

# HIGHLIGHTING *Japan*

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THE CHARMS OF HIROSHIMA



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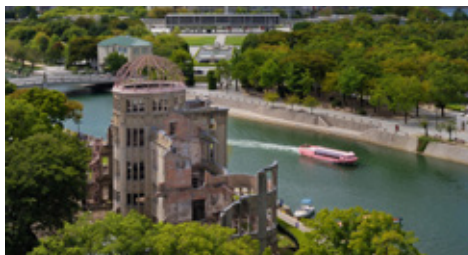
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## THE CHARMS OF HIROSHIMA

The eyes of the world will be on Hiroshima from May 19 to May 21, 2023 as it hosts the G7 Hiroshima Summit. Hiroshima is a beautiful prefecture surrounded by the Chugoku Mountains and the calm Seto Inland Sea, with many scenic spots to visit and explore. These include Itsukushima Shrine, which is registered as a World Heritage Site, Hiroshima Castle, and the traditional Japanese garden Shukkeien. Hiroshima is also a place where a unique tea ceremony culture developed and continues to be nurtured. On August 6, 1945, Hiroshima was destroyed by the first nuclear weapon used on a human population, but the city has recovered and the preserved ruin of the present-day Atomic Bomb (Genbaku) Dome is a World Heritage Site. In addition, the sake brewing district of Saijo, a new performing art called "Hiroshima Kagura," and a cycling route with beautiful views of the islands in the Seto Inland Sea are popular attractions. In this month's issue of *Highlighting Japan*, we introduce these charms of Hiroshima.



On the cover: Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome); Shukkeien, a feudal lord's garden; Hiroshima oysters  
Photos: Courtesy of Hiroshima Prefecture; denkei/PIXTA

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## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Supporting Female Athletes of Tanzania

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# G7 Hiroshima Summit

From May 19 to 21 this year (2023), as the G7 Presidency, Japan will host the G7 Hiroshima Summit at Grand Prince Hotel Hiroshima in Hiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture.

The G7 Summit is an international forum held annually for the leaders of the seven member states of France, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Italy, and Canada (in order of rotating presidency), and the European Union (EU). At the G7 Summit, the leaders of the G7, which shares fundamental values such as freedom, democracy and human rights, exchange candid views on important challenges the international community is facing at that time, such as the global economy, regional affairs and various global agendas, and issue a document as an outcome of such discussions.

Japan has assumed the G7 Presidency six times, and the G7 Hiroshima Summit will be the seventh Summit held in Japan. It has significant implications that the leaders of the G7 gather for discussions in Hiroshima, a city which has recovered from the catastrophic damage by an atomic bomb and which continues to seek lasting world peace.

Prime Minister Kishida has stated that as the world is facing an unprecedented crisis by aggression against Ukraine and the growing risk of use of weapons of mass destruction, at the G7 Hiroshima Summit in 2023, Japan would like to

demonstrate the G7's strong determination, with historical significance, to firmly deny military aggression, threats to use nuclear weapons as Russia has done, as well as any attempts to overthrow the international order. From such viewpoints, the Government of Japan decided to host the G7 Summit in Hiroshima, considering Hiroshima as the most fitting location to express its commitment to peace.

At the occasion of the G7 Hiroshima Summit, the leaders of the G7 will get acquainted with the realities of nuclear weapon use and share their desire for peace. Japan hopes that it will solidify steps toward achieving a world without nuclear weapons. Furthermore, by showing the world the strength of Hiroshima's recovery from the atomic bombing, Japan can once again emphasize the preciousness of peace.

## Charm of Hiroshima

Hiroshima is a scenic prefecture bordered by the Chugoku Mountains to the north and the Seto Inland Sea to the south. While agriculture and fishing thrive in the mild climate facing the Seto Inland Sea, a wide range of commercial fields, from heavy industries including automobiles and steel to cutting-edge enterprises such as electronic components, have developed throughout the prefecture to produce innumerable world-class companies. Hiroshima is a strategic point



Prime Minister Kishida Fumio  
attending the G7 Leaders' Video  
Conference on February 24, 2023

Photo: Courtesy of Cabinet Public Affairs Office

linking Kansai and Kyushu, serving as a hub for business in the Chugoku region with its active flow of people and goods.

The Summit host city of Hiroshima ranks as the largest metropolitan area in the Chugoku and Shikoku regions with its population of about 1.2 million. It is globally recognized not only as a city of peace, but also as an urban tourist destination blessed with mountains, rivers, and the sea. In 2018, prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the city of Hiroshima alone received approximately 1.78 million overseas visitors, with Hiroshima Prefecture as a whole welcoming 2.75 million.

Hiroshima is known for its strong hometown spirit among people of all ages. Locals are proud of their natural environment, which blends city with nature and yields the blessing of delicious regional products such as oysters farmed in Hiroshima Bay and sake in the Saijo area of Higashihiroshima City.



Sports are very popular in Hiroshima, and locally-based professional teams in sports such as baseball, soccer, and basketball, are known for their passionate fans.

Hatchobori, Nagaregawa-cho, and Kamiya-cho are a few of the bustling neighborhoods in downtown Hiroshima City where young people gather to shop and dine. Hiroshima's own apparel brands, specialty boutiques, and artists contribute to Hiroshima's local atmosphere generating a unique street culture.

### Initiatives in Hiroshima towards the Summit

Various organizations in Hiroshima Prefecture have taken initiatives to support the G7 Hiroshima Summit. Among them, the Citizens Council for the Hiroshima Summit is a joint public-private organization consisting of Hiroshima Prefecture, the City of Hiroshima, and related organizations in various fields, such as economy, transportation, and medical care. The council has implemented prefecture-wide initiatives based on five pillars: 'Supporting the operation of the Summit,' 'Hospitality,' 'Disseminating information about peace,' 'Communicating the appeal of Hiroshima,' and 'Promoting youth participation in events leading to post-summit activities.' One of the initiatives the council is implementing with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) of the Japanese government is the Summit School for the Next Generation program. At the Summit School for the Next Generation program, officers of MOFA have offered students of junior and senior high schools in Hiroshima Prefecture a detailed discussion of the significance of



The Summit School for the Next Generation program at Hiroshima Municipal Funairi High School

Photo: Courtesy of MOFA



Central area of Hiroshima City

Photo: Yanai Kenichiro/PIXTA



A view of the Chugoku Mountains and the Seto Inland Sea in Hiroshima Prefecture

Photo: toshichan/PIXTA

holding the G7 Summit in Hiroshima and the organization and role of MOFA. At a lecture held on January 11 at Hiroshima Municipal Funairi High School, Tanaka Noriko, a Hiroshima native and Deputy Assistant Secretary-General for the G7 Hiroshima Summit, spoke to about 640 students and stated, "Hosting the G7 Summit in the city where the atomic bomb was dropped is very significant for achieving peace in the international community."

Under the program, which concluded

March 2023, officials have visited 23 schools in Hiroshima Prefecture, including junior and senior high schools as well as national colleges of technology. 🇯🇵

(For more information on the G7 Hiroshima Summit, see <https://www.g7hiroshima.go.jp/en/>)

**Note:** This article has been created with the consent of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and on the basis of materials published by the ministry.



The tower of Hiroshima Castle viewed over cherry trees in blossom

Photo: PIXSTAR/PIXTA



# The Charms of Hiroshima



Townscape of Saijo Sake Brewery Street, Higashihiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture

Photo: PIXSTAR/PIXTA



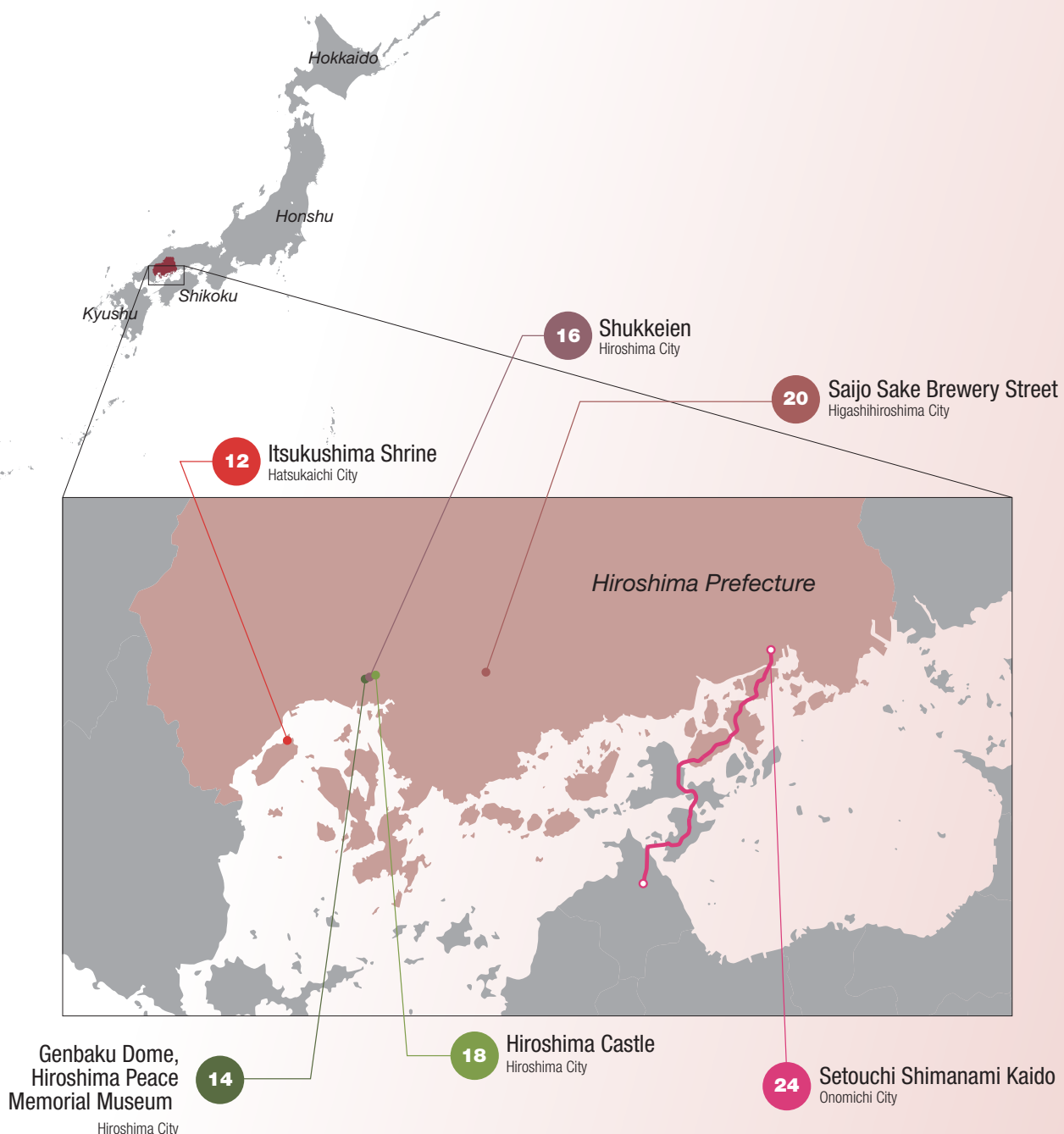
The Shimanami Kaido cycle and pedestrian path runs alongside the expressway on the bridges

Photo: Yocchan/PIXTA



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he eyes of the world will be on Hiroshima from May 19 to May 21, 2023 as it hosts the G7 Hiroshima Summit. Hiroshima is a beautiful prefecture surrounded by the Chugoku Mountains and the calm Seto Inland Sea, with many scenic spots to visit and explore. These include Itsukushima Shrine, which is registered as a World Heritage Site, Hiroshima Castle, and the traditional Japanese garden Shukkeien. Hiroshima is also a place where a unique tea ceremony culture developed and continues to be nurtured. On August 6, 1945, Hiroshima was destroyed by the first nuclear weapon used on a human population, but the city has recovered and the preserved ruin of the present-day Atomic Bomb (Genbaku) Dome is a World Heritage Site. In addition, the sake brewing district of Saijo, a new performing art called “Hiroshima Kagura,” and a cycling route with beautiful views of the islands in the Seto Inland Sea are popular attractions. In this month’s issue of *Highlighting Japan*, we introduce these charms of Hiroshima.



# The Tea Ceremony Tradition Passed Down in Hiroshima



Ueda Sokei, 16th generation grandmaster of the Ueda Soko Ryu school of tea ceremony

**W**E spoke with Ueda Sokei, 16th generation grandmaster of the Ueda Soko Ryu school of tea ceremony, about the tea ceremony tradition that has been passed down for over 400 years in Hiroshima.

**Please tell us about *sado* (also known as *chanoyu* or *chado*), the Japanese tradition of tea ceremony.**

The philosophy and forms of *sado*, which have been handed down to the present day, developed between the middle of the 15th century and the start of the 17th century when there were many battles between *daimyo* (feudal lords) across Japan. Put simply, *sado* is the act of serving tea and entertaining in front of guests invited by the host, but it is also a form of traditional Japanese comprehensive culture that includes a variety of elements, including the motions when serving tea, the tea bowls, the flowers and hanging scrolls decorating the tea room, the tea room itself, the garden, and more.

*Sado* stimulates the five human senses. Sitting in a quiet tea room, you become highly sensitive to the sound of the water boiling, the aroma of the incense, the feel of the tea bowl, the taste of the tea, and more. In doing so, your mind naturally relaxes, and you forget the many happenings of

your everyday life. You enter into a mood that feels as if your body and mind are purified. These sensations gained through *sado* are the same for people today as they were for warriors during times of war.

**Please tell us about the Ueda Soko Ryu school of tea ceremony that was founded in Hiroshima.**

There are a number of schools of *sado*. The Ueda Soko Ryu school was founded by Ueda Soko (1563-1650), who was renowned as a brave and intrepid warrior and with many military exploits. In 1619, Soko served under the feudal lord of the Hiroshima Domain and governed the western part of the present-day Hiroshima Prefecture.

Soko first studied tea ceremony under Sen no Rikyu (1522-1591), the man who perfected *sado*. He later studied under Furuta Oribe (1544-1615), a student of Sen no Rikyu and regarded as the best tea master at that time, and together they established *buke sado*, or warrior tea. They may have been strongly attracted to *sado*, which offers calmness of the mind, as they both lived alongside death as warriors.

Soko has left behind *sado* utensils. Two tea scoops known as *Tekigakure* (meaning “hiding from the enemy”)



Ueda Sokei (center) drinking tea in a room at Wafudo





Tea scoops called *Tekigakure* (“hiding from the enemy”) by Ueda Soko (top, 19 cm; bottom, 18.3 cm)



The tea bowl *Satemo* by Ueda Soko (8.2 cm x 12.4 cm)

are utensils he is said to have made calmly with a small knife, with bamboo he cut from a bamboo grove while waiting as the enemy pressed upon him. They are such beautiful objects that it is hard to believe they were made in the middle of a battle. A tea bowl known as *Satemo* is another of the fine tea items made by Soko. With this tea bowl, you can sense strength from the *herame* pattern on the surface made with a spatula, while at the same time, you can feel the warmth of Soko’s hands. Soko was also known as a garden designer and he designed Shukkeien Garden (see pp. 16-17) in Hiroshima, as well as Omotegoten Garden of Tokushima Castle, Nishinomaru Garden of Wakayama Castle and Ninomaru Garden of Nagoya Castle. In this way, we can say that Soko was both a warrior and an artist.

I am now the 16th generation grandmaster after Soko. Following Soko, the Ueda family served the feudal lord of the Hiroshima Domain as chief retainers and governed western Hiroshima during the Edo period lasting for about 260 years from the beginning of the 17th century. That was

why the Ueda family gave the responsibility to pass on and teach Soko’s sado to retainers called “*chaji-azukari*.” However, since 1955, the head of the Ueda family himself has directly passed on and taught Soko’s sado as head of the school. Currently, we offer lessons in Hiroshima, Kyoto, Osaka, and Tokyo, as well as abroad in Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States, Brazil, and more.

### What kind of people study sado of the Ueda Soko Ryu school overseas?

A variety of people practice, including designers, architects, artists and teachers. People today, both Japanese and



The tea pavilion Ensho at Wafudo





The team room Kusari-no-ma at Wafudo



Ambassadors to Japan view the garden at Wafudo, August 6, 2022





A teacher (right) of the Ueda Soko Ryu school entertains guests at a tea room in New York

otherwise, typically work, eat and drink while sitting in a chair. Even in sado, there are now times when we sit in chairs as the host serves tea and the guests drink. But the traditional tea ceremony is performed in a tea room while sitting *seiza*-style (kneeling) or cross-legged on *tatami* mats. People from outside Japan may experience a completely new kind of stimulation sitting while quietly drinking tea in a tea room, a space that is vastly different from the places they spend their everyday lives.

Actually, on August 6 each year, ambassadors to Japan from countries around the world attend a peace memorial ceremony held at the Peace Memorial Park, and they also visit the Ueda Soko Ryu school's Wafudo villa, located here in Furuehigashi-machi in western Hiroshima City. The mayor of Hiroshima invites the ambassadors as part of a program to experience the culture of Hiroshima. Around 40 ambassadors and their families have attended almost every year for the last 20 years or so. Each time, I explain sado and the Ueda Soko Ryu school to our guests and serve them tea. When everyone leaves, they have very cheerful expressions on their faces, perhaps because they feel refreshed.

### Please tell us about the history of Wafudo.

Wafudo was rebuilt through the support of many of those with a desire to preserve the tradition and culture that have been passed down in Hiroshima for around 400 years. Completed in 2008 after more than 30 years of work, Wafudo is a roughly 5,200 square meter replica of the Ueda family residence that Soko himself built within the grounds


of Hiroshima Castle. When the atomic bomb was dropped, the Ueda family was living in this region away from the city center, and so none of the art works or ancient documents passed down since the time of Soko were damaged. Illustrations of the residence were also left behind, so it was possible to build a replica.

Wafudo's outstanding feature is the integration of a building called a *charyo*, which features a tea room, with the typical *Shoin*-style warrior residence. This type of building was built for vassals to serve tea to visiting lords in the *sukiya-onari*, a ceremony that began in the early 17th century. "Sukiya" refers to the *charyo* and "onari" refers to the lords visiting the vassal's home.

Wafudo is the only building remaining of its kind in Japan, and it is visited by a variety of people from Hiroshima Prefecture and all over Japan. For example, a designer for Mazda, a car manufacturer headquartered in Hiroshima, said that he got the inspiration for a car design from Wafudo. According to him, when he entered the tea room at Wafudo and heard the dry sound of the door at the entryway closing, he felt as if he had entered another world. He said that he designed the doors of a car he worked on (a two-seater sports car released in 1989) to make a sound when closing them such that you feel you are entering another world.

### The eyes of the world will be on Hiroshima as it hosts the G7 Hiroshima Summit in May. Can you recommend some places for people visiting Hiroshima from abroad?

No matter when I go, I always think Itsukushima Shrine (see pp. 12-13) is fantastic. The scene of islands floating in the Seto Inland Sea is also truly beautiful every time I see it. I would also suggest visitors from overseas see a game at the stadium featuring the professional baseball team, the Hiroshima Toyo Carp. This team is like family to the people of Hiroshima. Visitors can experience a unique atmosphere at the stadium created by the enthusiastic support of the fans.

More than anything else, I hope visitors can see the beautiful city of Hiroshima. I was born just before the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, so I was raised amidst the rebirth of Hiroshima from the ruins. The people of Hiroshima poured out enormous energy and rebuilt the city and their own lives. As a result, Hiroshima became a beautiful city. Yet, I hope visitors will also learn that this came at the expense of a great many lives. 

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Interview by SAWAJI OSAMU

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# ITSUKUSHIMA SHRINE

## Standing Between Mountain and Sea

**Itsukushima Shrine in Hatsukaichi City, Hiroshima Prefecture, is known around the world for its striking contrasts in color and form between mountains, sea and architecture.**

SAWAJI OSAMU

**I**TSUKUSHIMA Shrine, which was registered as a World Heritage Site in 1996, is situated on the island of Itsukushima in Hatsukaichi City, Hiroshima Prefecture. Itsukushima, also commonly referred to (and hereinafter) as Miyajima, is an oval island with a circumference of about 30 kilometers in Hiroshima Bay in the western part of the Seto Inland Sea, a

10-minute ferry ride from the mainland<sup>i</sup>.

Miyajima, which is covered by dense forest and a mountain range with the 535-meter-high Mt. Misen as its highest peak, has been an object of nature worship since ancient times.

It is said that Itsukushima Shrine was built on the current site in 593 by Saeki no Kuramoto, the island's ruler, against the backdrop of Mt. Misen and overlooking the Seto Inland Sea. About 600 years later, in 1168, the warlord Taira no Kiyomori (1118-1181), immensely powerful at the time, transformed it into a magnificent shrine complex that incorporated *shinden-zukuri*,<sup>ii</sup> an architectural style typical of aristocratic residences in the Heian period (late 8th century to late 12th



The Otorii Gate and the Gohonsha behind it



One of the corridors leading to the Gohonsha





The Gohonsha (main hall) of Itsukushima Shrine

century). After that, Itsukushima Shrine was repeatedly rebuilt and new buildings were added, but the shinden-zukuri style has remained to the present. In this way, Itsukushima Shrine is unparalleled in Japan as a shrine in the shinden-zukuri style that extends from shore to sea. As such, the central building of the shrine, the Gohonsha, along with the East Corridor and West Corridor that extend a total of about 260 meters, and other buildings are designated as national treasures.

Itsukushima Shrine even has a shrine building built in the sea, and at low tide, when the seabed is exposed, the foundations that support the shrine are exposed. In contrast, at high tide, the sea level rises nearly to the floor of the shrine building, creating the appearance that it is floating on the sea. Because it is located in the sea, the shrine building is vulnerable to natural disasters such as high waves and storm surges, so measures have been taken to reduce such damage. For example, there are gaps between the planks of the corridor floorboards, so that seawater coming up from below can overflow, which works to weaken the pressure of water against the floor.

Moreover, the precious buildings in the sacred areas of Itsukushima Shrine are constantly being maintained and restored so that they can continue to be preserved in the future. The Otorii<sup>iii</sup> Gate, which is located in the sea about 160 meters from the Gohonsha, has just completed a three-and-a-half-year repair project in December 2022. The Otorii Gate is one of the largest wooden *torii* gates in Japan, standing 16 meters tall and 24 meters wide. The current *torii* gate was rebuilt in 1875

and is the ninth to stand on the site. At low tide, it's possible to walk right up to it.

The scenery of Miyajima, with its beautiful harmony of vermillion *torii* gate and shrine buildings, green mountains, and blue sea, is sure to be protected and enjoyed for many more generations to come. **[7]**

- i Miyajima-guchi near the ferry terminal is about 30 minutes from Hiroshima Station on the JR Sanyo Main Line and about 75 minutes by the tram that passes through downtown Hiroshima.
- ii The *shinden-zukuri* primarily consists of the central building "Shinden" facing the garden on the south side, and the ancillary buildings "Taiya" on the east, west, and north sides of the Shinden.
- iii A *torii* is the open gate that marks the perimeter and entry point of a shrine's grounds. "O" means "big" so "Otorii" means "big gate."



Overlooking the Otorii Gate, the Tahoto (right, two-storied pagoda) of Itsukushima Shrine surrounded by cherry blossoms (As of March 2023, the Tahoto is presently surrounded by scaffolding for reroofing.)



# Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome)

**The Genbaku Dome<sup>1</sup>, which was registered as a World Heritage Site in 1996, is a building that was almost completely destroyed during the first use of the atomic bomb in human history at the end of World War II. The structure's preservation serves as an ongoing appeal for the abolition of nuclear weapons and to emphasize the importance of lasting world peace.**

FUJITA MAO

**T**HE Genbaku Dome, which faces the Motoyasu River that flows through the center of Hiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture, is a building that was almost completely destroyed by the intense heat rays and devastating blast wind caused by the atomic bomb dropped in 1945.

The Genbaku Dome was originally the Hiroshima Prefectural Commercial Exhibition Hall, designed by Czech architect Jan Letzel (1880-1925) and opened in April 1915. It had an area of around 1,000 square meters, was about 25 meters high, and was built in brick with parts strengthened by reinforced concrete. This European-style building with three main floors, a basement and an oval dome was one of Hiroshima's landmarks.

The Exhibition Hall was built by Hiroshima Prefecture for the purpose of developing prefectural products, improving their quality, and expanding their sales channels. It was also popular with city residents as a venue for displaying products from inside and outside the prefecture, holding consultations on commerce and industry, and art exhibitions and workshops. In 1933 it was renamed the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall. However, after 1944, the building was used by public organizations.

Then, at 8:15 a.m. on August 6, 1945, an atomic bomb

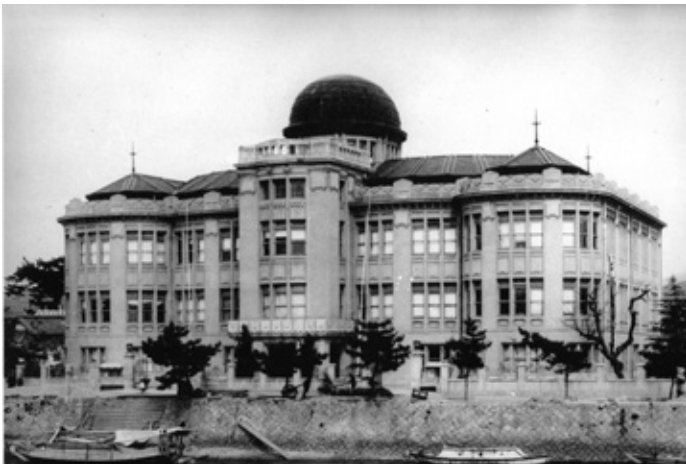
detonated 600 meters up in the air, about 160 meters south-east of the building. The building was destroyed and burned down, and all the staff inside the building are said to have died instantly. However, as the blast wind hit the building almost completely vertically from above, the thick-walled center of the building miraculously escaped collapse. City residents came to call it "Genbaku Dome" because the building's distinctively dome-shaped roof survived as skeletal remains in the shape of an umbrella.

Immediately after the atomic bombing, people said that Hiroshima was so devastated that not even grasses and trees would grow there for 75 years. Nevertheless, reconstruction began. The Genbaku Dome, which has retained its appearance from the time of the atomic bombing, became a symbol of the damage caused by the bombing, nurturing a strong desire for peace in Hiroshima.

Architect Tange Kenzo (1913-2005)<sup>ii</sup>, who designed the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum (see sidebar), argued that the Genbaku Dome should be preserved as a symbol, so that humanity would never use atomic bombs again. But at the same time, there was a risk of the building collapsing, and some who wanted it to be removed because they did not want to be reminded of their tragic experiences of the war.

In 1966, the Hiroshima City Council adopted a resolution requesting the preservation of the Genbaku Dome in order to pass on traces of the devastation and of the atomic bombing to future generations. Following this, the City of Hiroshima launched a fundraising campaign for the preservation work. The amount of money received in Japan and from abroad far exceeded the target, allowing the first preservation work to be carried out in 1967. Since then, several rounds of preservation





The Genbaku Dome before the atomic bombing (Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall)

Photo: Courtesy of Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum



Colored postcard of famous places in Hiroshima (Collection of Hiroshima City Archives)

Image: Courtesy of Hiroshima City



Central Hiroshima and the Genbaku Dome photographed after the atomic bombing (November 1945). US Army photograph

Photo: Courtesy of Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum



Preservation work on the Genbaku Dome (1990) (Collection of Hiroshima City Archives)

Photo: Courtesy of Hiroshima City

work have been carried out, and the Genbaku Dome still retains its appearance from the time of the bombing.

In 1996, the Genbaku Dome was registered as a World Heritage Site, meaning it would be permanently preserved in its present form.

Today, the Genbaku Dome, which most visitors to Hiroshima go and see, has become a peace monument that appeals for the abolition of nuclear weapons and the importance of

lasting world peace. ㊦

**Note:** This article has been created with the consent of Hiroshima City and on the basis of materials published by the city.

i Hiroshima City uses the English "Atomic Bomb Dome" for the building's name.

ii See *Highlighting Japan* November 2017, "Kenzo Tange: The Legacy of an Architectural Legend" [https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/201711/201711\\_02\\_en.html](https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/201711/201711_02_en.html)

## Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

The museum was designed by Tange Kenzo and opened in 1955 to convey the reality of the damage caused by the atomic bomb to people of all nations. It was also established to contribute to the abolition of nuclear weapons and the realization of lasting world peace, which is the spirit of Hiroshima. The Genbaku Dome can be seen when looking in a straight line from the Peace Memorial Museum, which was built as a symbol of postwar Hiroshima. Items that once belonged to A-bomb survivors as well as photographs and materials showing the devastation of the atomic bombing are on display, conveying the horror of nuclear weapons and what happened in Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. The museum was completely renewed in 2019, with the commentary panel in the main areas and the voice guide available in multiple languages.

### Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

1-2 Nakajima-cho, Naka-ku, Hiroshima 730-0811 Japan  
<https://hpmuseum.jp/?lang=eng>

Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum  
 Photo: Courtesy of Hiroshima Tourism Association







View over Takuei-chi Pond and the Koko-kyo Bridge toward Seifukan, a tea house

Photo: denkei / PIXTA

# Shukkeien, a Feudal Lord's Garden in the City

**Shukkeien in Hiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture is a Japanese garden that has survived for 400 years despite damage from fires and the atomic bomb.**

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**SAWAJI OSAMU**

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Takuei-chi Pond  
Photo: m.Taira / PIXTA



Yuyu-tei, a pavilion overlooking Takuei-chi Pond  
Photo: PIXTA



**S**HUKKEIEN is a Japanese-style garden of about 47,000 square meters, located beside the Kyobashi River about 600 meters to the east of Hiroshima Castle (see pp. 18-19). It was built in 1620 as part of a villa for Asano Nagaakira (1586-1632)<sup>i</sup>, the *daimyo* (feudal lord) of the Hiroshima Domain, so the garden is more than 400 years old. Daimyo gardens were typically built within the grounds of castles so they were not exposed to attacks from enemies, and Shukkeien is said to have been the first such Daimyo Garden built outside castle grounds. The gardens were designed by Ueda Soko (see pp. 8-11), a man who served the Asano family as a chief retainer and who was known as a tea master and garden designer. Unlike the present garden, when Shukkeien was first built there were few trees, grass was planted on the *tsuki-yama* artificial hills, and gravel was scattered around the tea house. It is thought that the purpose of these design choices was to allow for the immediate discovery of intruders.

However, in 1758, Shukkeien and a wide area of the Hiroshima Castle town were burned down in a major fire. To rebuild the garden, a gardener from Kyoto was invited and large-scale renovations took place between 1783 and 1788, creating the garden much as it appears today. The garden suffered catastrophic damage again due to the atomic bomb dropped on August 6, 1945, but work was done to restore the garden over the course of about 30 years starting in 1949, and the garden regained its original beauty.

“Shukkeien is not big compared to other daimyo gardens that remain today, such as Korakuen<sup>ii</sup> in Okayama Prefecture and Kenrokuen<sup>iii</sup> in Ishikawa Prefecture,” says Kobessho Tomoaki, who works at Shukkeien. “However, as the garden is a *kaiyu*-style garden (a garden with circulating paths) with islands in the middle of the central pond, bridges here and there, man-made hills, bamboo groves, and a tea house, all perfectly arranged around the undulating grounds, the garden doesn’t feel small.”

Located in the center of the garden is the roughly 8,000 square meter Takuei-chi Pond, with three Crane Islands and eleven Turtle Islands<sup>iv</sup>, since cranes and turtles are thought to be auspicious. It is said that these islands represent the many islands in the Seto Inland Sea, which Hiroshima faces. Water drawn up from the Kyobashi River is used for the pond. Since the Kyobashi River here is close to the river mouth where it empties into Hiroshima Bay, its water is a mixture of freshwater and saltwater, allowing both freshwater fish like koi and saltwater fish like flathead grey mullet to swim together in the pond.



Geiki-ho Peak, an artificial hill constructed to resemble Mt. Fuji and from which to view the garden


Photo: m.Taira / PIXTA

The Koko-kyo Bridge, a stone arch bridge, spans the center of the pond. The bridge remains in the same state as when it first spanned the pond some 240 years ago, having withstood the blast of the atomic bomb. There are also pavilions by the side of the pond, such as Yuyu-tei, where visitors can take a seat and relax as they enjoy viewing the garden.

Geiki-ho Peak is an approximately 10-meter-tall artificial hill by the pond said to resemble Mt. Fuji, and from the top, you can see the entire garden. Some time ago, before there were tall buildings around the garden, it was possible to see Hiroshima Castle, Hiroshima Bay, and even all the way to Miyajima (see pp. 12-13) from here.

There are around 5,600 trees planted within the garden. Among the varieties, pine trees are the most numerous, numbering around 370 trees. These evergreen pine trees are skillfully pruned by the gardeners. There are also around 110 cherry trees, with beautiful blossoms blooming in spring. In autumn, Japanese maple and other trees produce colorful autumn leaves. A large ginkgo tree in the garden that survived the atomic bomb stands 17 meters tall, has a trunk 4 meters wide, and is estimated to be more than 200 years old.

A variety of events are held in the garden throughout the year. For example, seasonal tea ceremonies are held at the Seifukan tea house. In the past, the feudal lord would pick tea and plant rice in the garden. Those activities have been recreated in the form of a Tea Harvesting Festival in late April and a Rice Planting Festival in mid-June each year.

“As there are a variety of flowers and events throughout the seasons to enjoy, many visitors come back to the Shukkeien repeatedly,” says Kobessho. “Despite being in the middle of the city, you can experience a quietness that feels like a different world. I want to convey the allure of the garden to people from Japan and abroad, while continuing the traditions that have been passed down for 400 years.” 

i Asano Nagaakira was the first Asano family *daimyo* of Hiroshima. He governed the domain from 1619.

ii See *Highlighting Japan* May 2021, “Okayama Korakuen: A Daimyo Garden Full of Charm” [https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202105/202105\\_04\\_en.html](https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202105/202105_04_en.html)

iii See *Highlighting Japan* May 2021, Kenrokuen: The “Outstanding Garden” of the Kaga Domain [https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202105/202105\\_03\\_en.html](https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202105/202105_03_en.html)

iv Each island resembles a crane or turtle.

The tower of Hiroshima Castle viewed over cherry trees in blossom  
Photo: PIXSTAR/PIXTA

# Hiroshima Castle

## A Symbol of the City

**Hiroshima Castle was built at the end of the 16th century. The castle tower, which remained until before World War II, was once destroyed by the atomic bomb, but the castle was reconstructed to its former appearance and is loved by local residents as a symbol of Hiroshima.**

SASAKI TAKASHI

**H**IROSHIMA Central Park, a multi-purpose park of around 420,000 square meters, extends out over central Hiroshima. In one corner of the park lies the historic site of Hiroshima Castle Ruins. Construction began in 1589 by Mori Terumoto (1553-1625), a military commander who had control over a wide area of the Chugoku region (western Honshu) at the time, and construction was fully completed by about 1599. The completed castle occupied around 900,000 square meters and was one of the largest castles in Japan. The castle tower, a symbol of the entire castle, was five stories tall, and was an imposing building, with a height of about 40 meters<sup>i</sup> including the base. However, around 350 years after its construction, the castle collapsed from the atomic bombing of the city in the Second World War,

<sup>i</sup> The castle tower alone was around 27 meters tall

and all that remained were the stone walls and moat.

“When the atomic bomb was dropped, the majority of Hiroshima Castle, which was within a one kilometer radius of the blast center, was reduced to ash. The wooden tower did not catch fire, but seems to have collapsed all at once from the bomb blast and other factors,” says Yamawaki Ikko, who works as principal curator at the Hiroshima City Culture Foundation.

The exterior of the tower was reconstructed in 1958 as the Hiroshima Castle Folk Museum. The reconstruction of the



Hiroshima Castle viewed over the moat  
Photo: love nature/PIXTA



tower was a symbol of the reconstruction of the city itself. Later, the castle gates and turrets in the *ninomaru* (second compound) were also reconstructed, and the castle was restored to its former appearance by 1994.


Around the 16th century, during the Warring States period when warlords fought for power, castles were mostly built on mountains as fortresses, making use of natural land features. Hiroshima Castle by contrast was built on flat land.

“Hiroshima is located on a delta where the waters of the Ota River and other rivers flow into the Seto Inland Sea, and at the time, it was at a key location for land and sea trade. It was Mori Terumoto who noticed the location,” says Yamawaki.

When Hiroshima Castle was built, Osaka was at the center of politics, and Osaka Castle, built by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598), and its castle town functioned together as a central hub for politics and the economy. Following this example, Mori Terumoto built Hiroshima Castle. Later, Hiroshima developed as one of the largest cities in the region, centered around Hiroshima Castle.

In the mid-late 19th century, many castles that had been the residences of feudal lords and military bases were demolished, their role having ended with the start of modernization in Japan. In the case of Hiroshima Castle, however, sections including the tower, part of the castle walls, and the interior moat were left. The tower, unchanged since it was built, had not only become familiar as a symbol of the city to local residents, but was also designated a National Treasure in 1931 for its historical value.

The interior of the tower, which was renovated in 1989, is a museum about the history of the Hiroshima castle town. From the observation platform at the top, one can see sweeping views of the city, making it very popular among tourists visiting the city both from within Japan and abroad.

Within the expansive castle grounds are a variety of trees and flowers, making it an attractive place to enjoy seasonal scenery. There are more than 1,000 trees of around 70 varieties, and in May, when the G7 Hiroshima Summit will be held, the fresh greenery will be beautiful and visitors will be able to see the flowers of the Japanese bird cherry and *tabunoki* (Japanese bay tree). After dark, the tower is beautifully illuminated. Hiroshima Castle continues to be a place of rest and relaxation for local residents and at the same time, a symbol. 



Hiroshima Castle illuminated  
Photo: BlackRabbit3/PIXTA



Restored buildings in the *ninomaru* (second compound)  
Photo: kazukiutako/PIXTA



The expansive castle grounds with many trees and popular walking trails  
Photo: s\_fukumura/PIXTA





Townscape of Saijo Sake Brewery Street,  
Higashihiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture  
Photo: PIXSTAR/PIXTA

# Hiroshima's Sake Capital

## Saijo Sake Brewery Street

**Saijo in Higashihiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture, is known as a town with a tradition of sake brewing that goes back more than 300 years. Saijo Sake Brewery Street, which retains much of its original appearance, is lined with sake breweries that give visitors the opportunity to learn about and taste the many different types of Saijo sake.**

KATO KYOKO

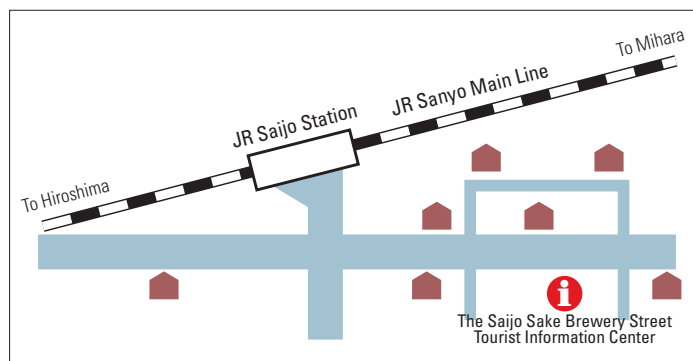
**S**AIJO in Higashihiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture, along with Fushimi in Kyoto Prefecture and Nada in Hyogo Prefecture, is one of Japan's big sake brewing areas. Saijo can be reached by train from Hiroshima Station on the JR Sanyo Main Line in less than 40 minutes. Seven sake breweries are to be found on Saijo Sake

Brewery Street, which is right in front of JR Saijo Station. The sake breweries have white walls or “namako walls”<sup>1</sup> and red tiled roofs, those roofs bearing a line of brick chimneys that show the brand names. Saijo flourished as a post town on the Saigoku Highway,<sup>ii</sup> one of the main roads of the Edo period (early 17th to mid-late 19th century), and Saijo Sake Brewery Street retains much of its appearance from that time. In 2017, it was selected as a cultural heritage site by the National Committee (Japan) of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).

Many tourists enjoy walking down the street and visiting the sake breweries one by one as they take in the old-time atmosphere.

Regarding sake brewing in Saijo, Ishii Eitaro, President of the Saijo Sake Brewers Association and CEO of Kirei Sake Brewery, explains, “Saijo, located in a basin at an altitude of 250 to 300 meters, has a climate with large differences in temperature and is blessed with excellent water, making it an ideal place for sake brewing. That’s why sake brewing in this area began more than 300 years ago.”

Sake is made from water and rice, and “in Saijo, we brew sake using underground water from nearby Mt. Ryuo (elevation about 575 meters). This water is medium-hard water that contains just the right amount of minerals, has a strong ability to grow yeast, and lets fermentation proceed smoothly, making it an ideal sake brewing water. As for the rice, we use 100% high-quality rice from Hiroshima Prefecture. From these raw



Map showing JR Saijo Station and the Saijo Sake Brewery Street





A building with a red tiled roof and a brick chimney and “namako walls”

Photo: photolibrary



A building with a red tiled roof and a brick chimney with the brewery's name written in white letters

Photo: photolibrary



Ishii Eitaro, President of the Saijo Sake Brewers Association and CEO of Kirei Sake Brewery

Photo: Kato Kumazo



Sake bottles and glasses in the office of Ishii Eitaro

Photo: Kato Kumazo

materials, we produce delicate, mellow, and high-grade sake of high purity. Of the three brands that won the first honorary awards at the Zenkoku Shinshu Kanpyokai back in 1917 (an annual event to evaluate sake launched in 1911), two were sake from Saijo, including sake from my brewery. Even today more than 100 years later, Saijo's sake is winning numerous awards at competitions.”


Each sake brewery in Saijo has a shop and proudly sells a variety of its own sake. Visitors can sample the sake, and some breweries hold tours where the *toji* (master brewer) guides tourists through the sake brewing process.<sup>iii</sup>

Nishigaki Masahiro, the *toji* at Kirei, says, “Sake is an alcoholic beverage made using a very complicated process, and good sake is made by taking the time and effort to handle it carefully. The quality of sake varies depending on those who make it, and Saijo's sake are also full of individuality, so I think it's good to go around breweries and sample their products to find sake you like. At our sake brewery, we use a traditional method to make dry sake that has an aromatic fragrance, umami, and refreshing throat-feel, and we pursue a quality of sake that makes you want to drink it again.”

The various breweries offer not only sake, but also original

products like sweets and gelato made from sake lees, udon noodles kneaded with sake, soap containing sake lees, and canvas bags with the brewery's logo. In addition to restaurants and cafés directly managed by the breweries, along Sake Brewery Street or the little side streets there are bakeries that use the local sake breweries' brewing water and sake lees, as well as cafés in old Japanese-style houses that serve dishes using sake, so there are various ways you can enjoy sake.

Another local specialty is *bishu nabe* (literally, beautiful sake hot pot), which is a hearty hot pot dish featuring plenty of seasonal vegetables and pork, cooked only with sake, salt, and pepper. It is served at restaurants along Saijo Sake Brewery Street and other places nearby, and it is recommended that you eat it with Saijo sake.

Why not take a short trip from Hiroshima Station and visit Saijo Sake Brewery Street to enjoy the charm of sake? 

i A traditional finish for walls in Japan in which the wall is covered in flat tiles to protect plaster from damage caused by rainwater. The plaster strips between the tiles are said to resemble sea cucumbers (*namako*).

ii Once the main road for travel in Western Japan and the basis for the current national highway Route 2.

iii Tours may cost a fee and require prior application, so please check with the brewery in advance (as of April 2023).



Hiroshima oysters served raw on the shell with dipping sauces and sake (serving suggestion)  
Photo: mao/PIXTA



# Plump and Rich Hiroshima Oysters

**Oysters are known as the “milk of the sea.” Hiroshima produces approximately 60 percent of Japan’s oysters, and they are appreciated for their plump flesh and rich flavor.**

**YANAGISAWA MIHO**

**H**IROSHIMA oysters are distinguished by their plump flesh, firmness, distinct aroma of the sea, and rich flavor. Hiroshima produces some 20,000 tons of oysters each year, accounting for around 60 percent of Japan’s total oyster production. The waters of the Ota River and its tributaries that flow through Hiroshima City into Hiroshima Bay are rich in nutrient salt<sup>i</sup> and plankton, creating ideal conditions for oyster cultivation. Many oyster racks can be seen floating in the calm waters of Hiroshima Bay, shielded from the open sea by the headland and islands.

The discovery of oyster shells in shell middens<sup>ii</sup> dating back more than 2,000 years tells us that people had been consuming wild oysters from Hiroshima Bay since ancient times. While oyster farming is said to have begun in the 17th century, in Hiroshima its growth dates from the period following World War II, when oyster racks came into widespread use.

Traditionally, the oyster harvest season runs from October through May in Hiroshima Prefecture, with the height of the season for fresh shipments occurring between

November and March. From April, most oysters produced are processed and frozen, and fresh oysters become increasingly scarce.

Recently, however, fresh oysters have become available even in the summer season. Oysters cultivated in Hiroshima Prefecture are mostly *magaki* (true oysters). However, *magaki* use up all of their nutrients from the rainy season through summer in order to spawn, at which point they become translucent and their flesh is referred to as *mizugaki* (water oyster). *Mizugaki* were not shipped during the summer months because they were not considered tasty. But the arrival of *Kaki Komachi* (Oyster Komachi), a non-spawning variety of oyster



Oyster shelves in Hiroshima Bay  
Photo: Courtesy of Hiroshima Prefecture





Fresh oysters on the grill  
Photo: Courtesy of Hiroshima Prefecture



Deep-fried oysters  
Photo: Courtesy of Hiroshima Prefecture



Okonomiyaki pancake served with grilled oysters  
Photo: leungchopan/PIXTA



Oyster hot pot  
Photo: sasazawa/PIXTA

developed by Hiroshima Prefecture, has made shipments of oysters possible even during the summer season. As a result, fresh oysters can be found on some restaurant menus beyond April and even in summer.

Hiroshima Prefecture is also one of Japan's leading lemon producing regions, accounting for more than 40 percent of production.<sup>iii</sup> A great way to enjoy Hiroshima oyster cuisine is with a squeeze of Hiroshima lemon. They are also delicious when paired with Saijo sake, another one of Hiroshima's specialties (see pp. 20-21).

"Oysters from Hiroshima are distinctive for their characteristic oyster-like sea aroma and robust flavor," says Watanabe Yuzo, Managing Director of the Hiroshima Federation of Japan Fisheries Co-operative Association. Oysters flourish in Hiroshima Bay due to the abundance of plankton which provide them with nutrients, and their flesh becomes firm and plump as a result of an accumulation of umami sources such as glycogen.

As well as being consumed raw, oysters are cooked in a variety of ways, including being baked and deep-fried, and as an ingredient in a hot-pot or *takikomi gohan* (dishes cooked together with rice). The distinctive aroma of oysters enhances the flavor of a dish in a way that no other ingredient can.

"When cooked in their shells on a mesh grill, the juices ooze into the shells. The oyster flesh and juices combine in the mouth to produce a characteristic oyster flavor that is simple yet has depth," says Watanabe. "An increasing number of restaurants are also serving oysters as an ingredient in

*okonomiyaki*<sup>iv</sup>, another of Hiroshima's specialties, so you can enjoy these two Hiroshima specialties at once."

In October 2021, Hiroshima Prefecture designated Mitsu Bay in Higashi-Hiroshima City adjacent to Hiroshima City as an EU export production zone. In January 2023, the area was awarded HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) certification, an international standard for food sanitation control, by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. Then February 2023 saw the first export of Japanese oysters to the EU. Oysters that have been frozen in their shells can be consumed raw once they have been thawed. While there are many oyster-producing regions around the world, Hiroshima's oysters were highly evaluated for their generous flesh and richness of flavor at business negotiations held in Europe in 2022, and the shipment of Japanese oysters to the EU was a source of great pride and high expectations.

It is timely that the G7 Summit is due to take place in Hiroshima in May of this year. Hiroshima oysters are now known around the world for their exceptional flavor and the day may not be too far off when people travel to Hiroshima just to sample them for themselves. <sup>7</sup>

i Generic term for minerals that dissolve in seawater such as silicate, phosphate, oxalate, and nitrite, that nourish phytoplankton, seaweed, and other organisms. Also referred to as nutritive salts.

ii Mounds of accumulated remains of the shellfish eaten by people in ancient times.

iii In 2018, 5,528 tons of domestically produced lemons were grown and shipped from 21 prefectures, including Hiroshima Prefecture (42 percent), Ehime Prefecture (31 percent), and Wakayama Prefecture (10 percent).

iv A wheat flour-based dish topped with ingredients such as squid, pork, and cabbage, cooked on an iron griddle and seasoned with sauce or other condiments. Osaka-style *okonomiyaki* and Hiroshima-style *okonomiyaki* are the best known.



# Cycling Over the Sea

## The Setouchi Shimanami Kaido



The Setouchi Shimanami Kaido<sup>1</sup> is the first route over sea straits that can be traveled by bicycle in Japan. It is a popular place for fun cycling while taking in stunning views of the islands in the Seto Inland Sea.



Map of the Setouchi Shimanami Kaido

### YANAGISAWA MIHO

THE Setouchi Shimanami Kaido is an expressway connecting Japan's main islands of Honshu and Shikoku by a series of bridges and crossing six small islands in the Seto Inland Sea. The road, which opened in May 1999, runs between Onomichi City in Hiroshima Prefecture and Imabari City in Ehime Prefecture, and is open to pedestrians and cyclists on the bridge sections where a designated path runs parallel to the expressway. The cycle route uses local roads on the islands, away from the expressway, and is about 70 kilometers long. It has been awarded a one star rating in the *Michelin Green Guide Japan* and was named by America's CNN travel website as one of the "Seven Best Bike Routes in the World." It has become a popular destination for cyclists from across the globe.

From the bridges along the route, cyclists can enjoy a panoramic vista of the Seto Inland Sea dotted with islands large and small. Zip-ping through the sea breeze high above the water while enjoying picturesque blue sky and sea, verdant islands, and colorful bridges is the great attraction of cycling along the Shimanami Kaido.

Along the way, cyclists can rest their legs and enjoy learning about the distinct history and culture of each island. For instance, Innoshima Island (Onomichi City, Hiroshima Prefecture) is the





The Kurushima Kaikyo Bridge comprising three successive suspension bridges, part of the Shimanami Kaido  
Photo: Courtesy of Onomichi Tourist Association



Lemons growing on Ikuchijima Island, also known as Lemon Island  
Photo: Courtesy of Onomichi Tourist Association



View over Buddhist statues from Shiratakiyama mountain, Innoshima Island  
Photo: Courtesy of Onomichi Tourist Association



View from Innoshima Park, Innoshima Island  
Photo: Courtesy of Onomichi Tourist Association

location of castle ruins dating back to the Middle Ages, when the island was the base for a naval clan known as the Murakami Kaizoku. Next to Innoshima Island is Ikuchijima Island (Onomichi City, Hiroshima Prefecture), regarded as the birthplace of Japanese lemons. Nicknamed “Lemon Island,” the scent of lemon blossoms permeates the air of the hill slopes in spring, while fall and winter see the island decked out in lemon fruit. Cyclists can enjoy lunch on the island featuring locally caught seafood such as octopus and conger eel. Over each bridge awaits an encounter with completely new landscapes, cuisines, and sights, so cyclists never become bored.

The cycle routes on the islands can also be easily accessed by travelers using the expressway, which means it can be enjoyed not only by serious cyclists but also by those who wish to take a break from their car journey and enjoy a pleasant bike ride. There are 10 bike rental terminals along the Shimanami Kaido, some of which even offer electric-assist bicycles and tandems. One-way rentals are also available for some of the bicycle models, making it feasible for visitors to combine different modes of transportation. Terminals also offer a luggage forwarding service to partner hotels.

Cyclists often ride the Shimanami Kaido in sections. A popular route begins at Onomichi Station in Hiroshima, crosses

to Mukaishima Island (Onomichi City, Hiroshima Prefecture), then Innoshima Island, and finally Ikuchijima Island, before returning to Onomichi by ferry from Setoda Port on Ikuchijima Island.

“Alight at JR Onomichi Station, hop on a bicycle and take it with you on the ferry to Mukaishima Island, which is right in front of you. Mukaishima Island has some of the finest fig and mandarin orchards in Japan. Only 300 meters away, at first glance the narrow strait of sea looks like a river, but crossing by ferry will give you the sense you are on a big trip,” says Sakamoto Daizo, Managing Director of Shimanami Japan.

“Those who travel by bicycle on the route will feel welcomed not only by businesses catering to tourists but also by the islanders,” says Sakamoto, speaking of the *omotenashi* spirit of hospitality on the island.

The more that cyclists get to know the route, the greater their desire to come back and discover another section of it. Many cyclists visit two or three times to re-experience the thrill of riding the road. A coastal route that features magnificent scenery, seafood from the Seto Inland Sea, and a variety of fruits offers a fun and richly rewarding experience. <sup>17</sup>

<sup>i</sup> In Japanese, Setouchi represents the Seto Inland Sea or the coastal area of the Seto Inland Sea. *Shimanami* means a chain of islands, and *kaido* means a sea road.





# Hiroshima Kagura

## *Plays for Today*

**Hiroshima Kagura, a new form of *kagura*, an evolution of the local performance arts that have been passed down for hundreds of years, continues to captivate performers and audiences in Hiroshima and beyond.**

SATO KUMIKO

**K**AGURA is a performance art that has various traditions across Japan, but generally is considered to be a ceremony of thanksgiving to the gods who bestow a rich and peaceful life. The origins of present-day

Hiroshima Kagura are said to lie in Geihoku Kagura, a form of folk entertainment that has been danced and passed down for over 250 years in the Geihoku region of northern Hiroshima Prefecture. Geihoku Kagura itself developed as a rustic autumnal festival celebrating the harvest. When bringing this form of *kagura* to the stage, stories from the Japanese classical performing arts of *noh* and *kabuki* were incorporated, and through the creative use of lighting and stage direction, Geihoku Kagura developed into a new form of *kagura*: Hiroshima Kagura. The most distinctive features of Hiroshima Kagura include the use of *washi* paper masks, colorful costumes and lively dancing.

There are more than 70 different plays associated with Hiroshima Kagura today. They are based primarily on myths and folktales from across Japan, and most of these have been adapted into easy-to-understand stories of right and wrong. For example, a famous tale is about the Yamata no Orochi, a large snake-like monster with eight heads and eight tails, that comes down from a large mountain to swallow a maiden before being vanquished by a deity. Several performers wear the huge, colorful costume of the snake and the performance is quite powerful. In another popular tale, a beautiful princess is transformed into a demon, which requires quick mask and costume changes by the performer. Musical accompaniment is provided by Japanese drums and flutes, and the entire audience erupts in applause at the end of the performance.

Kagura refers to songs and dances that are dedicated to the



Scene from *Yamata no Orochi* performed in Brazil

All photos: Courtesy of NPO Hiroshima Kagura Art Laboratory



deities. Kagura as a religious act is considered to have been established in the 8th century, and in Japan where villages are formed around rice farming, harvest kagura were performed as prayers to express gratitude for an abundant grain harvest. The kagura passed down today in each of these villages is called *sato-kagura* (village kagura), but as the populations of rural areas have decreased along with modernization, there are many regions where satokagura has disappeared. Geihoku Kagura on the other hand took a dramatic new direction.

“The movements of Geihoku Kagura are intense and, as a cultural form, it has been sustained by young people. This engagement becomes a source of vitality for rural villages. So we thought that we should pass on this traditional culture creatively instead of merely preserving it,” says Hayashi Hideki, president of the NPO Hiroshima Kagura Art Laboratory.

In 1948, kagura groups based in the northern part of the prefecture gathered and a kagura competition was held, and since then, it has been held annually.

“Winning the competition becomes a source of pride for a region. All groups rehearse with passion and engage in friendly rivalry,” says Hayashi.

As these groups were becoming more active, a new form of kagura was tried out in a large hall in central Hiroshima in 1993, with exciting costumes, lighting and stage effects to defy conventional wisdom as a performing art. The direction proved to be a great success, and marked the birth of the new Hiroshima Kagura as a performing art.

The reputation of this new art form spread not only within Japan but abroad as well, and so far, it has been performed many times in China, Mexico, Brazil, France, and other countries. “Even with an interpreter, I wasn’t sure if non-Japanese people would understand, as kagura is an art form that developed from local Japanese customs. But it was very well-received in every country. People are particularly surprised when they are told that the performers are all amateurs,”



Scene from *Itabukino-miya* performed by Nakakawado Kaguradan




Scene from *Tsuchigumo* performed by Kinsho Kaguradan

says Hayashi.

There are currently around 200 kagura groups within Hiroshima Prefecture. Members include farmers, company employees, and youngsters, some of whom are so taken by Hiroshima Kagura that they travel more than an hour to attend practices.

Thanks to group members’ regular practice, performances can be enjoyed

every Wednesday at the Hiroshima Prefectural Citizen’s Cultural Center in Hiroshima City. The plays are performed using a script that is easy even for first-time viewers to understand, so they move everyone, whether children, adults, or overseas tourists.

Kagura resonates with the hearts of its audience because it not only conveys local pride but also touches the soul. 



Paul Walsh

# Communicating the Allure of Hiroshima to the World

Paul Walsh from the United Kingdom works to communicate the allure of Hiroshima abroad and currently runs an inbound tourism consulting company for all of Japan from Hiroshima.

SATO KUMIKO

**P**AUL Walsh from the United Kingdom runs an inbound tourism consulting company for all of Japan from his base in Hiroshima. The company is called Jizo Hat. “When traveling to the countryside of

Japan, there are small stone Ojizo-san statues along the road, and they are quite adorable, often wearing little handmade hats made by locals. These statues are said to help people in trouble. I want my company to be that kind of a presence,”

says Paul.

While in university, Paul entered and won an award through an essay contest sponsored by a Japanese securities company, and as an extra prize, he was given the opportunity to study in Japan for three weeks. It was during this time that he learned of the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Programme, an initiative of the Japanese government that invites young people from abroad to offer language guidance in Japan. In 1991 after graduating from university, he joined the JET Programme, and spent three enriching years as an assistant language teacher at junior high and high schools in Oita Prefecture.

After that, he traveled around Asia with an American woman he met in Oita and who he would later marry. He then returned to Japan, and began working as an English conversation teacher in Hiroshima in 1996. At first, life in Hiroshima was not fun for the two of them.

“When I think of it now, we didn’t have enough information,” says Paul.

At the time, English information was limited to tourist spots, and there was little English information of benefit for enhancing and stabilizing everyday life.



Copies of *GetHiroshima*, a free English-language magazine formerly published by Paul and the GetHiroshima team



They thought of leaving Hiroshima, but before leaving, they decided to seek out the allure of Hiroshima on their own, walking around the city and visiting a variety of communities. This was in 1999.

“Right around that time, there was a movement among young people to try and communicate information about new shops and music in Hiroshima, and we started making connections with these people one by one.”

After making connections with others and finding a place to settle down, they took action. From 2000, they began distributing information they gathered themselves and had thought interesting under the name GetHiroshima.com. The information gathered through these



Paul riding his bicycle along the river in Hiroshima City



A map filled with information on Hiroshima created by Paul and the GetHiroshima team

actions led to the 2014 start of *GetHiroshima*, a free English-language magazine.

The concept for *GetHiroshima* is, “Be more than a tourist, become a virtual insider.” Paul wanted tourists, many of whom left Hiroshima after seeing Miyajima, Peace Memorial Park, and other major tourist spots, to know more about the lively everyday life in Hiroshima. *GetHiroshima*, filled with information about the city that Paul and his wife had selected, was met with a favorable reception among both tourists and foreign residents of Hiroshima.

Paul then poured his passion into inbound tourism, founding Jizo Hat in

2018. *GetHiroshima*, which had been published continuously for five years, ceased publication the following year.

Having originally come for a short stay, Paul has continued to seek out the charms of Hiroshima, and to him, it is a beloved city. He hopes to restart *GetHiroshima* someday and introduce restaurants such as those selling *okonomiyaki*, a Hiroshima specialty.

“Hiroshima had miserable wartime experiences in the past, but today, it is a city proclaiming world peace. Try speaking with someone from Hiroshima. It’s even better to eat and drink something delicious together with them. Just start by raising a toast with the person sitting next to you!” says Paul. 🍷



Paul at Jizo Hat headquarters



Athletes at the start of the 100 meter dash at the January 2023 Ladies First meet (all photos Jan. 2023)

# Supporting Female Athletes of Tanzania

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has been offering support to host Ladies First—a track and field meet for women in the United Republic of Tanzania.

## SAWAJI OSAMU

IN November 2017, Ladies First, the first track and field meet for women in Tanzania, was jointly held by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Tanzanian National Sports Council for two days in the United Republic of Tanzania in East Africa. The meet was held at the National Stadium in Dar es Salaam, the country's largest city, and 105 athletes from 24 of the country's 31 regions participated in 11 events, including the 100 meter dash, the 5,000 meter race, and javelin.

Together with JICA, former Tanzanian marathon runner Juma Ikangaa worked on hosting this meet. He participated in Olympic games in Los Angeles in 1984 and in Seoul in 1988, and won the Tokyo International Marathon in 1984 and 1986. He currently runs a track and field club in Tanzania, working to train young track and field athletes.

"Actually, the first time Tanzania won

a medal at an international track and field competition was in 1965, in the women's javelin. But the idea that sports are for men is strongly rooted in Tanzania, and the number of women participating in sports did not increase," says Ikangaa. "Ladies First is held to encourage more women to participate in sports."

As there are limited opportunities for female athletes to train in any sport in Tanzania, there are few female athletes participating internationally. However, as there are medal-winning female track and field athletes from the neighboring Republic of Kenya and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, it is highly possible that there are talented women in Tanzania, as well. One of the major goals of Ladies First is to focus on female track and field athletes who have not had enough opportunities for practice or participation in competitions and to discover and develop athletes who can participate in international competitions.

The number of participants in Ladies First increases each time the tournament

is held. There were 129 participants in 2018, 138 in 2019, and 210 women from 30 regions participated in the fourth meet in January of this year (2023), the highest number of participants yet. To support the meet, Japanese companies have donated operating funds, t-shirts, and more.

Through Ladies First, connections are developing overseas. Athletes who performed well in the 2017 Ladies First meet were invited to participate in a marathon held in October 2018 in Nagai City, Yamagata Prefecture, the registered host town<sup>i</sup> for Tanzania for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Tanzanian athletes who participated in both the full marathon and the half marathon came in first at this event. At the Ladies First meet in 2019, participants also included four athletes from South Sudan<sup>ii</sup>, where JICA offers support in hosting national sports events.


"We have also discovered athletes with incredible talent. We can expect our female athletes to earn medals at



international competitions in the near future,” says Ikangaa. “Awareness of the importance of sports for women is spreading in Tanzania, thanks to this meet.” Not stopping with simply offering access to sports with Ladies First, JICA also hosts a variety of side events, recognizing the event as an opportunity to widely promote women’s empowerment. In addition to holding a jogging event, an educational program to prevent teenage pregnancy, and a workshop on women’s empowerment for athletes led by a university professor from Japan were conducted. Booths for health checks and consultations on Sexual and Gender Based Violence were also set up. Around 1,000 students from elementary and junior high schools in Dar es Salaam were also invited to watch the meet.

“Ladies First is an important event for women in Tanzania, including myself,” says Neema Msitha, Secretary General of the National Sports Council, who has been involved in the operations of Ladies First since the first meet. “With side events related to the various challenges which women face, Ladies First is not only about sports, but is also having an impact on society.”

Through TV, newspapers, radio, and other forms of media, as well as social media, Ladies First is now widely known. The Tanzanian government also recognizes its importance and is considering hosting qualifying tournaments in the future for Ladies First in each region of the country to offer opportunities for more women to participate.

“What is most significant about offering sports to women is that it develops confidence among women,” says Msitha. “I believe that sports have the power to change the women of Tanzania.” 



Participants in discussion at a workshop on women’s empowerment



Athletes running the 100 meter dash final



Athletes gathering for the closing ceremony



A team from Zanzibar receiving an award for their win in the inter-region match

i See *Highlighting Japan* June 2021, “Host Town Initiative for Tokyo 2020” [https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202106/202106\\_01\\_en.html](https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202106/202106_01_en.html)  
 ii See *Highlighting Japan* July 2019, “National Unity through Sports” [https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/201907/201907\\_02\\_en.html](https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/201907/201907_02_en.html)



Moss phlox in bloom at Higashimokoto  
Shibazakura Park in Ozora Town,  
Abashiri District, Hokkaido  
kiki/PIXTA



Pink moss phlox  
aki/PIXTA

## SEASONAL FLOWERS

### Shibazakura

*Moss phlox*



White moss  
phlox  
Hisao/PIXTA

White and  
pink striped  
moss phlox  
GooDay/PIXTA



Moss phlox is a perennial plant native to North America. The plant grows to about 10 cm tall and blooms in dense clusters in areas exposed to full sunlight and in soil with good drainage. Moss phlox grows in many parts of Japan and blooms from April to May, beginning in the warmer southern parts of the country. In Japan moss phlox is called *shibazakura*, because it creeps over wide areas like a lawn (*shiba*) and produces pink flowers with five petals, about 2 cm in diameter, similar to cherry blossoms (*sakura*, here pronounced *zakura*). As a result of breeding improvements, there are varieties of moss phlox flowers other than pink, including white, blue, and purple, and the shape and size of the petals are also highly varied. The scenery of mountain slopes and hills covered with moss phlox like a “carpet of flowers” is very beautiful, and there are many places in Japan that have become famous spots for moss phlox viewing. In the Japanese language of flowers, moss phlox stands for consensus and unanimity, because of its clusters of many flowers.

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