

HIGHLIGHTING *Japan*

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ISSUE



ENJOYING JAPAN'S SPRING
BY LOCAL TRAINS

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Japan offers travel experiences that showcase the beauty of each season, in particular spring scenery never fails to lift the spirits. Traveling on local trains offers the feeling of spring through the train windows while making the way to the destination. In this issue of *HIGHLIGHTING Japan*, we feature an interview with MIYAMURA Kazuo, Professor Emeritus of Tokyo University of Science, who has completed the *zensen kanjo*—traveling every single line in Japan. Also featured are various perspectives on enjoying Japanese springtime on local trains, including sightseeing trains famous for the best scenic railway routes in Japan, local lines with cherry blossoms along the route, and retro-style steam locomotives.

This photo by NAKAI captures the SL Yamaguchi billowing steam and smoke through the town of Tsuwano, Shimane Prefecture, in spring. The contrast between people enjoying the cherry blossoms and the powerful steam locomotive thundering past creates a striking scene.



Photo: NAKAI Seiya

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FEATURES

Enjoying Japan's Spring by Local Trains



Above left: A journey through breathtaking scenery on the Gono Line aboard the Resort Shirakami sightseeing train.

Above right: The South Hokkaido Railway and the tulips of Saraki Cape.

Below left: Cherry blossom tunnel along the Kitano Line of the Keifuku Electric Railroad in Kyoto.

Below right: A Tosaden streetcar, ideal for a leisurely tour around downtown Kochi.

Japan offers travel experiences that showcase the beauty of each season, in particular spring scenery never fails to lift the spirits. Traveling on local trains offers the feeling of spring through the train windows while making the way to the destination. In this issue of *HIGHLIGHTING Japan*, we feature an interview with MIYAMURA Kazuo, Professor Emeritus of Tokyo University of Science, who has completed the *zensen kanjo*—traveling every single line in Japan. Also featured are various perspectives on enjoying Japanese springtime on local trains, including sightseeing trains famous for the best scenic railway routes in Japan, local lines with cherry blossoms along the route, and retro-style steam locomotives.



Exploring Japan's Spring Aboard Local Train Lines

Japan offers travel experiences that showcase the beauty of each season, in particular spring scenery never fails to lift the spirits. We spoke with MIYAMURA Kazuo, professor emeritus at Tokyo University of Science and an expert on rail travel in Japan, about journeys along local train lines where travelers can fully savor the feeling of spring.

Japan can be explored extensively by rail. From your experience with *zensen kanjo*—traveling every single line in the country—what would you say are the defining characteristics of Japanese railways?

My fascination with rail travel began with the “Good Journey Challenge 20,000 km,” a campaign run by Japanese National Railways¹ (the predecessor of today’s JR Group) in 1980 that ran for about 10 years. The initiative encouraged participants to ride a total of 20,000 kilometers by train, mastering timetables to complete *zensen kanjo*. Its unique appeal sparked my passion for railways when I was a



MIYAMURA Kazuo

Professor emeritus at Tokyo University of Science. Holding a Doctor of Engineering degree from the University of Tokyo, he has appeared on NHK’s Radio Midnight News with *Tecchan-sensei no tabi no susume* (“Dr. Tecchan’s Travel Recommendations”) and is known as a train enthusiast. His major publications include *‘Noritetsu’ kyōju no tokoton tetsudo tabi* (“Professor Noritetsu’s Complete Railway Journey”) (Ushio Publishing Co., Ltd., 2021) and *Zero kara manabu genso no sekai* (“Learning the World of the Elements from Scratch”) (*Zero kara manabu* series, Kodansha Scientific Books, 2006).

university student.

As the campaign suggested, in 1980 Japan’s railway network already stretched over 27,000 kilometers, and today it is said to exceed 30,000 kilometers. Japan’s long north-to-south archipelago, comprising the four main islands of Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu, is connected by rail lines via bridges and undersea tunnels, allowing travelers to journey across the islands entirely by train without switching to other modes of transportation.

The core of this extensive railway network is the high-speed trunk lines known as the Shinkansen (“bullet trains”), which connect Japan’s major cities. From Tokyo Station, the starting point of the East Japan network, four Shinkansen lines depart: the Tohoku–Hokkaido Shinkansen heading north, the Joetsu Shinkansen and Hokuriku Shinkansen toward the Sea of Japan side, and the Tokaido Shinkansen heading west toward Kyoto and Osaka. From Shin-Osaka Station, the western terminal station of the Tokaido Shinkansen, two more lines extend further west: the Sanyo Shinkansen and the Kyushu Shinkansen.

By skillfully connecting these trunk lines, travelers can journey from the northernmost city of Hokuto, a city just north of Hakodate in Hokkaido, to the southern city of Kagoshima in Kyushu, a distance of roughly 2,300 kilometers, in as little as 12 hours. This level of convenience for the movement of people and goods is one of the proud hallmarks of Japan’s railway system. Looking ahead, the opening of Linear Chuo Shinkansen, which will reduce travel time between Tokyo and Osaka, two of the country’s busiest hubs, from about two and a half



Cherry blossom tunnel along the Kitano Line of the Keifuku Electric Railroad in Kyoto.

hours to roughly one hour, is expected to further enhance Japan's high-speed railway network.

Another notable feature of Japanese railways is their punctuality. While on-time operation is taken for granted by Japanese passengers, it often surprises visitors from abroad. Indeed, travelers greatly appreciate trains that arrive and depart on time, but this punctuality can sometimes create challenges. For example, in my own experience, taking extra time to photograph a train can leave me boarding just moments before departure. Even in such cases, Japanese trains do not wait—they close their doors promptly and depart on schedule, so travelers should take be mindful of the time.

While Japan's main lines continue to expand and improve, many local lines—branch lines off the main network—face the threat of closure. Yet some lines have found ways to reinvent themselves by emphasizing their unique appeal. Could you tell us about the attractions of traveling on local lines that can only be experienced firsthand?

Japan has a large community of railway enthusiasts, and there are various ways to enjoy the experience. Some, known as *nori-tetsu*, take pleasure simply in riding trains. The term *nori-tetsu* comes from the words *nori* (“to ride”), and *tetsu*, which is short for *tetsudo* (“railway”). Others, called *tori-tetsu* (*tori* means “to take a photo”), capture trains and the surrounding scenery in photographs (See “Railway Photographer NAKAI Seiya on the Attraction of Railway Photography,” in *HIGHLIGHTING Japan* May 2026 issue). There are also collectors, or *shushu-tetsu* (*shushu* means “to collect”), who enjoy gathering tickets, boxed meals, and other railway merchandise and memorabilia. In short, the ways to enjoy railways are as varied as the enthusiasts themselves.

For me, the true joy of rail travel lies in simply being on the train. Given the same fare, I prefer to spend more time riding a local line, enjoying the changing scenery along the way, rather than focusing solely on reaching the destination efficiently. On routes through the mountains, travelers can view the outline of mountains and valleys, while coastal lines offer a different character depending on whether they run along the Pacific or the Sea of Japan.

Some travelers enjoy combining rail travel with



Herring (*nishin*) *migaki* bento (left) at Hakodate Station and surf clam rice (*hokki-meshi*, right) at Tomakomai Station. Regional *ekiben* are also one of the pleasures of train travel.

drinking alcohol, a pastime known as *nomi-tetsu* (*nomi* means “to drink”), but for me, one of the pleasures of riding trains is enjoying *ekiben* (from *eki*, meaning “station,” and *ben*, from *bento*, meaning “boxed lunch”), boxed meals purchased at station shops or on board the train, and carefully collecting their wrapping. Many *ekiben* feature creative presentations, and the ingredients often reflect local specialties. Recommended examples include the herring (*nishin*) *migaki* bento at Hakodate Station in Hokkaido, the surf clam rice (*hokki-meshi*) at Tomakomai Station, also in Hokkaido, and the cod rice (*tara-meshi*) at Naoetsu Station in Niigata Prefecture, all highlighting the distinctive seafood of their regions.

One local line with a distinctive appeal is the JR-West Sakai Line (See “Recommended Trips by Rail in Japan,” in *HIGHLIGHTING Japan* April 2025 issue), which runs from Yonago Station to Sakaiminato Station in Tottori Prefecture. The line has attracted wide attention for its “Kitaro Train,” featuring characters from *GeGeGe no Kitaro*, the famous work of Tottori-born manga artist MIZUKI Shigeru. Themed displays of the characters are also placed at stations along the route. A popular *ekiben* inspired by the series, the *GeGeGe no Kitaro Don*, is sold at Tottori Station on the JR West San-in Main Line.

Local lines offer various ways to enjoy rail travel, but some of them are facing closure. One such example is the JR Hokkaido Rumoi Main Line, which opened in 1910 and will be discontinued on March 31, 2026. Compared with when I became a railway enthusiast, nearly half of Japan's local lines have disappeared.

As a rail travel enthusiast, I have reflected on the role of local lines and sometimes feel they do not always complement the convenience of the main network. Because local lines are primarily used by residents for commuting to work or school, train schedules tend to be concentrated at certain times of

day. As a result, the number of trains connecting with the main lines is limited, and their overall contribution to the convenience of the country's railway network is not always sufficient.

To prevent further closures of local lines, attracting more domestic and international tourists is important. In addition, I believe there may be opportunities to strengthen freight transport, as is done on some railways abroad. At the same time, unique local initiatives, such as the Cat Stationmaster on the Wakayama Electric Railway Kishigawa Line in Wakayama Prefecture, showcase the appeal of local lines and help sustain their operations.

Are there any routes you particularly recommend for a spring journey? And are there any tips you keep in mind to make the trip more enjoyable?

When it comes to spring rail travel, few sights are as delightful as cherry blossoms. As Japan's national flower, cherry trees offer beautiful scenery along nearly every route in the country during their blooming season.

Particularly well known are the cherry blossom tunnel between Narutaki and Utano stations on the Kitano Line, which branches from the Arashiyama Main Line of the Keifuku Electric Railroad in Kyoto; the *Natsui Senbon-Zakura* ("1,000 Cherry Trees of Natsui"), where thousands of cherry trees line both banks of the river along the Ban'etsu East Line, operated by JR East, from Koriyama Station to Iwaki Station in Fukushima Prefecture; and the cherry blossom scenery around Shin-Fujiwara Station on the Aizu Kinugawa Line of the Yagan Railway, which runs from Shin-Fujiwara

Station in Tochigi Prefecture to Aizu-Kogen-Ozeguchi Station in Fukushima Prefecture.

While Japan's cherry blossoms are a must-see, I personally also recommend the peach blossoms. They bloom earlier than cherry trees, so timing is important, but when the trees in the peach orchards flower, the landscape is dyed a soft pink and looks stunning. Along the tracks, fields and embankments are dotted with dandelions and horsetail shoots, offering glimpses of spring's delicate arrival. Experiencing these scenes through a train window is a pleasure unique to traveling on local lines.

Rail travel in spring is also a pleasure when it follows rivers, waterfalls, and scenic valleys swollen with seasonal runoff. The JR Central Minobu Line, which runs between Fuji Station in Shizuoka Prefecture and Kofu Station in Yamanashi Prefecture, parallels the Fuji River for much of its route, allowing travelers to enjoy the river's gentle flow for about an hour. Along this line, there are also excellent viewpoints for taking in views of Mount Fuji.

On the Watarase Keikoku Line, which runs from Kiryu Station in Gunma Prefecture to Mato Station in Tochigi Prefecture, travelers can enjoy views of the Watarase River valley from the train window. Similarly, the JR Central and JR West Takayama Main Line, connecting Gifu Station in Gifu Prefecture to Hida-Furukawa Station, runs along the Arata, Kiso, and Hida rivers, offering spectacular views of the Hida River Gorge, known as *Hisui-kyo*.

The true charm of rail travel lies in enjoying the changing scenery outside the window, occasionally savoring a local *ekiben*, and simply taking in the



Natsui Senbon-Zakura along the Ban'etsu East Line in Fukushima Prefecture.



The beautiful flowering peach trees along the line of the Watarase Keikoku Railway in Gunma Prefecture.

passage of time. Equally enjoyable is the time spent planning the journey, researching routes, considering options, and thinking through the itinerary.

I always keep my bag packed so I can set out on a trip within five minutes whenever I decide to travel. Traveling light with just a single backpack is my style. A backpack worn on both shoulders makes it easier to navigate stations with many steps and to get on and off trains efficiently. I also recommend bringing rain gear, as spring in Japan tends to be rainy. Because the Japanese archipelago stretches from north to south, spring arrives first in the south and gradually moves north. I encourage travelers to enjoy this seasonal progression by following it along local lines. 📖



The Takayama Main Line running through *Hisui-kyo* in Gifu Prefecture.

1. In 1987, the company was privatized and split into six regional passenger railway companies and one freight railway company, among others.

WAKAYAMA ELECTRIC RAILWAY'S KISHIGAWA LINE: CONTINUING THE CHALLENGE WITH THE STATIONMASTER CAT

In 2022, Japan's railways marked their 150th anniversary. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, as travel was severely limited, the rail industry suffered a major blow. Coupled with long-standing challenges such as depopulation and changing lifestyles, the Japanese government in July 2022 issued a recommendation that the future of certain local lines should be carefully reviewed.

Amid increasingly challenging conditions, some local lines have continued efforts to survive by highlighting their unique appeal. One such example is Wakayama Electric Railway's Kishigawa Line in Wakayama Prefecture (See "The Station with a Cat as Its Stationmaster: Wakayama Electric Railway's Kishi Station," in *HIGHLIGHTING Japan* February 2022 issue).

The Kishigawa Line connects Wakayama Station in Wakayama City with Kishi Station in Kinokawa City, Wakayama Prefecture. In 2004, the line, then operated by Nankai Electric Railway Co., Ltd., was in danger of closure. Responding to residents' calls to keep it running, the local government opened public tender for operators nationwide. Among those who stepped forward was Okayama Electric Tramway Co., Ltd., based in Okayama Prefecture. KOJIMA Mitsunobu, then its president, was passionate about maintaining public transportation. To revitalize the Kishigawa Line, he established Wakayama Electric Railway Co., Ltd. in 2005, and the company took over operations in April 2006.



The first stationmaster cat, the late Tama (served 2007–2015).

The company quickly began collaborating with local communities on a variety of initiatives to attract passengers. Recognized as a model for local railways' revitalization efforts, the Kishigawa Line drew widespread interest—and then sparked an even more remarkable movement: the birth of the "stationmaster cat" in 2007.

When publicly owned land around Kishi Station was reorganized, the resident cat "Tama", left homeless, was welcomed as the stationmaster—this story caught the public's attention. Domestic and foreign tourists flocked to see the diligent cat at work. The first stationmaster cat, Tama, steadily "rose through the ranks," and her successor, Nitama, took over the role. Their contributions would go on to play a major

part in the survival and revitalization of the line.

Then, in 2025, as the line marked the 20th anniversary of its revitalization, Wakayama Electric Railway began moving toward public-private operation under a fully separated infrastructure-and-service model.¹ As of 2026, with stationmaster duties carried on by Yontama, Gotama, and Rokutama, attention is once again focused on the Kishigawa Line's bold challenge as a local railway.

1. A railway management system in which the local government owns and maintains infrastructure such as tracks and stations, while a private railway operator handles train operations and commercial services.



Photo: South Hokkaido Railway Company

The South Hokkaido Railway and the tulips of Saraki Cape.

A Spring Journey through Hokkaido on the South Hokkaido Railway

If you want to experience Japan's magnificent natural landscapes and enjoy encounters with local residents, why not take a ride on the South Hokkaido Railway (Donan Isaribi Tetsudo), a local railway running through southwestern Hokkaido? We spoke with HARUI Michihiro of South Hokkaido Railway Company's operation and planning division about ways to enjoy the region's late-arriving spring and the unique appeal of the railway. (Text: TAKADERA Kuriko)

The South Hokkaido Railway is a local railway in southwestern Hokkaido that took over operations of the JR Esashi Line in 2016, following the launch of the Hokkaido Shinkansen, which runs parallel to the route. Stretching 37.8 km, the line runs along the coast from Kikonai Town in Kamiiso District, passes through Hokuto City, and terminates in Hakodate City.

The South Hokkaido Railway's official starting and terminal stations are Kikonai Station and Goryokaku Station; however, trains actually continue beyond Goryokaku Station onto the JR line to the neighboring

Hakodate Station. Hakodate is a core city following Sapporo and Asahikawa, and a historic port city that has played an important role in Hokkaido's development. On the other hand, Kikonai Station is served by the Hokkaido Shinkansen, providing a direct rail connection to Tokyo Station.

Of the South Hokkaido Railway's 12 stations, the section between Kikonai Station and Kamiiso Station runs along the Tsugaru Strait. The strait is a body of water linking the Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Japan between Hokkaido and Aomori Prefecture, and from June through December it serves as a rich fishing



Along the section running beside Hakodate Bay, passengers can enjoy views of Mount Hakodate.



The lights visible on the sea in the background are *isaribi*, or 'fishing lights,' from which the railway takes its name.



The *Nagamare* train running along the Satsukari Murakami Moss Phlox Garden, where moss phlox blooms in a vibrant carpet.

Photos: South Hokkaido Railway Company

ground for Japanese flying squid (*surume ika*), a local specialty of Hakodate. In squid fishing, boats head out to sea at night and use bright lights to attract their catch. The sight of these lights floating in the darkness has long been known as *isaribi*, or 'fishing lights,' and their dreamlike glow has become a seasonal summer feature of Hakodate, giving rise to the name 'Donan Isaribi Railway.' Here, *Donan* refers to the southwestern part of Hokkaido.

In particular, the stretch between Izumisawa Station and Moheji Station offers especially fine views. "It's an open, scenic section, with spectacular views from the train windows," says HARUI. Beyond Hakodate Bay, Mount Hakodate comes into view, and under the right weather conditions, passengers can even see the Shimokita Peninsula in Aomori Prefecture.

In spring, the Donan region, centered on Hakodate and served by the South Hokkaido Railway, is transformed by the flowers that bloom along the line, creating colorful vistas throughout the area, according to HARUI.

"In most regions south of Honshu, plum trees bloom first to signal the arrival of spring, followed by cherry blossoms. In southern Hokkaido, however, plum and cherry trees bloom almost simultaneously. In Hakodate, for example, both plum and cherry blossoms begin in late April and are gone by early May, before the start of the Golden Week holidays, a series of national



Route map of the South Hokkaido Railway. The dotted section indicates the through-service segment on the JR Line.

holidays in Japan. From May onward, flowers such as tulips and marigolds come into bloom. In Hokkaido, spring is marked by this dramatic transformation—from the pure white snow of early April to a vibrant, colorful landscape as the flowers gradually appear."

Notable spring flower spots along the line include the *Yae-zakura* (double-flowered cherry blossom) trees at Trappist Monastery near Oshima-tobetsu Station, the *Shiba-zakura* (moss phlox) at the Satsukari Murakami Moss Phlox Garden near Satsukari Station, and the tulip beds at Saraki Cape near Kamaya Station.

In addition to regular trains used by local residents, the South Hokkaido Railway also operates a special sightseeing train called the *Nagamare Kaikyo*. *Nagamare* is a term from the local dialect in the Donan region meaning 'take it easy' or 'relax.' The train runs a round trip between Hakodate Station and Kikonai Station in approximately four hours, even though the journey normally takes about one hour each way. Passengers can enjoy spectacular views of the Tsuraru Strait and meals prepared with local ingredients along the route. At Moheji Station, where the train makes a brief stop, passengers step onto the platform to enjoy fresh seafood grilled at an on-site barbecue.

Such train journeys are made possible with the cooperation of local communities, and the warm, personal hospitality they offer has earned high praise from international tourists. "Going forward, we also want to focus on attracting inbound visitors, including those from Asian countries," HARUI says, while also expressing his enduring commitment to the local community. "Since opening, our company has worked hand in hand with the local municipalities along the line. In March 2026, we celebrate our 10th anniversary, and we hope to continue initiatives that contribute to the revitalization of the communities along the railway."

Across Hokkaido's vast landscapes, late spring is just beginning to arrive. Aboard the South Hokkaido Railway, passengers can enjoy a leisurely ride and experience a spring journey on a local line at a relaxed, unhurried pace. 🌸

Exploring Spectacular Seascapes and a World Heritage Site Along the Gono Line



Photo: Akita Branch Office, East Japan Railway Company

A journey through breathtaking scenery on the Gono Line aboard the Resort Shirakami sightseeing train.

Running 147.2 km between Higashi-Noshiro Station in Akita Prefecture and Kawabe Station in Aomori Prefecture, the Gono Line is widely regarded as one of Japan's most scenic railway routes. From the train windows, passengers are treated to dramatic coastal views and the vibrant spring greenery of Shirakami-Sanchi, which was designated a UNESCO World Natural Heritage site in 1993. (See "The Forests of Shirakami-Sanchi, Japan's First World Natural Heritage Site," in *HIGHLIGHTING Japan* May 2024 issue). This article introduces the highlights of the Gono

Line, where travelers can fully experience the rich natural beauty of northern Tohoku as spring breathes new life into the landscape. (Text: MURAKAMI Kayo)

Running along the Sea of Japan at the northern tip of Honshu, the Gono Line has been cherished by local communities since its full opening in 1936. Since 1997, the sightseeing train Resort Shirakami has been in operation, attracting visitors from Japan and abroad who seek breathtaking scenery and an unforgettable travel experience.

HATAKEYAMA Junya of the Akita Branch Office, East Japan Railway Company, says, "Riding the Gono Line itself is a highlight of the journey. From the changing views of the Sea of Japan to Shirakami-Sanchi, the line captures the essence of northern Tohoku's charm."

Boarding the train at Higashi-Noshiro Station, the starting point on the Akita side, passengers travel north for about 40 minutes. After passing Akita-Shirakami Station, the Sea of Japan comes into view on the left. From here, the train runs along the coastline for roughly 80 km.

One must-visit spot along the Gono Line is Juni-ko, or the Twelve Lakes, located at the foot of

Shirakami-Sanchi. The area is made up of 33 ponds and lakes of varying sizes, among which Aoike, or the "Blue Pond," stands out with its mysterious cobalt-blue waters, as if blue ink had been poured into them. The pond's vivid color remains clear year-round, but the scenery is said to be especially breathtaking in spring.



Photo: PIXTA

In spring, the cobalt-blue waters of Aoike, the "Blue Pond," become even more strikingly clear.

"From May to June, the melting snow further enhances the pond's clarity. Around 11 a.m., when sunlight streams directly from above, the surface of the water shines most vividly. The newly sprouted leaves of the beech trees are reflected in the clear water, creating a scene that seems to embody the vitality of spring."

A shuttle bus operates from Juniko Station to Aoike in coordination with the arrival of the Resort Shirakami, making access to the pond smooth and convenient.

As the train continues north, one of the Gono Line's most spectacular sections awaits between Fukaura and Hiroto stations. Passengers are treated to dramatic scenery as waves crash against rugged cliffs along the Sea of Japan, filling the train windows with



Photo: Akita Branch Office, East Japan Railway Company

Inside the Resort Shirakami (Buna train set). The interior features abundant use of local woods, including Akita cedar and Aomori cypress, along with large windows that create an open, airy atmosphere.

Along the coastline for roughly 80 km.



Photo: Akita Branch Office, East Japan Railway Company



Photo: PIXTA

Above: Scenic views along the Sea of Japan coast between Fukaura and Hiroto stations.

Below: Senjojiki Coast, where a rocky plateau, said to have been formed from ground uplift, stretches out into the sea.

breathhtaking views. On the Resort Shirakami (No. 1, 3, and 5), the train slows down along this stretch so travelers can fully enjoy the scenery.

“Fukaura Town is also known as the ‘Sunset Town,’ and the beauty of the sun setting over the horizon is not to be missed,” says HATAKEYAMA.

Further along, at Senjojiki Station, the Resort Shirakami (No. 2, 3, 4, and 5) makes a 15-minute stop. In front of the station, a rocky plateau extends into the sea, said to have been formed when the ground uplifted during the 1792 earthquake. Passengers can explore the coastline on foot, and walking among the uniquely shaped rocks, they are sure to be awed by the natural beauty of the formations.

After passing Ajigasawa Station, the scenery outside the train changes dramatically. The route turns inland from the coast, and apple orchards come into view. In early May, the white blossoms of the apple trees bloom, bringing a sweep of spring color to the countryside along the route. “Apple blossoms are as beautiful as cherry blossoms. The train runs between the orchards, creating a view that can only be seen at this time of year,” says HATAKEYAMA.

In addition, the Resort Shirakami continues from Kawabe Station onto the Ou Main Line,



Route map of the Gono Line. The dotted section indicates the through-service segment on the Ou Main Line (operated by the Resort Shirakami).



The Resort Shirakami runs between apple orchards.


Photo: Akita Branch Office, East Japan Railway Company

providing access to Hirosaki Station in central Aomori Prefecture. About 15 minutes by bus from Hirosaki Station, Hirosaki Park surrounds Hirosaki Castle, which was built approximately 400 years ago, and is home to some 2,600 cherry trees that bloom each spring, making it one of Aomori Prefecture’s most renowned cherry blossom viewing spots.

The blossoms typically reach their peak in late April. Even after full bloom has passed, visitors can enjoy the sight known as *hanaikada*, or “flower rafts,” when fallen petals blanket the castle moat. This striking scene draws many visitors from Japan and abroad each year.

To help passengers more deeply enjoy their journey on the Gono Line, onboard events are held on the Resort Shirakami, offering opportunities to experience regional traditional culture. Travelers can listen to live performances of the Tsugaru shamisen, a style of shamisen music handed down in the Tsugaru region of Aomori Prefecture, as well as storytelling performances in the Tsugaru dialect featuring local folktales. The train also presents performances of the Kinta Mamejo puppet theater, an Intangible Folk Cultural Property of Aomori Prefecture.

“The Tsugaru dialect has a distinctive sound even within the Japanese language, so even if you do not understand the words, you can still enjoy its rhythm and atmosphere.”

Why not set out on a journey aboard the Gono Line, one of Japan’s most scenic railway routes, and experience the arrival of spring in northern Tohoku? 



Hanaikada at Hirosaki Castle, where fallen cherry blossom petals blanket the moat.

Photo: PIXTA



A live Tsugaru shamisen performance aboard the Resort Shirakami.

Photo: Akita Branch Office, East Japan Railway Company

Remote Tadami Line: Spring Encounters in the Depths of Oku-Aizu



Train passes under cherry trees on the Tadami Line.

Photo: Fukushima Prefecture

Eleven years after torrential rains forced the closure of part of the line, Tadami Line service has been fully restored, thanks to strong calls from local residents and railway enthusiasts. The line spans a total length of 135.2 km, connecting Aizu-Wakamatsu Station in Fukushima Prefecture and Koide Station in Niigata Prefecture. In this issue, we explore the singularly beautiful scenery that unfolds outside the train window only in spring-time – landscapes woven of lingering snow, emerging green growth, and cherry blossoms in bloom. (Text: MURAKAMI Kayo)

The Tadami Line traverses Oku-Aizu, a mountainous region that straddles the border between Fukushima and Niigata prefectures, crossing numerous bridges over the Tadami River along its line. With scenic views of the train winding its way through the valley, global media outlets have hailed the line as “the world’s most romantic railway,” attracting many tourists from overseas in recent years.

Still, the Tadami Line was once in danger of closure. Sections of the route became impassable when heavy rain washed away multiple bridges in July 2011. Snow cuts off mountain roads in the region each winter, and the train serves as a vital lifeline for local residents. Fukushima Prefecture, local municipalities along the line, and the railway company responded to urgent requests from residents, working together to restore train service. Thanks to their dedication, the long-awaited resumption of operations for the full line was finally achieved in October 2022.



Cherry blossoms in full bloom around Tsuruga Castle

Photo: Aizu-Wakamatsu Tourism Bureau



Route map of the Tadami Line



Cherry blossoms in bloom at Fukuman Kokuzo Bosatsu Enzoji Temple



The Tadami Line crosses Tadami River Bridge No. 1. An observation deck within walking distance of the roadside station Oze Kaido Mishima-juku, offers a view of the train, bridge, reflection on the water, and fresh new spring greenery.

in red tiles and ornamented by cherry blossoms in full bloom stands in magnificent beauty—a scene that heralds the arrival of spring.

Boarding the Tadami Line and leaving the Aizu Basin behind, the train soon arrives at Aizu-Yanaizu Station, the gateway to the Oku-Aizu region. Near the station, Fukuman Kokuzo Bosatsu Enzoji Temple offers a quintessentially Japanese spring experience — historic temple buildings beautifully complemented by cherry blossoms.

As the train travels along the Tadami River heading into the mountains, the scenery outside the window grows increasingly dynamic. After a while, the train approaches Tadami River Bridge No. 1, an illustrative scenic spot along the Tadami Line. As the train crosses the bridge, a breathtaking view unfolds below—the calm surface of the river reflecting the green mountains.

SAKAI Haruko, who serves as an in-train guide and regional coordinator, says, “From this point onward, the train line crosses a series of bridges over the Tadami River, one after another. The fresh greenery and ever-changing scenery as the train makes its way across each bridge in spring are captivating.”

Getting off the train at Hayato Station to take the rowboats at Mugenkyo is an experience not to be missed. In the past, paddle boats were used to cross the river to reach settlements on the opposite bank, long before bridges were built. Today, local volunteers have revived this traditional ferry culture as a unique attraction for visitors.

“From May to June in particular, snowmelt transforms the Tadami River into a vibrant emerald green,

HAKOZAKI Shota of the Fukushima Prefecture Tadami Line Administrative Office explains, “It is thanks to the Tadami Line that tourists make the journey deep into the mountains of Oku-Aizu. Now that the Tadami Line is restored, municipalities along the line are also quite excited to bring even more energy to their local areas.”

The journey begins at Aizu-Wakamatsu Station, gateway to the city that still retains the atmosphere of a historic castle town. From the station, a short bus ride leads to Tsuruga Castle, where the castle tower crowned

creating a striking contrast with the fresh new green carpeting the surrounding mountains. As temperatures rise, mist tends to gather over the river's surface. The boats gliding slowly through the fog are a truly magical sight.”


The area around Tadami Station, the westernmost point in Fukushima Prefecture, is rich in nature and home to expansive virgin Japanese beech forests that are also a registered UNESCO Global Geopark (Biosphere Reserves).¹ From April to May, as emerging beech buds break through the lingering snow on the mountainside, the scenery grows more vivid each day.

“The sparse greenery of the morning spreads rapidly by evening, covering the entire mountain in soft new foliage as buds begin to open. In Oku-Aizu, the tender green of the new growth is, I think, an even more beautiful than the cherry blossoms. Just a short hike from Tadami Station, a roughly two-hour trek through the beech forest offers views of the fresh spring greenery.”

On the Tadami Line, passengers are occasionally greeted by local residents waving at the train. This is based on the “Everyone Wave to the Tadami Line” ordinance adopted by six municipalities along the line — starting with Uonuma City in Niigata Prefecture, and including five towns and villages in Fukushima Prefecture, such as Tadami Town.

The ordinance was adopted to foster a warm custom of waving at any train one sees to convey hospitality to passengers, while encouraging and deepening local residents' affection for the Tadami Line.

Along the Tadami Line, the varying elevations create a relay of peak seasons, as cherry blossoms and fresh greenery appear in succession from mid-April through May. One of its charms is that, during the season, passengers are sure to encounter signs of spring somewhere along the route.

“Oku-Aizu is a place where Japan's original landscapes and the warmth of its people are still cherished today. I hope riding the Tadami Line gives one the same warmth and comfort as coming home.” 



From the Mugenkyo rowboats, trains on the Tadami Line can be seen running along the Tadami River.



Locals wave at a passing Tadami Line train

1. The UNESCO Global Geopark project is aimed at blending ecosystem conservation with sustainable utilization. These initiatives develop local communities, while preserving their natural environment and culture. There are 10 registered UNESCO Global Geoparks in Japan.



Photo: Tonami City

Enjoy Beautiful Views of Tulips and Rice Paddies along the Johana Line

A train car (KiHa 40 series model 1) on the Johana Line, featuring a tulip-themed headmark.

Extending for about 30km across Toyama Prefecture from Takaoka Station to Johana Station, the Johana Line is a truly historical local line which started operations in 1897. Tonami City along the route hosts the Tonami Tulip Fair from late April each year, when around 3.5 million tulips come into full bloom. This article introduces the charm of the Johana Line in spring, where travelers can enjoy colorful tulips and the nostalgic rural landscapes.

(Text: MURAKAMI Kayo)

The Johana Line is one of Toyama Prefecture's longest-running railway lines. Now directly connected to Shin-Takaoka Station on the Hokuriku Shinkansen, today's Johana Line is frequented by large numbers of visitors from both inside and outside Toyama Prefecture.

Spring on the Johana Line is symbolized by the Tonami Tulip Fair. Each year around 300,000 visitors from Japan and overseas attend the Fair, held from late April to early May during Japan's consecutive holiday period. "When the Fair is on, we run a number of special train services each day using a diesel train car with a tulip-themed headmark, contributing to a really vibrant Fair for spring," says NISHINO Takashi

of Toyama City Office's Planning and General Affairs Department.

The main venue of the Tonami Tulip Fair is Tonami Tulip Park, just a short walk from Tonami Station. Around 3.5 million tulips are in bloom during the Fair, comprising 300 varieties. Sights at the park include the Large Flowerbed, where 210,000 tulips form colorful designs, and the 4m-high, 30m-long Snowy Great Valley tulip corridor, inspired by the Tateyama Kurobe Alpine Route, a scenic spot that stands for Toyama Prefecture. The sheer scale of the tulip arrangements offers a fascinating spectacle for visitors.

"When tulip cultivation began in Tonami City in 1918, the flower was still rare in Japan. Since then,



Photo: PKXTA

The Tulip Tower and Large Flowerbed at the Tonami Tulip Fair



Photo: Tonami Sankyoson Museum

Scenery featuring *sankyoson* settlements



Route map of the Johana Line

tulips have been grown for over a century and have developed into a local specialty of

the region. Currently, Tonami City boasts the largest tulip bulb cultivation area in Japan. Moreover, there are few places outside Japan where tulip fields on this scale can be seen.”

Meanwhile, the Tonami Tulip Gallery close to the park offers an opportunity not only to admire tulips blooming throughout the year thanks to the latest cultivation technologies, but also to learn about tulip cultivation methods and the history of these flowers.

During the fair, tulips can be enjoyed not only inside the venue but also throughout the city. The Tulip Farm event, held in several tulip producers' fields within the city, is another popular attraction for visitors. The Tulip Farm Bus operates four times a day, taking passengers on an approximately one-hour circular route around the various fields, offering enjoyable opportunities for a close-up look at these great expanses of tulips. This special experience can only be enjoyed in an area where tulip bulbs are produced.

“Walk through the city, and colorful tulip fields come into view everywhere. The whole experience is rooted in the warm-hearted, welcoming spirit of the local residents who have prepared their city for the Fair. Many residents volunteer to set up planters along the roadside. It is a delightful surprise for visitors coming here: ‘Wherever I walk in Tonami, I’m greeted by tulips everywhere,’ they say.”

Another charm of the Johana Line is the picturesque landscape created by the rice paddies. As the train passes by Tonami towards Johana, an unusual landscape — traditional farmhouses scattered across




The Johana Line train passes through rice paddies that reflect the surrounding scenery like a vast mirror.

a fan-shaped expanse of rice paddies in a vast plain — opens up before the window. This type of settlement is called a *sankyoson* or “scattered village”.

“This style of village — where houses are scattered individually among the rice paddies — is one of the Japan’s oldest village landscapes. In late April, the rice-paddy plain is filled with water prior to rice-planting, and it reflects its surroundings like a vast mirror, beautifully setting off the train as it weaves its way through the fields.”

Those seeking a truly luxurious way of taking in this view are recommended to experience the Belles Montagnes et Mer (nicknamed the *berumonta*), a special sightseeing train that runs only on weekends. The train’s name comes from the French words for “beautiful mountains and sea.” Its interior is designed around the concept of a “moving gallery,” in which the window frame encloses the ever-changing *sankyoson* landscape like the frame of a picture, allowing passengers to appreciate the lovely scenes like works of art.

The Johana Line trains passing through this nostalgic-looking landscape continue to run on diesel even today, giving the line an old-time atmosphere. However, newer and more environmentally friendly train cars are scheduled to be introduced in 2028. Surveys are currently underway to explore connecting the Johana Line with the Himi Line, creating a single through-service from Shin-Takaoka Station, ensuring even more convenient travel for passengers in the future.

For just a few more years, passengers can enjoy the nostalgic red train as it winds through the rice paddies and tulip fields. This spring, don’t miss the chance to ride the Johana Line and experience scenery that can only be seen at this time of year. 

1. A diesel train car series manufactured by Japanese National Railways between 1977 and 1982.



The Belles Montagnes et Mer train car

Scenic Springtime on the Tarumi Railway

The Tarumi Railway stretches for a total of 34.5km from Ogaki Station to Tarumi Station, in Gifu Prefecture. This local railway line runs through the mountain gorges, partly following the course of the Neo River. It connects many wonderful places to see cherry blossoms in spring, so it is sometimes called the “cherry blossom line” and drawing many visitors. In this article, we spoke with KAWASE Narumi of the Planning and Sales Department, Tarumi Railway Co., Ltd., about some must-see spots along the local train line.

(Text: MURAKAMI Kayo)

Starting from Ogaki Station in Gifu Prefecture, roughly 40 minutes by train from Nagoya station in Aichi Prefecture, the Tarumi Railway winds its way through the mountains of Gifu. Originally opened in 1956 as the JNR¹ Tarumi Line, covering only a portion of its current route, the line was re-established in 1984 as the Tarumi Railway under a third-sector² railroad company, and extended by around 11km from Komi Station to Tarumi Station. Operating today as a single-car train with a solo driver, it passes through landscapes of rice paddy fields and mountain-surrounded gorges. “This railway packs an amazing amount of Japanese history, culture, food experiences and nature into a compact route,” says KAWASE, who works as a public relations officer and



Route map of the Tarumi Railway



A train on the Tarumi Railway travels through a “tunnel” of cherry blossoms near Tanigumiguchi Station in Gifu Prefecture.

Photo: PIXTA

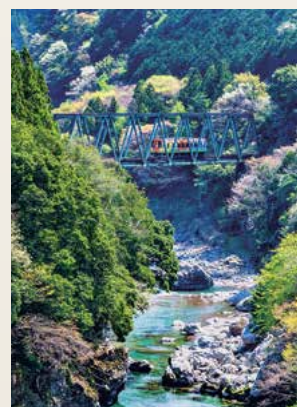
attendant on the Tarumi Railway.

As it heads through the mountains, the Tarumi Railway crosses 12 bridges in total: one over the Ibi River, one over the Sai River, and 10 over the Neo River. Because the route crosses rivers that meander through the landscape, it offers some dynamic-looking views from the window. “I think this rapidly-changing scenery along this route, winding between mountains and rivers, is really something unique to Japan,” says KAWASE.

In spring, the route is adorned with cherry blossoms in full bloom at various spots along the line.

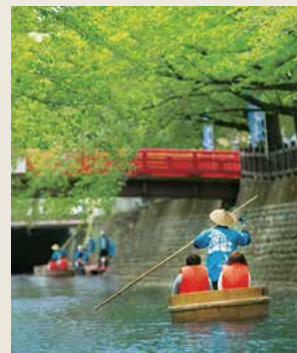
At Suimon River, just a short walk from Ogaki Station, visitors can admire the cherry blossoms while drifting along the river on a raft from late March through early April. From late April to early May, visitors can experience a *tarai-bune* (traditional Japanese tub boat shaped like a barrel) surrounded by fresh greenery (advanced reservations required). Ogaki City, home to Ogaki Station, has been known for centuries as “the City of Water” thanks to its abundant underground water. It is a popular spot among visitors who come for raft trips that pass around 100 cherry blossom trees and fresh greenery along the banks of the Suimon River, which flows through the center of the town.

From Ogaki Station, passengers make their way north on the Tarumi Railway to Tanigumiguchi Station.



The Tarumi Railway crosses a bridge spanning the gorge of the Neo River.

Photo: PIXTA



Visitors can ride in a traditional *tarai-bune* while admiring the fresh greenery.

Photo: Ogaki Tourism Association



Photo: Ibigawa Town



Photo: PKTA



Photo: SOU Inc.

Left: The approach to Tanigumi-san Kegon-ji is known as a famous cherry blossom viewing spot in spring.

Center: Hinata Station, cherry blossoms and railway bridge together create a charming scene.

Right: The Neodani Usuzumi-Zakura in full bloom

The surrounding area is almost blanketed by cherry trees planted there, and when they are in full bloom, passengers can enjoy the magical sight of the train passing through the “cherry blossom tunnel.”

Meanwhile, Tanigumi-san Kegon-ji, located about 10 minutes by bus from Tanigumiguchi Station, is a historic temple dating back to the Heian period (late 8th to late 12th centuries). In spring, the cherry trees lining its approach bloom beautifully, and the temple is well known as a celebrated viewing spot.

Hinata Station is another scenic spot along the route, as the train makes its way north. This station is popular as a perfect place for photographs, because the waiting room with cherry trees standing directly behind it, the nearby railway bridge and tunnel, and the train itself can be captured in a single shot.

Visitors who get off at Tarumi Station (the terminal station) and walk 15 minutes up a slope are greeted by the sight of the Neodani Usuzumi-Zakura, literally meaning “diluted ink cherry blossom,” one of Japan’s “three great cherry blossom trees.” Over 1,500 years old, this tree was designated a Natural Monument of Japan in 1922. Its pale pink buds open up into white flowers, before turning gray after the peak of the bloom. On a typical year, around 8,000 people a day visit this tree between late March and early April.

“It is precisely because the Neodani Usuzumi-Zakura has been lovingly protected by local people for over 1,500 years that it continues to stand in magnificent form to this day. Many descendant trees of this venerable giant are planted alongside the railway tracks, transforming the Tarumi Railway into a mass of pink blossom that is well worthy of its nickname, ‘cherry blossom line.’ Visitors can also enjoy exploring the areas around the stations on foot.”

But beautiful scenery is not the only delight on offer along the Tarumi Railway. Visitors can also enjoy regional specialties made with seasonal ingredients

from along the railway line: wild vegetables in spring and sweetfish from the Neo River in summer. In fall, the region’s prized *fuyugaki*, a persimmon sometimes known as “the king of sweet persimmons” come into season. In winter, the local specialty is game cuisine. The Tarumi Railway operates special seasonal themed trains that allow passengers to enjoy local cuisine on board, and they are said to be highly popular.

Another essential part of the Tarumi Railway’s appeal is the nostalgic atmosphere created by its colorful, unique-looking train cars and station buildings.

With six cars currently in operation, the designs include not only a light blue car which evokes the clear waters of the Neo River, but other brightly-colored designs featuring advertisements for local companies. Passing through the rich natural scenery, these trains with their vivid-looking designs are a charming sight.

Seventeen of the Tarumi Railway’s 19 stations remain unstaffed, and most of these retain the old-fashioned appear-

ance they had when the railway first opened. There is a charmingly nostalgic air to this line, from the handwritten signs to the wooden waiting room buildings; these are not replicas, but the original structures, preserved over the decades. “These days, more and more young people are coming here, attracted by the ‘Showa-retro’³ atmosphere,” says KAWASE.

Getting off at one of these old-fashioned stations and strolling around in the nearby area while waiting for the next train is an experience unique to a local line. Visitors are sure to love a trip to this railway when the cherry blossoms bloom and the fresh green leaves of spring appear. ▮



Photo: SOU Inc.

The six trains in operation, with their vivid designs

1. An abbreviation for “Japanese National Railways.” In 1987, the company was privatized and split into six regional passenger railway companies and one freight railway company, among others.
2. A third-sector railway company is a business entity established through joint investment by a private-sector company and either the national government or a local government.
3. “Showa-retro” is a nostalgic movement in Japan, which is about appreciating objects, designs, cultural aspects and atmospheres which evoke the lifestyle and culture of the Showa period (1926 to 1989).

Enjoy Good Old-Fashioned Steam Train Travel with Great Scenery on The SL Yamaguchi

Steam locomotive (SL) played an active role in the early days of railways. Today, the SL Yamaguchi still billows out smoke and white steam from its beautifully glossy black body, a sight that captivates visitors. Step aboard the train and immerse yourself in wood-paneled passenger cars and spacious box seats, evoking the feeling of traveling back in time.

(Text: YANAGISAWA Miho)

SL are popular not only with railway enthusiasts but also with many tourists. Riding an SL train transports one back to a more leisurely and luxurious era of travel, with its distinctive, heart-stirring whistle at departure, the comforting rhythm of its rolling wheels, and the slight scent of coal drifting through the air. Even today, it is possible to come across several of these majestic locomotives on Japan's railways. Especially popular among them is the tourist train SL Yamaguchi, which connects Shin-Yamaguchi Station in Yamaguchi Prefecture to Tsuwano Station in Shimane Prefecture.

The SL Yamaguchi is hauled by steam locomotives of the C57 class —affectionately nicknamed as the “Noble Lady” for its beautifully balanced form — and the D51 class, renowned for their large, powerful, and commanding presence. The passenger car designs have been recreated based on the trains in use during

the golden age of steam around the late 1930s to the 1940s, blending a retro look with comfort. Car 1 (the front car) has an observation deck that lets passengers directly experience the billowing smoke and wind while enjoying the sound of the train in motion more intensely.

What makes the journey on the SL Yamaguchi even more special is the scenery along the way. ISHIMURA Tatsunori, Community Engagement Manager of Hiroshima Branch Office, Chugoku Headquarters, West Japan Railway Company, says,



The SL Yamaguchi hauls passenger cars in beautiful form with a spectacular billow of smoke. Pictured is the C57 class, affectionately known as Kifujin, or the “Noble Lady.”

Photos: Courtesy of West Japan Railway Company

The lush, green rural scenery visible from the train windows is another highlight. The photo shows the D51 class, affectionately known as Degoichi (“D51”).





Photo: Courtesy of West Japan Railway Company

Standard-class reserved seats. The most modern of the vintage passenger cars, it features a spacious interior that highlights the natural texture of wood to offer a nostalgic and relaxing atmosphere for passengers to fully enjoy their journey.



Photo: PKTA

Cherry blossoms adorn the five-story pagoda of Rurikoji Temple,¹ a National Treasure.² The sight brings together the history of Yamaguchi City and the beauty of spring.



Route map of the SL Yamaguchi

“In 2026, the SL Yamaguchi starts to run in May, and the fresh greenery at this time of year is beautiful. I think the countryside scenery around mid-June is also impressive.” Between Tokusa Station in Yamaguchi Prefecture and Tsuwano Station, young rice seedlings sway in the breeze above water-filled paddies, creating a scene that resembles a vast green carpet. With the SL passing by, it feels like a condensed view of a primal Japanese landscape.

In 2026, SL Yamaguchi service is scheduled from May to August, but in some years, it starts running in March, allowing travelers to combine the journey with cherry blossom viewing. Yamaguchi City was selected for the New York Times “52 places to go in 2024.” At Rurikoji Temple,¹ which is featured on the list, one can

enjoy a scene like a painting: cherry blossoms in full bloom elegantly framing the five-story pagoda.

Other highlights are the Ato area and its beautifully flowing clear streams; and Taikodani Inari Shrine, whose roughly one thousand vermilion torii gates form a tunnel-like pathway. Why not hop aboard the SL Yamaguchi, the only regularly operating steam locomotive in Western Japan, and embark on a journey to explore the region's famed sights? 🗺️

1. A temple in Yamaguchi Prefecture. The five-story pagoda on the temple grounds is a designated National Treasure (see 2.) of Japan and considered a tangible cultural property of high value from the perspective of world culture. Its beauty is praised as one of the Three Famous Pagodas of Japan and it is regarded as the most outstanding architectural work of the mid-Muromachi period (15th century).
2. Tangible cultural assets such as buildings, crafts, sculpture, and historical materials are designated Important Tangible Cultural Properties. Items of particularly high value in terms of world culture are designated as National Treasures and are protected accordingly.

RAILWAY PHOTOGRAPHER NAKAI SEIYA ON THE APPEAL OF RAILWAY PHOTOGRAPHY



Photo: NAKAI Seiya

This photo by NAKAI captures the SL Yamaguchi billowing steam and smoke through the town of Tsuwano, Shimane Prefecture, in spring. The contrast between people enjoying the cherry blossoms and the powerful steam locomotive thundering past creates a striking scene.

In Japan's photography scene, there is a genre known as “railway photography,” which focuses on capturing trains. Photographer NAKAI Seiya stands apart from railway photography that places the train itself at the center. He is known for a style that captures railways within the unique

landscapes of each region, and sometimes deliberately blurs the train to let the scenery take the lead, conveying the sense of travel and the atmosphere woven by the train and the landscape.

Why is railway photography so popular in Japan? NAKAI explains, “We have so many railway enthusiasts here, and I think that is a unique form of Japanese culture. It shows how railways are inextricably linked to daily life in Japan.”

He highlights steam locomotives: “Their appeal lies not in beauty of their design, but in functional beauty that comes from the pursuit of performance. In particular, the SL Yamaguchi was revived as a tourist train. It makes an outstanding subject for photography, showcasing the sheer power of the large C57 or D51 locomotives as they haul the passenger cars.” He adds that the wealth of shooting locations, including Chomon Gorge¹ and mountain passes, where the train can be captured billowing steam and smoke and running powerfully, is another reason he is drawn to photograph the SL Yamaguchi.

Capturing beautiful railway images requires not only favorable weather and other conditions, but also skill. This is exactly why the joy of capturing a fleeting moment is so immense, and why it has the power to move the viewer.

1. A gorge along the midsection of the Abu River in central Yamaguchi Prefecture. It is distinguished by its long stretches of cliffs and dramatic rock formations.



FEATURES

A Tosaden streetcar, ideal for a leisurely tour around downtown Kochi.

Riding Kochi's Beloved Streetcars: An Experience That Blends into Everyday Life

Known as “Nangoku Tosa,” meaning “Tosa, the warm southern land”—the former name of the region—Kochi Prefecture is sometimes the first place in Japan where the cherry blossoms are officially declared in bloom. It is also home to the country’s oldest surviving streetcar system, which still runs through the city. As the first signs of spring bring a sense of anticipation, riding these historic streetcars offers a front-row seat to the changing scenery outside the window. Step aboard for a journey that blends seamlessly into everyday life in Kochi.

(Text: YANAGISAWA Miho)

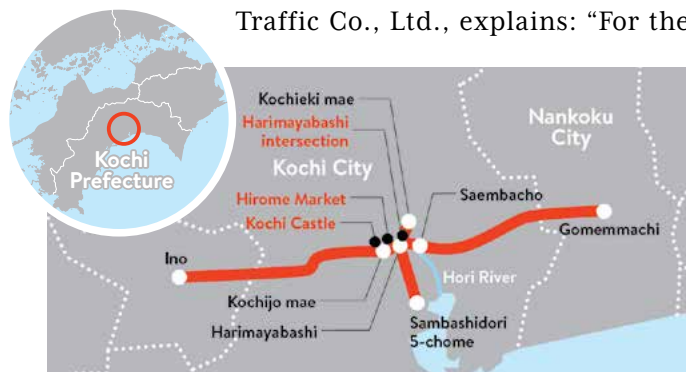
In Kochi City, the central city of Kochi Prefecture, streetcars that have long been cherished by residents continue to run more than 120 years after their introduction. Opened in May 1904 as the 10th streetcar system in Japan, the line is the country’s oldest still operating on its original track alignment.

From Harimayabashi—Kochi City’s transportation hub—the network extends east on the Gomen Line, west on the Ino Line, north on the Ekimae Line, and south on the Sambashi Line. With a total length of 25.3 kilometers and 76 stops, it forms one of the longest streetcar networks in Japan.

Connecting the city center with the suburbs, the streetcars are also an easy and convenient mode of

transportation for visitors.

TAKAHASHI Miho of the streetcar planning section of the railway operations department at Tosaden Traffic Co., Ltd., explains: “For the



Route map of Tosaden Streetcar



Photo: Tosaden Traffic Co., Ltd.

A rare “diamond crossing,¹” where tracks intersect at the same level, can be found at locations such as the Harimayabashi intersection. Tosaden’s diamond crossing is particularly unusual, as on rare occasions three streetcars turning left and right overlap on the crossing at the same moment—an event known as a “triple cross.”



Photo: PIXTA

Cherry trees lining the Hori River stretch their branches over the water, allowing visitors to admire the blossoms up close. Only from the water can one fully appreciate petals drifting across the river’s surface.



Photo: Tosaden Traffic Co., Ltd.



One of the streetcars’ charms is their wide variety of designs. The car on the left is the *Ishingo*, a restored recreation of Tosaden’s original streetcar, while the cars on the above are several foreign models.

people of Kochi, the streetcars are an indispensable part of the city’s social infrastructure. At the same time, for many visitors, riding the streetcar itself becomes a highlight of their trip. Traveling while experiencing the rhythms of daily life and the local culture is part of the appeal.”

Spring is the best season to explore Kochi City, when attractions are scattered along the streetcar lines. Just a one-minute walk from Saembacho Stop, visitors can admire a row of more than 120 cherry trees blooming along the Hori River. The arching branches intertwine overhead to form a spectacular tunnel of blossoms. Viewing the cherry blossoms from a sight-seeing boat offers yet another memorable experience.

Just a three-minute walk from Kochijo mae Stop, Kochi Castle is another landmark that takes on a special charm in spring. Within its main enclosure (*honmaru*), where the feudal lord once resided, Kochi Castle is the only castle in Japan to have all its original buildings reconstructed on their original sites and preserved together as they were at the time of its founding. Fifteen of its structures are designated Important Cultural Properties of Japan.

Surrounded by approximately 220 cherry trees, the castle presents a particularly striking scene in bloom. In

the evening, illuminations create a magical nighttime display of cherry blossoms that captivates visitors.

The appeal of Tosaden’s streetcars extends beyond the scenery along the line. The fleet is also known for its variety, including retro cars that retain their nostalgic wooden plank flooring; the *Ishingo*, a restored Tosaden’s original streetcar; vintage cars formerly used in other parts of Japan; and foreign cars from Austria, Norway, and Portugal.²

“In 1984, on its 85th anniversary, the ‘World Streetcar’ project was launched, and old foreign streetcars were introduced. By running these foreign vehicles, the aim was to have people rediscover the appeal of the streetcars,” says TAKAHASHI.

Special tours featuring the foreign streetcars, as well as the *Okyaku*³ Train, where passengers can enjoy a party on board, are also organized as streetcar-centered events that serve as a stage for bringing people together.

Streetcars have been running through the heart of the city for more than 120 years. On board these slow-moving trams, visitors can watch people returning from Hirome Market, students commuting to school, and families admiring the cherry blossoms outside the window, giving a sense of blending into everyday life. Streetcars traveling through the city serve as the perfect guide to experiencing the character and rhythms of the local streets at a leisurely pace. **■**



Photo: Tosaden Traffic Co., Ltd.

The *Okyaku Train*, where passengers can enjoy a party on board while taking in the streetscapes of Kochi City as the streetcar travels.



Photos: Kochi Castle Management Office

Kochi Castle can be viewed from inside the streetcar as it passes through the Kenchomae intersection in front of the prefectural office, and in spring it becomes a popular spot for enjoying cherry blossoms set against the backdrop of the castle.

1. A grade-level crossing, where tracks intersect at an intersection.
 2. The *Ishingo* and foreign streetcars are now operated only for private charters or special events; they do not run on regular schedules.
 3. In the local Kochi dialect, *okyaku* refers to a gathering or party.

Enjoy a relaxing journey on the Yufuin no Mori Limited Express, embodying Yufuin's Town-Building Vision

The Yufuin no Mori Limited Express is a tourist train running through northern Kyushu that transforms travel itself into an exhilarating experience. The views of cherry blossoms and canola flowers unfolding outside the windows, the cabin space, the food and the service all gently elevate expectations on a spring trip to Yufuin, Oita Prefecture, a tranquil hot spring area.

(Text: YANAGISAWA Miho)

The Yufuin no Mori Limited Express, a tourist train that runs between Fukuoka and Oita Prefectures, holds a special place in Japanese railway culture. This train, which began service in 1989, was a pioneer among sightseeing trains in Japan and has captivated both visitors from Japan and abroad for over 35 years.

The section from Hakata Station to Beppu Station is served only by Line 3 (outbound—toward Beppu Station) and Line 4 (inbound—toward Hakata Station). Other lines run from Hakata Station to Yufuin Station.

The backdrop to the train's inception was in the late 1980s. A major challenge for Kyushu Railway Company, which was established immediately after



Route map of the Yufuin no Mori Limited Express



The Yufuin no Mori Limited Express features two types of cars, known as "Yufuin no Mori I" and "Yufuin no Mori III." Many JR Kyushu trains, including the Yufuin no Mori III in the photo, have a unified design aesthetic created by designer MITOOKA Eiji.

Photo: Kyushu Railway Company

the nationalized railways were dismantled and privatized, was to show people the value of train travel in a new way. ITO Yoshinori, in charge of Tourism and D&S at the company's Sales Department's Sales Section, says, "To encourage customers to actively choose train travel, we had to create trains that would make the journey itself enjoyable."

At the same time, the destination, Yufuin, was also in transition. Yufuin is located right across the mountains from Beppu Onsen, which was already famous nationwide for having the largest number of hot spring sources and the highest spring output in



Photo: Kyushu Railway Company

The salon space on the Yufuin no Mori I. Seats arranged facing the windows allow passengers to enjoy the scenery at a leisurely pace as they travel.



Photo: KUSU-TOWN TOURISM ASSOCIATION

One of the views from the Yufuin no Mori Limited Express is Mount Kirikabu. Its name comes from its shape, which resembles a *kirikabu*, tree stump afloat in the rural landscape.



Photo: KUSU-TOWN TOURISM ASSOCIATION

Also known as “Urami Falls” (Back-View Falls), since the visitor can walk behind the falls to enjoy the view from there. Jion Falls is illuminated in the nighttime, when it shows a different side from its daytime look.

Japan, while Yufuin was not yet widely known at the time. Thus, Yufuin sought to distinguish itself from major hot spring towns like Beppu Onsen, aiming to become a destination where visitors could enjoy a tranquil stay in harmony with nature. It pursued development as a highland resort focused on leisurely healing for mind and body, deliberately avoiding the creation of an entertainment district. ITO explains the train's origins. “In planning the train, we exchanged ideas with the people of Yufuin many times. The clear concept of the ‘Highland Resort Express’ emerged from the desire to honor Yufuin's vision — a lush, stay-and-relax hot spring resort city.”


The Yufuin no Mori Limited Express has high decker seats, which are raised a step above the floor, naturally inviting the eyes outward. The metallic, green-based colors of the exterior and interior are consistent with colors that harmonize with the forest. “From the moment you get onboard, an extraordinary journey begins,” says ITO.

The journey from Hakata to Yufuin takes about 2 hours and 15 minutes. The scenery outside the window changes dramatically during the trip. The train pulls out of the city, runs through the countryside, and eventually enters a valley intersected by mountains and rivers. In the section where the Kusu River meanders, the train follows the natural contours of the terrain, and the scenery of the valley unfolds in succession. Announcements and tourism information are provided for specific highlights along the route. The train slows down as it passes Jion Falls, a two-tiered waterfall that has a 20-meter upper drop and a 10-meter lower drop. Particularly in spring, the river and waterfall sparkle in the gentle sunlight, and one gets the feeling that the scenery itself is part of the “show” making this journey exciting. Moreover, at the journey's destination, Yufuin, if the timing is right, a picturesque scene awaits: cherry and canola blossoms

blooming along Mount Yufu and the Oita River.

Additionally, the onboard experience is another major attraction of this train. At the buffet, one can enjoy drinks and light snacks made with local foods, as well as pre-order-only boxed lunches, all while enjoying the scenery from one's seat. ITO adds, “Unlike a car journey, a train trip takes you to your destination in comfort, allowing you to relax while slowly enjoying the scenery and meals along the way.” What makes train travel so appealing is the fact that it requires no driving, and gives travelers freedom to use their time as they wish.

These days, the majority of passengers on the Yufuin no Mori Limited Express are travelers from overseas, especially from Asian countries. Travel agencies outside Japan have praised the train, with some saying, “you can't truly experience Japan's tourist trains without riding it.” Its long-standing, unchanging train design and service have cultivated a brand value that transcends borders. The train tickets are relatively affordable; although more expensive than an express bus, it is still relatively accessible among special tourist trains. The train is also characterized by its higher usage among younger people compared with other tourist trains. ITO sums it up: “It offers a slightly special space that you can enjoy while being relaxed. This stance has won widespread support.”

The Yufuin no Mori Limited Express is much more than a means of transportation. Riding it becomes a memorable part of the journey, gradually building anticipation for the destination. This bountiful flow of time probably explains the train's enduring popularity over the years. 



A conductor gives tourism information near Jion Falls, one of the highlights along the route.

Photo: Kyushu Railway Company

GREEN×EXPO 2027: Opening in Just One Year

Preparations are steadily progressing with just one year remaining until the opening of the International Horticultural Expo 2027, Yokohama (GREEN×EXPO 2027), to be held in Yokohama City, Kanagawa Prefecture. This article gives an overview of the Expo, which promotes coexistence with nature and the creation of a sustainable society through flowers and greenery, while highlighting its main attractions.

Conceptual image of the main garden of the GREEN×EXPO 2027 (as of March 2026)

Image: Courtesy of GREEN×EXPO Association



The official logo (left) and official mascot character (right) of the Expo. The character design is by video and art director MAKINO Atsushi. The mascot character's name was conceived by KITAHARA Yae, representing a state in which people and all forms of life resonate and connect with each other.

GREEN×EXPO 2027
Official mascot character
Tunku Tunku
©Expo 2027

Overview of the International Horticultural Expo 2027, Yokohama

Abbreviated name:	GREEN×EXPO 2027
Theme:	Scenery of the Future for Happiness
Expo site:	The former Kamiseya Communication Facility, Yokohama City, Kanagawa Prefecture (Approximately 100 hectares/250 acres [80 hectares/200 acres for the main event area]) Shuttle buses are scheduled to provide connections from the Sotetsu Main Line's Seya Station and Mitsukyo Station, JR Line Tokaichiba Station, and Tokyu Line Minami-machida Grandberry Park Station
Duration:	Friday, March 19, 2027 – Sunday, September 26, 2027
Participating countries:	Approximately 70 countries and international organizations planned
Organizer:	The Japan Association for the International Horticultural Expo 2027, Yokohama (GREEN×EXPO Association)

The GREEN×EXPO 2027, to be held from March 19 to September 26, 2027, will be the largest horticultural exposition held in Japan in 37 years since The International Garden and Greenery Exposition, Osaka, Japan, 1990. Under the theme “Scenery of the Future for Happiness”, the Expo aims to reacknowledge the diverse values of plants like flowers and trees as natural capital assets, reaffirm their value, and present a picture of coexistence with nature and the happiness that comes from it. In addition, the Expo seeks to address global challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss by creating and promoting concrete actions to address them.

Yokohama City, the host site of the Expo, has served as Japan’s gateway for horticultural products since the opening of its port in 1859. Serving as the first location where roses, tulips and other Western flowers were imported, it has continuously fostered an impressive culture of gardening. The vast 100-hectare (approx. 250-acre) GREEN×EXPO 2027 site will bring together ten million flowers and much other greenery, creating a space where visitors can experience richly abundant nature and biodiversity. It will feature a variety of different flowers in bloom throughout the exhibition period, from spring to autumn. With the opening

in March coinciding with cherry blossom season, visitors will be welcomed by around 600 cherry trees of 40 varieties. The Expo is expected to offer visitors a place to reflect on a happy future for the planet and deepen their understanding of the global environment, all while enjoying the diverse exhibits and experiences and feeling the soothing effects of plants, surrounded by flowers and greenery.



Example of a GREEN×EXPO 2027 poster

Image: Courtesy of GREEN×EXPO Association

Four Sub-Themes and Five Villages

To provide perspectives embodying the main theme, the GREEN×EXPO 2027 has established four sub-themes: (1) Harmony with Nature; (2) Co-existence through Greenery and Agriculture; (3) Creation of New Industries; and (4) Resolution through Co-operation. Building on these themes, the site will feature exhibition zones designed by domestic and international exhibitor, as well as five concept areas called “villages.” These areas will offer visitors a range of experiences along with exhibitions by exhibiting companies and organizations on the theme of a future society in harmony with nature.

The first is the Urban GX Village, which will feature exhibitions by telecommunications carriers, construction companies, and others, providing a venue for visitors to engage with the latest technologies for achieving a green society. The second, the Craft Village, will bring together forms of traditional Japanese craftsmanship that have been cultivated alongside nature. The third, the Farm & Food Village, will promote well-being through agriculture and food, while the fourth, the Kids Village, will provide a place for children, the future inhabitants of Earth, to have fun learning about nature and the world. Finally, the fifth, the SATOYAMA Village, will serve as a venue where visitors can rediscover the comfort of living in harmony with nature.

The latest information and events related to the GREEN×EXPO 2027 can be found on the official website [<https://expo2027yokohama.or.jp/en/>] (updated on a regular basis).



Conceptual image of the Kids Village

Image: Courtesy of GREEN×EXPO Association



The concept of the Nihon Seifu-en (Japan Pavilion) is “Reconsidering Japan’s View of Nature and Moving Forward into the Future.” Designed by the Japanese government, the exhibition garden draws on agricultural practices carried out in coexistence with nature as well as Japan’s traditional gardening culture and techniques, seeking to present a vision of the future that can be brought about by greenery and to share that vision with the world.

Image: Courtesy of Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

About tickets

Advance ticket sales begin March 19, 2026. Tickets can be purchased at the official website as well as from various ticket vendors. Please refer to the official ticket website [<https://ticket.expo2027yokohama.or.jp/en/>] for details.



QR Code for official ticket website

*Drafted based on information current as of March 20, 2026.

Ikebana Into the Future

OZONO Saihou is a Contemporary Ikebana Artist. In this issue, he speaks about the relationship between ikebana (or *kado*) and art, as well as about his activities outside of Japan.

OZONO Saihou, *Peace Tree*. Created in Shanghai, China. Bicycles painted yellow are used to symbolize peace.

Photo: OZONO Saihou



OZONO Saihou

In the March 2026 issue of *HIGHLIGHTING Japan* (See “Contemporary Ikebana: An Evolved Form of Ikebana,” *HIGHLIGHTING Japan*, March 2026 issue) and the April 2026 issue (See “The Japanese Spirit Within Ikebana,” *HIGHLIGHTING Japan*, April 2026 issue), I explored the fundamentals of ikebana, as an expression of Japanese culture, the Japanese spirituality inherent in this art, and my forward-looking vision as a Contemporary Ikebana Artist. In this article, I introduce the future possibilities of ikebana, particularly its relationship with contemporary art and my activities abroad.

First, I believe that ikebana, particularly the Sogetsu School—one of the three major ikebana schools¹—resonates deeply with contemporary art.

As I noted in the previous issue, ikebana places greater emphasis on

conveying a message or theme than on decorative beauty. Similarly, contemporary art does not necessarily pursue beauty. Rather, it is often driven by a powerful message that arises from the artist’s inner vision. Of course, many other elements also contribute to its creation.

Imagine an unusual or seemingly obscure work hanging in an art gallery. A visitor might superficially glance at it and walk past it with a faint smile, unable to understand its meaning. Yet the message embedded within the work can only begin to be understood through careful engagement—by reading the accompanying caption and listening to the audio guidance.

As one practices ikebana more deeply, one comes to realize that it is not simply a matter of placing a bouquet casually into a glass vase. Rather, one learns to select floral materials and arrange them in ways that embody seasonality and individuality to convey the message one wishes to

express in that moment. For example, I favor an ikebana technique called *hanadome*, which refers to a complex structure of holders that secure flowers at multiple points along the stem. Disposable chopsticks, forks, or even cardboard can serve as a *hanadome* holder inserted between the vessel and the floral material to hold the



OZONO Saihou, *N.D.* The two-dimensional work in the background echoes the three-dimensional work in the foreground, elevating ikebana to an art form. Using the image of a Japanese convenience store, it conveys the breadth and diversity of Japanese culture.

Photo: OZONO Saihou



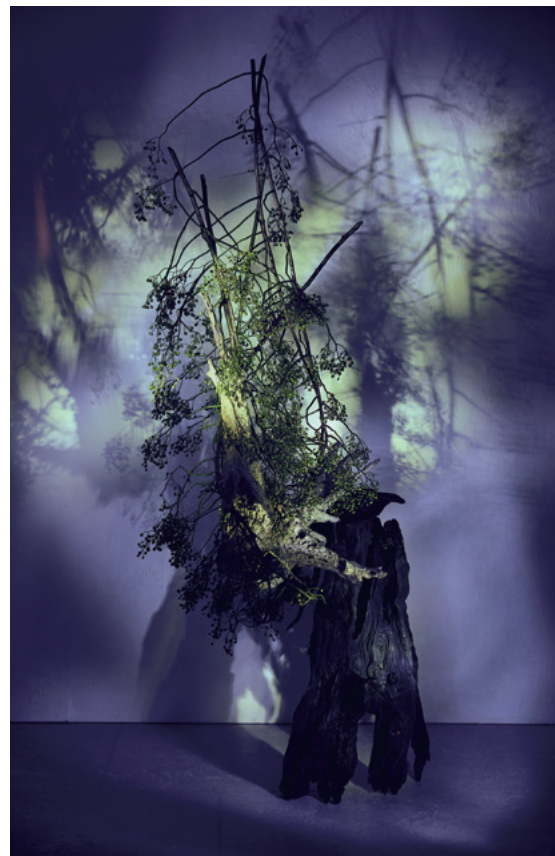
OZONO Saihou

First-class master of the Sogetsu school, one of the three major schools of ikebana, and Contemporary Ikebana Artist. Born in Tokyo in 1987. As a Contemporary Ikebana Artist, OZONO designs and arranges contemporary ikebana works brimming with originality. His works of art are defined by their innovative nature. Striving to create pieces that incorporate materials other than flowers, OZONO infuses contemporary and stylish expression with a meaningful message. He is the winner of numerous awards, including the 103rd Sogetsu Newcomer Award (2022), the 1st Sogetsu Excellence Award (2024), and the Ikebana Grand Prix 2019 Special Jury Award. OZONO's work has been presented internationally, including in countries such as China and Italy, and has been featured in numerous media.



OZONO Saihou, *school*. Created in Beijing, China. The piece utilizes chairs from a vocational school that were meant for disposal. By using the chair—an object found everywhere in the world—the work conveys a message of bridging Japan and China.

Photo: OZONO Saihou



OZONO Saihou, *SEReNDIPITY*. The work captures the fleeting beauty of chance moments that cannot be reproduced. The complex interplay of light and shadow is expressed solely through lighting. As the shadows shift and change, the work conveys the wonder of encountering a once-in-a-lifetime moment of serendipity.

Photo: YAMASHIRO Masatoshi

steams upright. This creates a sense of spaciousness and enables the entire work, including the *hanadome* itself, to express the message behind the arrangement.

Moreover, as a facet of Japanese culture and contemporary art, ikebana is attracting attention beyond Japan.

I regularly have opportunities to create ikebana works and give lectures overseas, and I am always struck by the depth of enthusiasm and understanding shown by audiences. Ikebana arrangements cannot be transported in their finished form and are essentially created from scratch at the place where they are

displayed. This is particularly true overseas. I bring nothing from Japan except my tools, creating each piece with locally sourced flowers and materials—an experience that continually inspires me. I take pride in believing that the ever-evolving art of ikebana is one of Japan's cultural traditions that resonates across the world, and that it rivals any entertainment thriving in today's society. It is only when I create numerous works across Japan and around the world, touching hearts and having a positive influence on as many people as possible, that my work as a

Contemporary Ikebana Artist begins to have meaning. In a contemporary society marked by excessive consumption, bringing something new into the world requires considerable effort, yet I believe it to be a profoundly noble act.

I will continue to devote my life to creating works that contribute as much as possible to society.

1. The three major schools of ikebana are Sogetsuryu, Ikenobo, and Ohararyu.

Forging a Supreme Blade with Techniques Preserved for 700 Years—The Essence of Japanese Culture in Uncompromising Discipline

Johan Leutwiler, the first *katana-kaji*, or swordsmith from outside Japan, works on an ongoing basis to craft Japanese swords. We spoke with Johan about the essence of Japanese culture reflected in the Japanese sword, a tradition that has been passed down without interruption for more than 700 years.

After going through the *hi-zukuri*¹ process, in which the metal is heated and shaped by hammering, Johan checks the sword's *sori* (curvature).

Photo: KJUDO Asuka



Johan Leutwiler

I believe the value of the Japanese sword lies in its rarity as a traditional craft. Looking beyond Japan, there are very few traditions that, like the Japanese sword, have been continuously passed down for nearly a thousand years while preserving both their techniques and spiritual foundations. From my understanding, this rarity is precisely why Japanese swords are so highly regarded overseas.

As modern *tosho*,² we craft swords as works of art. Drawn to the craft of sword-making, I came to Japan and became a swordsmith. I believe many people from overseas share the same aspiration. In today's society, few works are created with such meticulous care. Swordsmiths forge

many blades, yet release only the finest one into the world. The rigor of this process, the resolve it demands, and the values it embodies resonate deeply with many foreign audiences. It is precisely in this approach that the essence of the sword as a work of art lies.

In modern Japan, the Japanese sword is often seen as something old-fashioned. Images of sword fights in period dramas tend to dominate people's perception, and I feel that the artistic value and spiritual essence of the Japanese sword are not always fully conveyed. A Japanese sword is not merely a weapon—it embodies Japanese culture itself.

In Europe and other regions overseas, there is a long-standing tradition of appreciating crafts as works of art. The fact that the techniques of the



The raw material for a Japanese sword, *tamahagane*,³ is heated to over 1,200°C and hammered to remove impurities.

Photo: KUDO Asuka



Johan Leutwiler

Born in Switzerland. Seeing Japanese swords at an exhibition at age 17 and being captivated by their beauty inspired his aspiration to become a swordsmith. After coming to Japan in 2017 and training as an apprentice for five years, he became the first foreigner to obtain national certification as a *katana-kaji* in 2024. After becoming an independent swordsmith, he established a workshop in Hiroshima Prefecture and received the Achievement Award (First Place) and New Face Award in the *Sakuto* (Blade Forging) division at the 2025 Contemporary Swords and Artworks exhibition. His swordsmith name is Mitsutsuna.

Photo: KUDO Asuka



Adjusting and finishing the curvature of the *tanto* (dagger).

Photo: KUDO Asuka



A *kozuka kogatana*⁶ crafted by Johan, featuring a straight *hamon*⁵ (temper pattern) known as *suguha*.

Photo: KUDO Asuka

Japanese sword, passed down for 700 years, are still faithfully preserved and reproduced may help explain why this tradition resonates so deeply with foreign audiences today. The shape of a sword, its *sori* (curvature), the *jigane*⁴ (steel texture), and its *hamon*⁵ (temper pattern) vary by period, each carrying

the spirit of its time. Many foreigners study these differences with great enthusiasm. The process of making a sword and the specialized terminology associated with it offer countless clues about the aesthetic sensibilities and values of the Japanese people of the era.

Japanese culture has the power to move people's hearts, regardless of nationality. If through the Japanese sword, people can experience even a glimpse of that depth and develop an interest in it—that is the greatest joy I can have as a swordsmith.

1. The process of heating metal and applying force to transform its shape. Also called *tanzo*.

2. Another word for *katana-kaji*, or swordsmith.

3. Steel made by smelting iron sand, used as the raw material for a Japanese sword.

4. To bring out strength and resilience, the steel used to make a Japanese sword is repeatedly folded and hammered in a process called folding and tempering (*tanren*). This process produces patterns on the blade's surface, known as the steel's texture, or *jigane*.

5. A white wave-like pattern added during hardening, one of the processes of making Japanese swords, in which the steel is hardened by cooling it rapidly from a high-temperature state.

6. The part of a Japanese sword corresponding to the handle is called a *kozuka*, and the blade portion is called a *kogatana*. In some cases, the term *kozuka* may refer to the entire small sword, including the *kogatana*. These are slender, short blades, primarily decorative rather than practical.

Lidth's Jay



Lidth's jay (*Garrulus lidthi*) is a bird of the crow family that inhabits in the forests of Amami Oshima and its surrounding islands in Kagoshima Prefecture, and a species native to Japan. At roughly 38 cm in body length, it is slightly larger than a dove, and has plumage combining deep lapis lazuli blue with rich chestnut brown. It has a hard, sharp ivory colored beak and a diverse diet including nuts, insects, and plant roots. It also stores acorns in tree hollows and under the soil—a habit that also contributes to forest regeneration. Lidth's jays live their daily lives in flocks and communicate with companions far away by making loud “gya-gya” calls. During the breeding season from February to April, they build nests in grass and tree hollows, and sometimes in houses and under the eaves. As a result of population declines caused by overhunting for its beautiful feathers, habitat loss due to deforestation, and predation by non-native species such as mongooses, Lidth's jay has been designated as a Natural Monument of Japan and is protected as an endangered species.



Photos: PIXTA

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