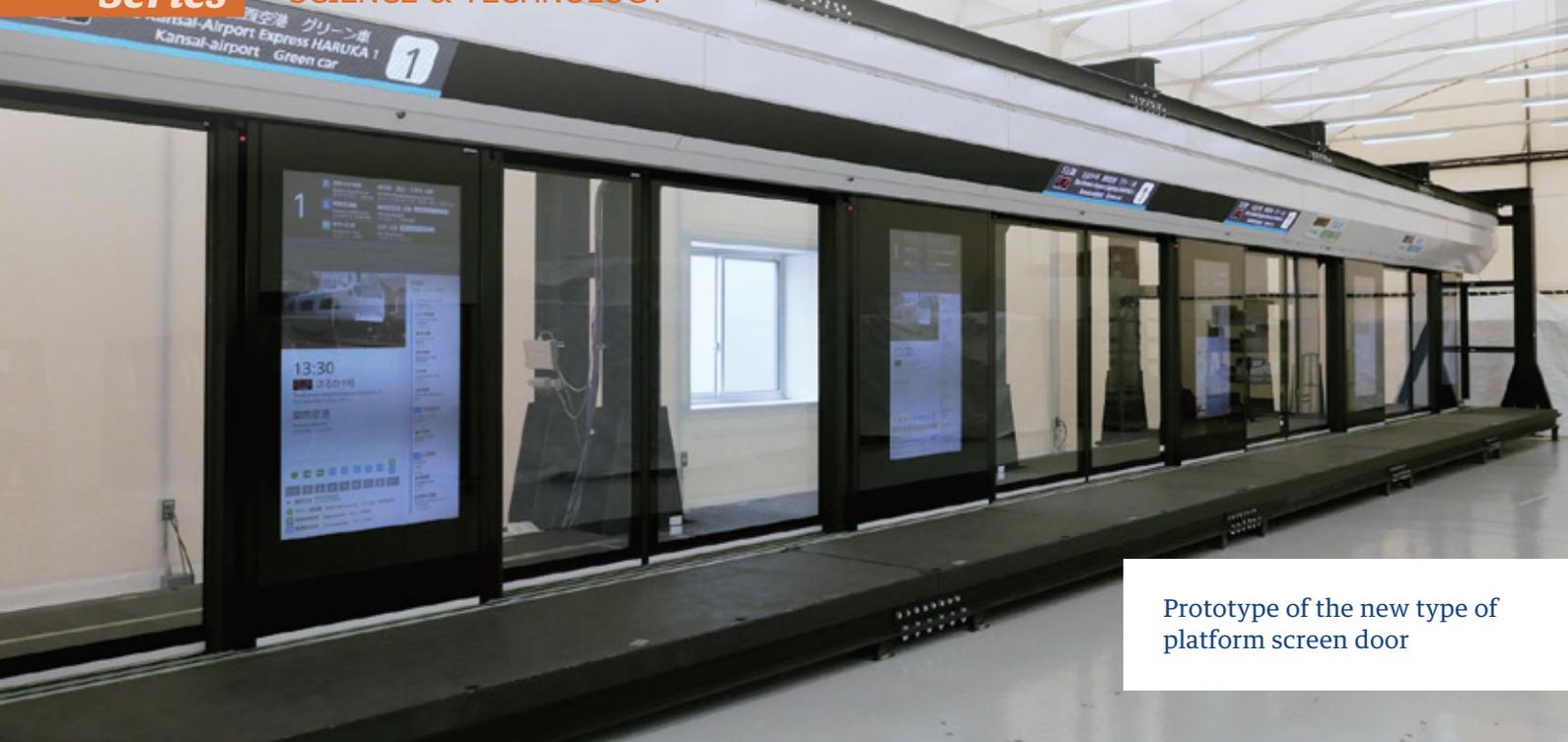
Photo: Expo 2020 Dubai JAPAN PAVILION

aikido, and a dance performance by students at the Japanese school in Dubai. Japan Pavilion attendants and other crew members paraded through the Expo venue with PR banners for Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, and informed visitors about the upcoming Expo.

THE VIRTUAL JAPAN PAVILION

Due to the spread of COVID-19, the Japan Pavilion set up a special website, “Virtual Japan Pavilion,” enabling virtual visits from anywhere in the world to learn about and participate in the Japan Pavilion. The Expo 2020 Dubai Japan Pavilion Special Website (<https://expo-whereideasmeet.go.jp/en/>) presents concept movies and the variety of content that makes up the Japan Pavilion. JUNKAN—Where ideas meet—is an online platform (<https://expo-junkan.go.jp/en/>) for sharing ideas for solving various issues facing the world as messages. Messages posted on JUNKAN will be passed on to Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai. 

Note: This article has been created with the consent of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and on the basis of materials published by the Ministry.



Prototype of the new type of platform screen door

Train Station to Install Latest Type of Sliding Platform Screen Doors

Japanese train stations are increasingly installing platform screen doors to prevent passengers from falling onto the tracks or coming into contact with moving cars. We introduce a brand new sliding platform screen door with an opening that can be freely adjusted to accommodate any train type and number of cars, the first to be developed in the world.

UMEZAWA AKIRA

IN Fiscal Year 2019 in Japan, there were approximately 2,900 cases of people falling from station platforms and 160 cases of accidents involving people on platforms coming into contact with moving trains¹. In order to prevent passengers from falling onto the tracks or coming into contact with moving cars, stations are increasingly installing platform screen doors. In the case of regular platform screen doors, when a train arrives at the platform, the sliding doors open and passengers get on and off the train. However, this method has severe

limitations: the platform screen doors and car doors must be aligned in a fixed position and they cannot be used unless the position of all the car doors is the same.

In order to make the use of platform screen doors more widespread, these problems had to be solved. West Japan Railway Company, headquartered in Osaka, has developed the world's first "full-screen" platform door that covers the entire platform edge from floor to ceiling, making it compatible with any type of train car. Installation of the new platform doors is planned for the Umekita (Osaka)



The position of conventional platform screen doors is fixed.

Underground Station, scheduled to open in central Osaka in spring 2023.

"Many different kinds of trains will arrive at the new station in the future, and large numbers of passengers are expected

¹ Source: Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism <https://www.mlit.go.jp/tetudo/content/001378759.pdf>

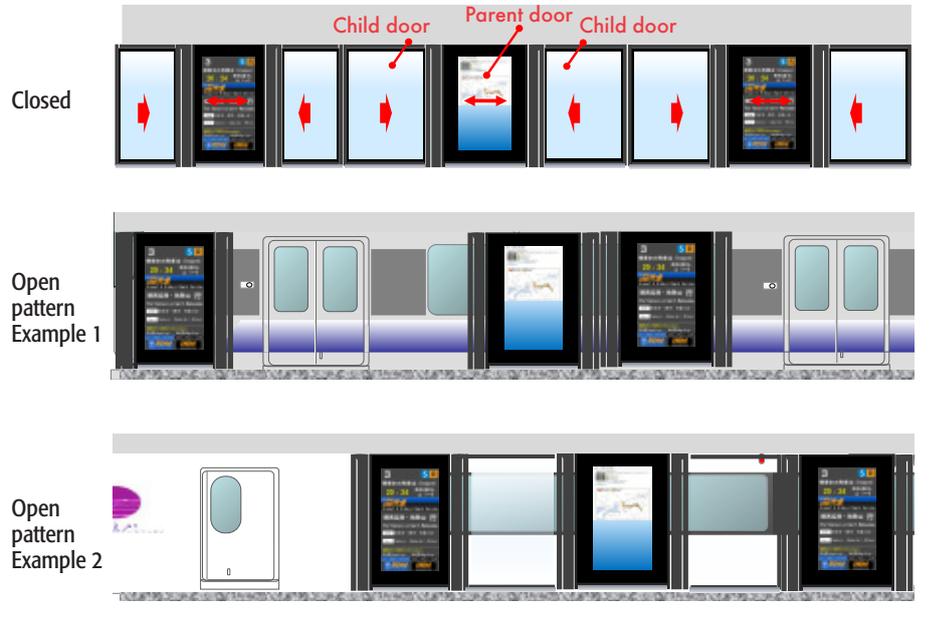
to gather on the platforms. That's why we set about developing a full-screen platform door that completely separates the track side from the platform side and ensures a high level of safety, and that has doors that can be moved freely to accommodate any train type and number of cars," says Shikai Yuichi of the company's Innovation Division, speaking alongside Kawai Yohei of the Facilities Division.

The new platform screen door is designed as a single block (equivalent to one car) consisting of five units: one wall-like "parent door" suspended from the top and two sets of glass "child doors." The blocks are installed and connected to each other according to the length of the cars that stop at the station. The system works by automatically sliding each unit to match the length of the arriving train cars, then adjusting the parent and child doors to precisely align with the position of the car doors.

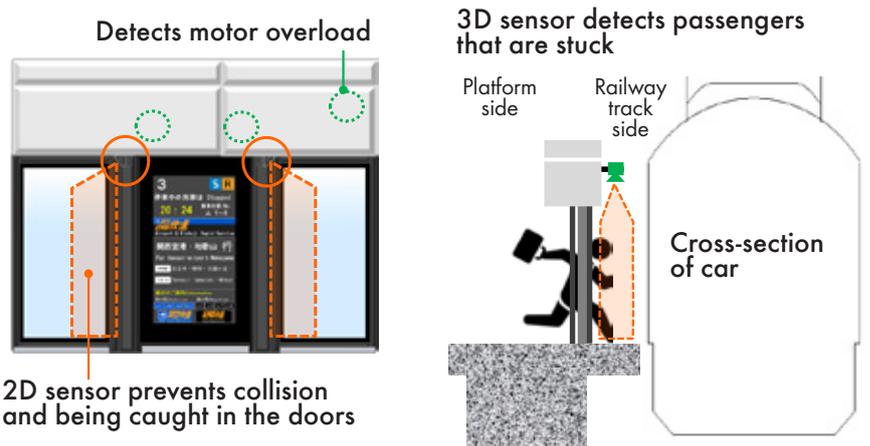
The development process entailed a number of challenges. One was how to slim down the equipment.

"Compared to a conventional platform screen door, a wider variety of movements are possible with the new system and the internal structure for opening and closing the doors is more complex, increasing the overall thickness of the unit. This makes the width of the walkable platform space narrower, causing inconvenience to passengers moving along the platform. In order to solve this problem, we put the drive unit and wiring inside a box at the top of the door, making the door part slimmer," says Shikai.

Another issue was how to make the doors operate more quickly. Door movement needs to be dynamic and precise in order to move the opening of the platform screen doors according to the type of train and number of cars. If the operating speed is slow, it will take longer for passengers to get on and off the train, and that might negatively affect the



By changing the position of the parent and child doors, the system can be adapted to any type of car. In the above figure, example 1 shows the case of a car with three doors, and example 2 shows the case of a car with two doors.



Sensors installed at the top of the platform screen doors prevent passengers from colliding with the doors or being caught in the doors. Sensors are also installed at the top of the platform screen doors on the track side to prevent passengers from being stuck between the platform screen doors and the car (right).

train schedule. In urban stations where trains arrive and depart every few minutes, a delay of several seconds can have a significant impact on the subsequent train schedule.

"We researched the optimal opening pattern according to the type of train and number of cars. We then developed an operating program in order to minimize how long and what distance the platform screen door slides. Not only that, but we also considered a system that would allow us to change the door layout according to the different stopping positions even for the same car type, thereby greatly reducing the opening and closing

time," says Kawai.

Once this new type of platform screen door has been successfully trialed at the Umekita (Osaka) Underground Station, it may also be introduced into other stations.

"In order to ensure that we provide our customers with a safer and more secure experience than possible with conventional platform doors, we have made use of new technologies and proceeded with development aiming for "the ultimate in safety assurance," says Shikai. Kawai adds, "We'd like to continue technology development that focuses on the safety and security of our customers." 7

Anthony Robins rides the Kintetsu Railway's "Tsudoi," a train equipped with a footbath

An Englishman Who Loves Japanese Railways

Anthony Robins, originally from England, has been promoting the appeal of Japanese railways for more than thirty years.

SATO KUMIKO

BASED in the United Kingdom, the birthplace of rail, the Japanese Railway Society (JRS) is a group of railway enthusiasts with an interest in Japanese railways. The society has more than 170 members in countries including the United Kingdom, other European countries, the United States, Australia and Japan. At its peak, the society had as many as 300 members. Anthony Robins, a native of England, has been a member since the society was set up in 1991.

Born in London, Robins says that by

age three or four, he already loved railways. "When I was little, I used to pester my mother to take me out on walks to see the trains. Of course, I knew about Japan's Shinkansen bullet trains from the books I read as a child." He hoped to get a job in transportation, but the opportunity did not arise. However, Robins did not lose interest in the railways; rather, his interest turned into an all-important and lifelong hobby.

Robins first arrived in Japan in 1983 to start a job teaching English at a school run by a British organization in Tokyo.



Anthony Robins alongside an Odakyu Electric Railway's "Romancecar" train sometime in the 1990s



Robins likes to travel the coastal routes. He took this photograph at Omigawa Station in Niigata Prefecture

Later, he returned to the United Kingdom to do a Master's degree at university. In 1995, he was invited back to Japan to teach English at a university in Japan and ended up making his life here. Since then, he has edited the newsletter for The Japanese Railway Society, reported the latest news about Japan's railways, and advised on travel itineraries for visiting Society members.

For these tours Robins arranges, he plans interesting itineraries for Japanese railway enthusiasts from overseas that include railway journeys lasting two to three weeks to explore the history and culture of specific regions, including visits to locations such as train depots and rolling stock factories. Although such



Robins' snap of the Seto Inland Sea from a train crossing the Seto-Ohashi Bridge in Shikoku



Railway enthusiasts from overseas on a chartered tour of the Okayama Electric Tramway arranged by Robins (second from right)

tours have not been possible during the past two years due to the pandemic, he is now looking forward to restarting the activities.

On the appeal of Japan's railways, Robins says, "First of all, the accuracy of the Japanese railway timetable is renowned worldwide. The conductors and drivers take pride in their work. It is a really nice feeling to watch them perform the 'point-and-call.'" He adds, "Another enjoyable thing about the Japanese railways is the rich variety. There's the Shinkansen, but also the local lines run by regional companies and third-sector operators. Some cities have streetcars, while steam

engines run on some routes, although not as many as in the UK."

The turning of the seasons and a landscape rich in mountains, rivers and other natural features provide another attractive feature of train travel in Japan: the view out the window. Robins likes to travel the coastal routes. "For example, the Nippo Main Line with its majestic views of Sakurajima Island in Kagoshima Prefecture and the sea in Miyazaki Prefecture, or the beautifully silhouetted islands in the Seto Inland Sea seen from the Sanyo Main Line, the Seto-Ohashi Line with its amazing views of the technology for building the bridge, or the Himi Line with its views of the Sea of Japan and the Japan Alps." Robins reels off one JR Line after another. Though too many to mention, "on private railways, there is stylish and wonderfully comfortable rolling stock, such as Kintetsu Railway and the Odakyu Electric Railway limited express services."

Yet, "I have still not traveled on every railway line in Japan," says Robins. "Once I retire from the university and have more time, I want to take some leisurely trips and collect stamps for the 'Tetsuincho' railway stamp book published by third-sector railways," he says.

Japan is a long and narrow archipelago from north to south and the railway system runs its length and breadth, covering a total of 27,000 kilometers. Which routes and what season to choose for travel? During this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, Robins takes great pleasure in thinking over new plans. 📖



The Kintetsu Railway's "Hinotori," one of Robins' favorite trains



Front cover of a recent issue of the *Bullet-In*, the newsletter of the Japanese Railway Society edited by Robins and others



Robins' "Tetsuincho" railway stamp book

Communicating the Wonders of Bonsai Abroad

From July to September 2019, Bonsai Master Mori Takahiro toured eight cities in four countries—Canada, the United States, Australia and Singapore—as a Japan Cultural Envoy. Here, Mori shares his experiences meeting attendees to his lectures and workshops on bonsai in each of these countries.

YANAGISAWA MIHO

BONSAI are planted in pots¹, shaped to resemble the forms of the trees in their natural environment, and appreciated for their beauty. Bonsai have been loved by the Japanese for more than a thousand years. Today, there are even museums entirely dedicated to bonsai. Since the 1990s, the community of bonsai enthusiasts has grown around the world.

Mori Takahiro says the joy of bonsai is its “compact beauty.” “One creates and squeezes a small world into a pot just as if the tree had grown there naturally. What is so interesting about bonsai is that despite the small size, it is possible to create the appearance of a majestic tree by trimming the leaves and arranging the shape of the trunk and branches.”

Many who work with bonsai inherit their family business, but this was not the case with Mori, who aspired to the path of bonsai after graduating from university. One of the main reasons for his interest was wanting to learn about Japan’s unique culture and make use of his knowledge overseas. After training for about five years, Mori became a bonsai master. Not long after, he produced a work which won the Kokufu Award, the top honor at the prestigious Kokufu Bonsai Exhibition organized by the Nippon Bonsai Association. Now recognized as a bonsai master, Mori started to promote bonsai abroad as had

¹ Pots for Bonsai “Bonki”: Please refer to *Highlighting Japan* 152, January 2021.



A bonsai created by Mori

been his initial ambition. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, he was involved with promoting bonsai in California where he held workshops every spring.

Mori was appointed Japan Cultural Envoy for bonsai from July to September 2019. As a Cultural Envoy, Mori visited eight cities in four countries: Canada, the United States, Australia and Singapore. In his lectures, Mori introduced the basics of bonsai, including demonstrations of trimming and methods of expression. The participants were astonished to hear that some bonsai in Japan have an estimated age of more than a thousand years. Responding to the astonishment, Mori explained that a bonsai can be passed down for generations if the tree is given love and kept healthy by watering and repotting at the right time so that it firmly takes root. In demonstrations using local trees and materials, Mori showed techniques to adjust the shape of a tree by pruning and using wires in such a way as to allow the bonsai to look large and vigorous when half of the branches are trimmed and most of the leaves removed. Mori comments, “Everyone who saw my performance seemed to have a much better understanding of bonsai.” Participants also brought their own bonsai to workshops, received advice from Mori, and trimmed their trees.

When a bonsai master prunes a tree, it looks effortless, as if anyone could easily do it, but even if you have a clear image of the finished tree and use the pruning scissors carefully, the



Mori gives a presentation to people of all ages at Japan House, Los Angeles

Mori Takahiro prunes a bonsai in a demonstration at the Japan Information & Culture Center, Embassy of Japan, Washington D.C.



result won't always correspond to what you had in mind. In this respect, bonsai is profound.

Mori says, "Nature is actually bonsai's best teacher—natural forms such as a pine tree that has weathered wind and snow, or a persimmon tree heavy with fruit provide the models. This is why many people in bonsai communities talk about 'learning from nature.' Through bonsai, I would like to demonstrate to the world Japan's appreciation of nature underpinning the art of shaping trees."

Mori mentions his discoveries as a Cultural Envoy. In Japan, bonsai are usually grown outdoors, but on his visit to Singa-

pore, he found that some people were using LED lights to grow bonsai indoors. This was eye-opening, he says.

"I was intrigued to learn how bonsai can be grown using red and blue LED lighting. With this method, it might be possible to enjoy bonsai in environments that have been unsuitable in the past, such as extremely cold areas or deserts. I felt that the potential for bonsai has significantly broadened."

As well as using his experience as a Japan Cultural Envoy and helping more people around the world enjoy bonsai, Mori is eager to continue presenting to the world the wonders of bonsai. 



Mori and participants at a bonsai workshop in Gardens by the Bay, Singapore



Mori at work on a Japanese cedar bonsai in a demonstration at the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre, Burnaby, Canada

Courtesy of TOKYO SHAMO POULTRY FARMERS UNION



A Tokyo Shamo chicken

A *nabe* (hot pot) featuring Tokyo Shamo chicken meatballs



GI JAPAN PRODUCTS

Tokyo Shamo

東京しゃも

Tokyo Shamo Chicken

Tokyo Shamo is a type of chicken developed in Tokyo by crossbreeding a Shamo hen (50% pure) with a pure Shamo rooster. Shamo is a type of game fowl that has been farmed in Tokyo since the Edo period (1603–1867), these days mostly in Akiruno City, Tachikawa City and Ome City. The meat of Tokyo Shamo, being 75% pure Shamo, has a flavor close to that of the original Shamo breed. It is characterized by its dark red appearance, firm texture and minimal odor. The meat is offered in signature dishes such as Shamo *nabe* (hot pot) and *oyakodon* (chicken and egg on rice) at restaurants in Tokyo that specialize in using high-quality, locally-produced ingredients.

Text and images courtesy of Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries: <https://gi-act.maff.go.jp/en/register/entry/77.html>



* Owing to space limitations, the Tokyo Islands are omitted from the map.

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