In 2023, Kintaikyo, one prime example of a traditional Japanese bridge, marked the 350th anniversary of its construction. Construction techniques used when the bridge was originally built continue to be maintained, and the bridge still stands today in the same location and has virtually the same form as it always has. We visited to see the beauty of the Kintaikyo Bridge for ourselves. (Text: Kurosawa Akane)

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pletion of the current form of the bridge in 2004. The Kintaikyo Bridge still stands today in the same location and has virtually the same form as it always has.

In 2021, the cultural landscape of the Kintaikyo Bridge and castle town below Iwakuni Castle in the lower reaches of the Nishiki River was designated an Important Cultural Landscape by the Japanese Government.

“By the 19th century, well-known ukiyo-e artists, including Utagawa Hiroshige and Katsushika Hokusai were already depicting the Kintaikyo Bridge as a famous landmark. The beauty of the Kintaikyo Bridge has captivated many people across the ages.”

Another charming aspect of the Kintaikyo Bridge is the way it reveals beautiful forms amid the assortment of richly colorful natural scenes that appear around it over the course of the changing seasons: blossoming cherry trees, vibrant autumn foliage, blankets of snow. With each season showing the bridge in such completely different appearances, visitors will not likely tire of visiting the bridge any number of times. Cormorant fishing near the bridge is a local tradition of summer as well. Visitors will also enjoy crossing to the south side of the bridge to stroll through the remaining vestiges of the traditional castle town.

“Iwakuni City is currently working to achieve World Heritage site designation for the Kintaikyo Bridge. We hope this beautiful bridge, which has been maintained over the ages thanks to the passion and effort our predecessors put into it, will be preserved for future generations.”

Visitors can take a ropeway to the top of Mount Shiroyama to enjoy stunning views of the bridge from Iwakuni Castle’s keep. Views from beneath the bridge also offer closer looks of the structure’s intricate kigumi wood joinery. Also consider traversing the bridge’s rhythmical series of five arches on foot. When you have a chance to visit to Japan, be sure to look into making the trip to Iwakuni to experience the charm of this beautiful bridge, which has remained unchanged since so many ages ago.

1. A form of Cultural Property corresponding to places of high artistic or scenic value as designated by the Japanese national government or local public bodies.
2. Uki: A traditional fishing method using trained cormorant birds to catch ayu (sweetfish) and other fish.
3. Keta beams are stacked on top of each other, stretching at angles from the bridge piers toward centers of arches, with kusabi wedges used to fill gaps created by variations in beams’ angles. Five parallel keta beams are secured transversely with hari (crossbeams). Keta beams protruding from bridge piers in this fashion are then connected at centers of arches with munagi crossbeams.