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my JAPAN

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FEEL THE QUINTESSENTIAL JAPANESE EXPERIENCE IN KYOTO

BY LISKA OKTAFIANI - HANATOUR JAPAN WORLD

Welcome to the former capital of Japan; the cultural and historical heart of the nation. This magical prefecture is unavoidable for a reason. Kyoto is the former capital of Japan, the cultural and historical heart of the nation. It is one of the most rewarding destinations where you can immerse yourself in the intricacies of Japanese culture: visit sublime Zen gardens and colorful Shinto shrines, take a glimpse of graceful geisha, dip in a rejuvenating onsen, and indulge the refined multi-course kaiseki cuisine.

You may stay in strategic and well-known hotels such as Hotel Senren Kyoto to experience all of those attractions. The hotel is just across the Gojo Ohashi Bridge.

The inn facing Gojo-dori, which leads to the Tokaido, is in the best location environment as a starting point for a journey full of encounters and excitement that connects history, nature and the present. The scenery of the townhouse with the scent of ancient culture remains in the surrounding area, and it is close to famous places such as Kiyomizu-dera, which is located in the east.

The hotel offers a Japanese and Western buffet-style breakfast centered on Kyoto-style "Obanzai". The word "obanzai" refers to "side dishes" made in ordinary households in Kyoto, apart from Kyoto cuisine. A restaurant where you can feel the morning full of openness. The inside of the

store, which continues from the lobby lounge, is a space that connects to the back, with two more continuations. Lighting that creates soft light, sliding doors and display shelves with sumi-e paintings create a richly expressive atmosphere in the restaurant.

Using plenty of brightly colored wood, it creates a "smooth" space while giving a feeling of warmth and familiarity. Hotel Senren Kyoto makes use of traditional Japanese fittings and designs, and each space has an independent floor plan, achieving the quality of relaxation and the ease of use that allows you to spend your time as if you were living.



NOKONOSHIMA, FUKUOKA

BY KARL BAHCECI - FUKUOKA CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

As far as 'the appeal of Japan' goes, the proximity of the modern to the ancient and the urban to the natural are often touted. How fitting then that Nokonoshima, while only 15 minutes from Fukuoka proper, brims with nature and tradition.

Nokonoshima was a part of a travel itinerary I was lucky enough to attend at end of October. Upon disembarking from our boat the good weather stood out immediately, a gentle but cool breeze wafting in the air. As I was part of a group of coworkers, we took a chartered bus to get around the island, where I was able to take some photos and get a good view of the scenery along the road.

As we made small talk I noticed a barrier in the water upon which sat numerous seafowls.

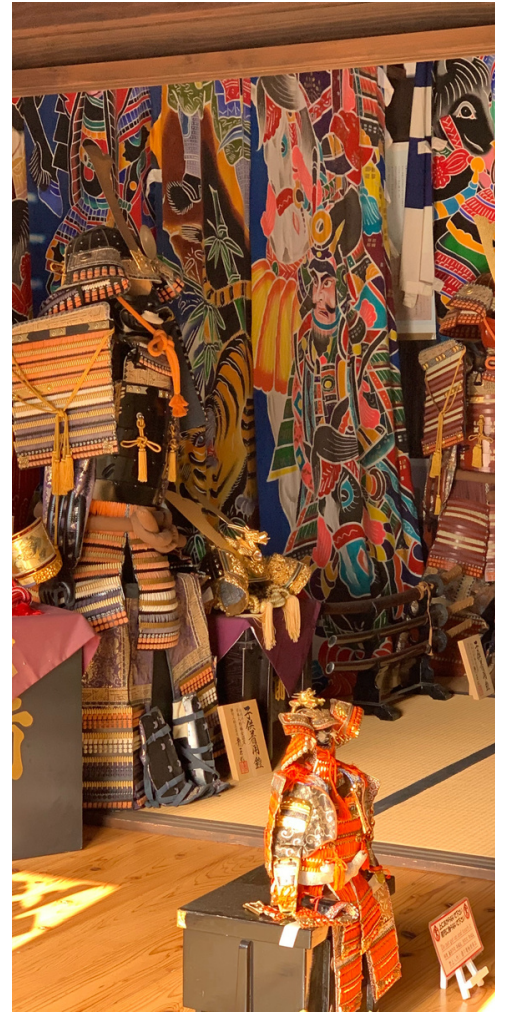
Finding the imagery humorous, and perhaps similar to the chatty company I found myself in the bus, I snapped a quick photo.

Our first stop along the way was by a beach facing Hakata-bay. Equipped with facilities meant to entertain and house visitors during the summer seasons, there were no swimmers currently on the premises when we arrived save for a man operating a drone nearby. With palm trees, sandy beaches, and all sorts of amenities,

I imagined it would make for a great summer visit. Little did I know that this was but only 'one face', both figuratively and literally, of Nokonoshima.

We continued further up the island, and arrived in an area resembling a valley. Now, this was the kind of place you'd find a painter assiduously at work on his canvas, for the views here were nothing short of spectacular. Fields of flowers, particularly of the Cosmos variety, coated the sloping valleys on the top of the island, adding a tint of 'magical realism'. In a testament to the taste of the landscapers, the flowers were well arranged as well.

Continued to page 20



That is of course to say nothing about other views from atop the island. As with much of Japan, I sometimes get the feeling that the country was conceived with photogenicity in mind, because it seems like no matter where I go there's some magnificent view to take in.

Upon reaching what (I thought) was the end of the flowered path, eventually we reached what appeared to be a folk house area, or an area designed to resemble a traditional neighborhood. Here there were plenty of gift shops and stores specializing in wares either unique to Nokonoshima or made comparatively better there than elsewhere. The samurai armor exhibit (and the interior design it was featured in) was a highlight.

The end of our journey had us arrive at another one of the main flower fields, which more or less dwarfed the others in scale.

Some of my coworkers actually had elected to stay in some of the housing on this island right by this same flower field. While I did not, I was a tad envious because I could definitely imagine that getting up in the morning in a place like this would really be something!

After a work related seminar the day finally began to wind down. The breeze strengthened, and colder air settled upon the island. I was to leave around 20:00 o'clock, but not before I partook of dinner on the island. It was the perfect end or

finishing touch to the day, or what we call in Japanese the *shime*. A full scale barbecue? Count me in!

After eating I then returned home via ferry, and then took a rather brief bus ride back to the neighborhood in which I currently reside. I had spent the better part of the day in Nokonoshima and was rather exhausted, but nonetheless satisfied. My day had been rewarding, and reaffirmed exactly what it is about Japan that I (and I can only imagine so many others) find so enchanting. Some places feel like they're cut right out of a picture book and seem to exist in spite of our expectations. Nokonoshima is one of those places... but being close to a metropolis certainly makes visiting easier.



NIIGATA – THE HIDDEN GEM OF JAPAN

BY YUKA KATO – NIIGATA VISITORS & CONVENTION BUREAU

To experience Japan, one needs to look beyond Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka, and one of my personal favourites is Niigata, a true treasure trove. Located on the west coast of Japan, it is a complete destination in itself, offering contemporary hotel options for a comfortable stay while maintaining a fine balance with the old-world charm. One of the best times to visit Niigata is during the Cherry Blossom season (Sakura season). Due to its geographical location, it has an advantage over other cities in that it enjoys a longer period of Sakura, lasting over a month. One of the best places to experience this amazing natural phenomenon during spring would be Takada Castle. The park and the road leading to it are filled with Sakura trees.

While in Niigata, a must-do excursion is a trip to Sado Island (Island of Gold). At Nishimikawa Gold Park, which is said to be the remains of the oldest gold dust mine on Sado Island, one can experience gold panning for just 1000 yen, and findings within thirty minutes are free for you to take back.

Apart from Sakura and other natural or man-made sights, Niigata is a sake enthusiast's heaven. It grows one of the best qualities of rice and is the best sake producer in Japan. In the middle of March, Niigata hosts the Sake no jin festival (Niigata Sake Fair). It is a two-day event, bringing the best of the sake breweries from Niigata prefecture.

For the complete experience, combine your visit with the experience provided by Yoga Spa yogayuH. It maintains concepts of Yoga, Ayurveda, and Havan Dining to promote a "traditional Indian healthy lifestyle". The yoga spa is near the seaside of the Japanese sea, with a beautiful sunset view almost every day. There is a beautiful nature walking park in front of YogayuH. It also has an Ayurveda treatment facility, "Herbs Life," and teaching with Indian cooking classes. For a healthy vegetarian SATVIK diet, Havana Dining is the place to be. It has seating for about a hundred people and is open daily for lunch buffet from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Niigata awaits you to visit, discover the best of Japan it has to offer and return with golden memories.



ARASHIYAMA & KAGOSHIMA – JEWELS OF JAPAN

BY YOGENDRA PURANIK – FIRST INDIAN/ASIAN ORIGIN ASSEMBLYMAN IN JAPAN

Arriving into Japan, as a student in the latter half of 1990s gave me ample of opportunity to explore and understand the cultural ethos of the land. In all these years of working in Japan since 2001, my favourite places to visit and to find peace and solace are Arashiyama in Kyoto and Kagoshima.

Arashiyama is located in the western side of Kyoto at the base of Arashiyama Mountain also known as Storm Mountain. The highlight or the most visited place in this area is the Bamboo Forest, located at just ten minutes from JR Sagano station or Arashiyama Station on Hankyu line. But I would recommend visiting Kego-Ji or

popularly known as Suzumushi-dera or Cricket Temple. It is one of the hidden treasures of Arashiyama district. The Buddhist temple founded in 1723, is famous for crickets that make the whimsical chirping. The temple priest enjoyed the sound of crickets during the warm summer nights but these were not there year-round. So, after lot of research, training and breeding crickets, the temple of Kego-Ji got its nick name as Suzumushi-dera.

The best way of visiting this temple is to enjoy tea along with the amazing sound of whimsical chirping and there lecture about

the history of the temple from the priest. Rooms of the temple are kept warm round of the year for crickets to produce the welcoming sound. And this temple is a delight to visit during winters.

Another destination that does not stop to delight is Kagoshima, located by the sea in Kyushu. Kagoshima is shaped naturally and Sakurajima mountain delights the view from any point of the city. It is an active volcano and symbol of the city. Kagoshima is filled with natural sites ranging from ancient forests of Yakushima to the tropical islands around Amami Oshima.

Continued to page 23



Kagoshima is just two hours by air from Tokyo and also one can take shinkansen for the high-speed train experience. The view of yellow fields of Rapeseeds with back drop of Sakurajima mountain is one of the best sights. For relaxation and rejuvenation, head to Ibusuki, the hot spring town, at the southern tip of Kagoshima, famous for its sunamushiburo, or sand bathing. Volcanic hot springs line the coast of Ibusuki, warming the sands to 50-55 degrees Celsius. One can also hike around Lake Ikeda and Kaimondake, an active volcano that resembles Mt. Fuji.

Meanwhile, my favourite restaurant is a sushi joint named Kaikou, located in Sunamachi, Koto city, Tokyo. The owner is a fish trader who decided to offer high quality fish to the citizen for a highly

discounted price. The fish that you eat here for 1,500 Yen will cost you at least 20,000 Yen in Ginza. The joint is always crowded and one has to queue up for at least 30 min, any time of the day, before getting in. The thickness of the sushi amazes me as it helps me feel the taste and yet completely dissolves inside the mouth like a true alphonso mango.

For Indian food shall recommend Restaurant Reka, the winner of Mayor's award and is the one Indian restaurant in Japan to be called the Jewel that broke the fixed concept of naan and butter chicken Indian food in Japan. Reka chef is the only chef in Japan who serves more than 50 authentic Indian home food recipes along with delicious seasonal sweets. Reka has been covered by Japanese national TV for more than 60 times, by popular magazines for more than

80 times, and by 100's of blogs since its establishment in February 2013.

Japan awaits you to visit these unique hidden gems.

About Yogendra Puranik (Yogi)

Yogi is the first Indian/Asian to be elected as assemblyman in Japan, representing the Edogawa city in Tokyo where he has lived for more than 16 years, socially contributing to the community. Yogi is Chairman of All-Japan Association of Indians (AJAI), Advisor to Japan Foreign Human Resource Association (JFHRA) and serves on many other bodies. Before becoming a politician, Yogi worked in the IT and banking industry for 23 years. He became the Vice Director of Corporate Planning Division of Rakuten Bank after serving at Mizuho Bank.



ODATE, AKITA – RURAL TOURISM

BY EMI ITO – NIPPON TAIYO HOSPITALITY

Thinking of rural Japan is like, does anything of that kind exist? Thinking of Japan is all about neon-lit Tokyo, Osaka, or the well-kept traditional town of Kyoto, the Shinkansen (bullet train) zipping around Japan or the best shopping destinations. Rural Japan does coexist with neo - modern Japan and has created a fine balance. Local schools in Japan encourage students to take a field trip to rural areas of Japan to understand traditional farming, local culture, and lifestyle.

Agriculture and fishing being the main industries in the Akita region, many of the younger people opt for bigger cities for jobs in different fields, resulting in a lower number of inhabitants. Without young people to work with or carry on the community spirit once the elderly pass on, many villages become abandoned. The elderly people that continue to live in such

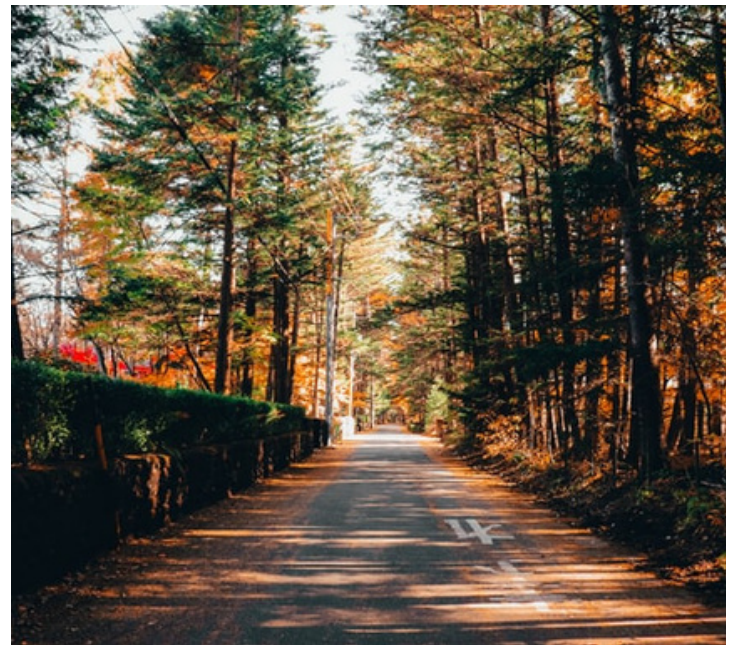
villages are isolated and lack logistical support.

Rural Akita is one such place in Japan that offers the opportunity to live with locals and experience a day in their lives. To make this possible, Akita Hanamaru Green Tourism has collaborated with local farmers to offer a unique experience, and through these efforts, local farmers generate additional income. Rural tourism, or green tourism, is a way to re-popularise local traditions and lifestyles and it is worth the experience for foreign guests too.

Odate City, located in Akita Prefecture, is famous as the home to legendary Akita dog Hachi. One can opt for stay at one of the farm houses for an authentic regional cooking lesson and farming experience. Farm Inn Ichirin is a charming farm house with large and comfortable guest rooms, a tea-

ceremony room with a great view, and an exhibition space for photos of Hachi, the famous and faithful Akita dog. The owner, Ishigaki San is humble and welcoming. There is a different farming experience throughout the year. Spring: apple/pear flower picking, seeding, planting, Summer: harvesting vegetables, blueberry, Autumn: harvesting rice, apple, and pear, leaves picking, jam making, Winter: snow shoveling, dried Japanese radish making, apple chip making, Year-round: Making of sesame rice cake, sushi roll, soba noodle and pickles. Thus, giving distinct experience in every season.

The farm stay experience could be for one day or two days, during which your host shall take you to the farm for farming, fruit plucking (depending on the season), a tea ceremony, and the highlight of the evening is authentic Odate Kiritampo making and eating during dinner.



KARUIZAWA – A HIDDEN JEWEL

BY SHELLY RAJIV EGBERT – JAPAN AIRLINES

I remember vividly when Karuizawa caught my attention with an advertisement on a train in Tokyo. It was a photograph of Kogen Church, which is lit up with lamps in the summer. The image of the night view enamored me so much that I decided to take a trip to this intriguing town of Karuizawa.

My journey began by taking a bullet train, which was an experience in itself. The neat, clean and spacious seats offered a luxurious experience. By the time I was warmed up by the beautiful views of the countryside as the train sped away from the bustles of the city, I arrived at my destination. The short but sweet ride on the bullet train will remain as a fond memory for a long time to come.

My visit to the Kogen Church was an experience of awe, serenity and peace. The simple but elegant architecture of the Church with its steep triangular roof, stood

out amongst the lush green trees that surround it. Built in 1921 as a place for liberal artists to come together and for the community of Christians in that area to worship, it has become a landmark of Karuizawa and a very popular venue for weddings. Spending the evening strolling around the vicinity of Kogen Church, taking in that picturesque night view beautifully lit with lamps and soaking up the somber holy atmosphere was ethereal.

Harunire Terrace is another exhilarating place to visit while at Karuizawa. This beautiful wooden planked shopping complex blends perfectly with the surrounding nature, and the beauty of this spot is further accentuated by a stream flowing close by.

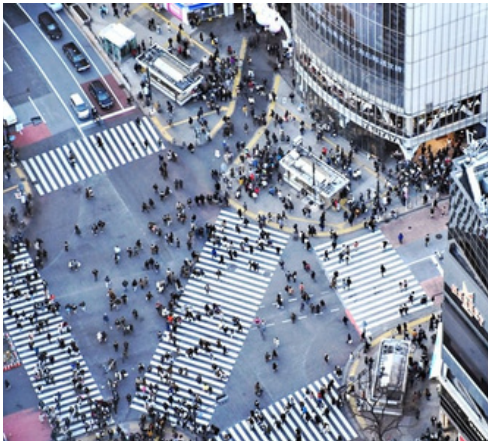
While there, I also made a stop at Hoshino Onsen where I had the most wonderful experience of gazing up at a sky full of stars

while enjoying a healthy soak in the hot spring water of the Onsen. A highly recommended place for tourists.

Finally, I went to Karuizawa Prince Shopping Plaza, which turned out to be a haven for shoppers as it offers a wide array of luxury brands. While there, you must also visit the splendidly decorated Lindt Café which will satisfy all the cravings of a chocolate lover.

The easiest way to reach to Karuizawa from India is to fly Japan Airlines from either Bengaluru or Delhi, to Tokyo. From there, you can reach Karuizawa by bullet train or bus.

Japan is richly endowed with endless beautiful places, many of which are still not well known to many tourists. Why not make a trip to this wondrous place to discover all the hidden gems that this country has to offer!



TOKYO – IN TRANSIT

BY SELYUCUS MARKUS – ASAHI TRAVEL SERVICES

While on my flight to San Francisco from India, I had little over eight hours of connection time and that is when I thought of experiencing Japan, even though it was for a short duration. I landed at Narita International airport and took airport limousine bus to Asakusa Hotel View. It took around an hour to reach Asakusa Area, from where I started my four-hour tour that also included an authentic Japanese lunch and lucky me, it was the Cherry blossom season, so I was able to get some perfect pictures during the short Japan excursion.

My first stop was at Asakusa. Amidst the skyscrapers of Tokyo, it retains the heritage charm of old Tokyo, a reminder of Edo period. Nakamise Street leads the way to Senso-Ji Temple and is a perfect place to savour some traditional sweet (Mochi) or

savoury snack and also a perfect to buy some traditional souvenirs. Senso-Ji Temple is the oldest Buddhist temple of Tokyo, built in the seventh century and a symbol of Asakusa. The entry to the temple is from Hozomon Gate, decorated with a huge red lantern with Kanji letters in the centre. One can offer incense sticks in the courtyard and prayers in the main hall. This place is photographer's delight.

Next stop was Tokyo Skytree, located two kilometres from Asakusa. It is a great place to enjoy great scenery of the Asakusa area and the Sumida River bank. It was the cherry blossom season and it made a perfect backdrop for great pictures, at Skytree.

After visiting Tokyo Skytree and soaking in traditional Asakusa, it was time to visit

Shibuya and en-route stopping at Imperial Palace for a photo stop. Shibuya is the centre for fashion and culture. It is also famous for the large intersection in front of the station's Hachiko Exit. The intersection is heavily decorated by neon advertisements and giant video screens and gets flooded with pedestrians each time the crossing light turns green, making it a world-famous crossing (where, Sung Kang's character Han Lue died in *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift*). Later enjoy shopping and coffee at Shibuya scramble Square.

After the café stop at Shibuya, we headed for lunch at Ichiran Ramen. Their unique soup and thin noodles were a delight, and this also brought an end to the tour.

It was a perfect transit tour and I would recommend to all.



JAPAN – OIISHI

BY DEEPAK SINGH – NIPPON TAIYO HOSPITALY

When people plan their trip to Japan, they wish to connect not only through culture and traditions, but also through food. If someone is "Kuishinbo" (a Japanese word meaning a person who is a foodie), then Japan is the ideal place for you. Japanese food takes inspiration from the four seasons as well as a rich selection of ingredients from land and sea.

On my trip to Japan a few years ago, I was lucky to have tasted healthy, nutritious meals, be it at Michelin Star restaurants, karaoke bars or fast food restaurants. If you wish to explore the best of Japan, then try the street food restaurant called "Yattari" with foods like Takoyaki, Yakisoba, Yakitori, Imagawayaki, and many more.

Being a foodie myself, I wanted to eat like a

local. There could be no better place than Osaka, where people spend more money on food than anything else. It is definitely a food lover's paradise and the best place to try traditional Kansai restaurants. To see all this action, I headed to Shinsekai, which is said to be the oldest area in Osaka and has the famous Tsutenkaku Tower. Shinsekai is located east of Tennoji station in the Tennoji district of South Osaka. It is home to plenty of places where you can enjoy delicious Kansai food such as Takoyaki, Okonomiyaki, and Kushikatsu. While crossing this street, you will see a golden statue of Billiken, the God of good fortune. These statues can be found at various places on the street.

I visited a famous Aji no Daimaru restaurant for the "Yattari" experience. I tried "Takoyaki". Takoyaki are octopus dumplings.

Each mould is made of a savoury batter mixture of tempura scraps, pickled ginger, and pieces of tako Octopus meat. The Takoyaki are cooked and evenly cooked with the help of a skewer. It is served with Takoyaki Sauce and topped with mayonnaise, seaweed, dried bonito, etc. You can also choose squid and shrimp as fillings. Though Japan is known for seafood, it has multiple options for vegetarians too, like you can try Japanese meals from Shojin Ryori-Buddhist Meal, Okonomiyaki, Zara Soba, Miso Soup with rice, Kushiage, and tempura, to name a few. You can even try Italian and Mediterranean food here.

Don't forget to say Itadakimasu before starting your meal, Oishii while you savour the food, and Gochisousama after finishing your meal and thanking the chef for the food.



A SLICE OF SLOW TOURISM AS YOU SOAK IN THE LAVENDER FIELDS OF JAPAN

BY TARU BAHL - THE QUEST

Furano in Hokkaido prefecture of Northern Japan is best known for its ski opportunities and lavender fields which are much more than just an Instagram draw. Japan has over 40 prefectures, and each one of them offers a different experience. No doubt for a first time visitor, the lure of visiting the popular cities of Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto would be tempting but once you go beyond the obvious and the 'must do, must see' credo, there is a whole different world waiting for you to explore. Rural Japan has a frozen in time quality that is resplendent with its culture, history, famed courtesy and etiquette and stunning landscapes.

Hop on to a flight from Tokyo to Furano in Hokkaido or take the Hokkaido Shinkansen.

Hokkaido which is arguably most famous as a winter sports resort, is equally alluring with its almost unreal purple lavender plantations, multicoloured summer flowers, winter sports, snow festivals, wineries, farm stays and a delicate range of seafood. There is something happening all through the year, whether it is a festival or a local community event. So whether you opt to go on a road trip (self-drive or with a local taxi driver cum guide) or hike/bike, make sure you combine farm stays with traditional Ryokan hospitality which are traditional Japanese style inns.

Known lovingly as the 'belly-button town' or 'naval town', Furano is located directly in the middle of Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost

island. It is situated on the Sorachi River, and its surrounding hills in central Hokkaido lead up to Mt. Tokachi, which is within the Furano-Ashibetsu Nature Park. Furano is famous for its winter resorts and breathtaking lavender fields. The word Furano means 'fragrant' and this comes not necessarily from its stunning lavender or the town's fields of multicoloured flowers. In fact, it is more closely translated as 'stinky flame' from the word 'furanai' that refers to local volcanic activity. Every summer, this 'Belly-button' town comes alive with a quaint festival where locals and visitors come together - sometimes with funny faces painted on their tummies around their belly button. This is known as the Hokkai Heso Festival (or Belly-button festival), and has

Continued to page 29

been celebrated each July since 1969 and thankfully without much variation and modernised makeovers.

Furano has been a centre of lavender cultivation for over half a century. Earlier, lavender farming in Hokkaido served as a thriving agricultural industry, but over time it turned into living, major-scale art display and tourist attraction. Several farms reinvented themselves to house tourists and even local population. Some farms became more popular like farm Tomita to whose credit goes the reviving of the declining lavender cultivation and pioneering “lavender tourism” with a reverence akin to that is referred to by locals as “a lavender holy land”.

Farm Tomita is about a 45-minute drive from Asahikawa Airport, about five minutes from JR Furano Station, and a seven-minute walk from JR Lavender Farm Station, where only the special train Noroko is allowed to run. On this incredible Furano flower farm, there are a variety of blooming fields and many places worth viewing. Lavender season in Hokkaido starts in late June and is in full bloom from early to mid-July. Late-blooming lavender varieties begin flowering early July and peak from mid to late July. Best time to see Hokkaido lavender is between July 10-25 and before harvesting which starts in August. The Noushi Hayazaki and Youtei variety of lavender are in bloom early July to mid-July, and Okamurazaki that flowers anywhere from mid to late July. The breathtakingly stunning purple, mauve and lavender views can stretch as far as your eyes can see. This facility, with its ruggedly beautiful Tokachi Mountain Range backdrop, offers not just the vividly colourful fields but also workshops and culinary experiences that attempt to do justice to the beauty and immense versatility of this gorgeous flower.



The farm draws around a million guests annually (pre COVID-19), many of whom naturally flock here during the summer months to catch the fields in full bloom. The site’s origin dates back to 1903 when Tokuma Tomita, who came to Furano from Fukui Prefecture, began what would become the first incarnation of Farm Tomita. Lavender cultivation became increasingly popular in the Furano area in the 1950s. Farm Tomita started cultivating lavender in 1958, mainly for lavender essence. It was around the mid-1970s that the farm started to capture the attention of visitors. The culinary offerings of Farm Tomita are sure to delight any visitor. Apart from having on its menu some of Japan’s best Sushi and Sashimi, range of goat cheese and a host of local bakery items and savouries. Then there is the lavender soft cream, which is as tasty as it is photogenic. Other culinary highlights include the lavender lemonade, sold in marble soda bottles, fresh sweet melon, and the melon-cream-filled crispy and soft melon pan. While you can walk up and down the lush lavender sidewalks and slopes or soak in the sights from your window, you could also take a ski lift that drops you to the top of a hill from where you can see the different varieties of lavender, from the early blooming Noushi Hayazaki, the late bloomer Okamurazaki, the white lavender Misetosekka, and the larger Lavandin. The largest lavender field in the country is the Lavender East which is operated by Farm Tomita is located about seven



minutes away from Farm Tomita by car and about 10-minute drive from Choei Lavender Farm. It was originally a farm to produce dried flowers, lavender oil, and other products, however, from 2008 it was opened to the public for a limited period on.

There is a lot to explore around the farm area. A drive to Biei area will take you to the Blue pond, a large man-made pond with natural minerals that gives the water a deep blue color. There are trees around the pond and some dead trees inside the water. A two-hour drive will take you to Daisetsuzan park, the largest park of Hokkaido with an unspoiled nature of 230,000 hectares. There are two active volcanoes in the park - Asahi-dake in the north side and Tokachi-dake in the southern side. The net of trails linking these two mountains is known as the “Grand Traverse.” There are two active volcanoes in the park -Asahi-dake in the north side and Tokachi-dake in the southern side.

A visit to Japan cannot be complete without experiencing its indoor and outdoor onsens. While in Hokkaido, a visit to the Asahidake Onsen provides a perfect outdoor hot spring which overlooks lavenders and nestles at the foot of Hokkaido’s highest mountain, Mount Asahidake (2290 meters). There is Asahidake Ropeway that lifts visitors from Asahidake Onsen to within a two-hour hike of Mount Asahidake’s summit. Even though the ropeway’s upper station is “only” 1600 meters above sea level, it stands in a treeless alpine tundra landscape with alpine flowers in summer. Wind up your visit to one of the prefecture’s many Sake breweries. Local legend has it that the pull of the lavender fields is very strong and will bring you back at least once more in your lifetime. And that is indeed a wonderful thought to carry with you when you bid adieu to Hokkaido and Japan. The feeling of déjà vu lingers.



TARU BAHL - THE QUEST
A BOUTIQUE TRAVEL COMPANY



JAPAN – THE AIRPORT EXPERIENCE

BY VINAY NANJAPPA – SILVERPEAK GLOBAL (SPG)

My boarding pass was finally in my hands. This was “the” trip I was looking forward to from my childhood. I was flying Cathay Pacific and the destination was Fukuoka with a change of flights at Hong Kong. Despite my many travels abroad, I seriously had no idea what to expect from Japan.

The flight from Bangalore to Hong Kong was uneventful except for the fact that I was pleasantly surprised when the announcements and safety instructions were given in chaste Kannada. I was served International Breakfast an hour before we landed. At Hong Kong I was to change my terminal but, had only 1 hour and 30 minutes to report to the next Gate. I was guided by the staff of Cathay Pacific who were already waiting for me with a placard in my name as I disembarked from the flight. It was a mad rush after that to the other terminal.

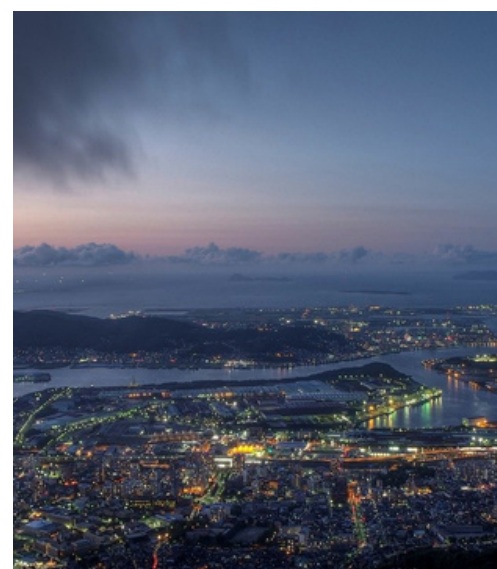
The plane from Hong Kong to Fukuoka was already boarding people when I arrived. The flight took off on-time and I settled into a slumber after the red-eye flight. I was gently awoken by the Chinese Airhostess calling out my name. It was time for lunch. I had not pre-selected my meal as I wanted to have the regular meal served on the flight on that sector. The meal was not a disappointment at all. I had a choice between a Chicken, Pork and Fish meal. I opted for the fish meal. The meal was a scrumptious one with rice, fish and vegetables and noodles and was polished off with a Haagen-Dazs ice-cream, cookies and a hot cup of coffee.

As we neared our destination, I could hardly contain my excitement. Being an Island country, I could see many small islands and lots of ships going about their business. We finally approached Fukuoka, the fastest

growing city in Japan. Fukuoka is the capital of the Fukuoka Prefecture and is the 6th largest city in Japan. It also has the second largest port after Yokohama. Fukuoka is considered a part of an ancient trade route for many centuries as it is the closest to mainland Asia amongst all cities of Japan. References to Fukuoka, in particular the Dazaifu port dates back many centuries with the region populated from the Stone Age times. Fukuoka is home to many ancient temples and castles. The Fukuoka Castle, the Kitakyushu Castle, Dazaifu Temple are famous tourist attractions in the region.

On landing, dismemberment/ declaration Forms were handed out to all foreigners on the flight. Biometrics were collected once we entered the queue. The immigration check and passport stamping was quick and efficient. Purpose of entry was asked.

Continued to page 31



Schedule of travel and meetings were scrutinised and after a stamp was stuck on the Passport, I had officially set-foot into Japan.

The baggage collection is an experience by itself. A perimeter line is drawn 2 feet from the baggage belt. Everyone is outside the perimeter waiting for their turn to pick their luggage in an orderly fashion. No pushing, no chaos, as the luggage arrives. All bags have their handles placed towards the passenger. One just has to reach out to collect ones baggage.

Final baggage check is random. Purpose of visit is asked. They ask if there is anything to declare and you are out of the arrival.

Unlike in India, visitors are allowed inside the Airport. My colleagues, Subha San and Mori San were waiting for me at the arrivals. After the customary greetings, I picked my WiFi Router and a temporary SIM at the Airport on producing my Passport. The WiFi routers can be dropped off at any airport as we exit the country. The router came in a neat pouch with a charger, wire and manual. Although free WiFi is available to all foreign visitors across the City through a city-wide network across the country, it is unreliable

as sometimes, the network may be missing or the signal may not be strong for a download.

There was an explosion of sights, sounds, smells and information. My brain was lapping up everything in glee. A quick visit to the washroom was an experience by itself. Spotlessly clean. No odours. To top it all, no toilet tissue or faucet or a balti (bucket) or mug... The toilets are all automatic. No touch. If you are first time visitor, be prepared.

Vending machines are everywhere in Japan and you can virtually buy anything through that machine. Carry cash without fail. Japan is a country where cash is the primary currency mode. Coins are required everywhere. Carry a pouch for the same or you will end up with a lot of loose change all over you. Coin changing machines are available everywhere and so are ATMs exchanging foreign currency. Indian currency cannot be exchanged through these machines or at the Bank. So, go prepared with Japanese Yen. Cards are widely accepted. But, make sure you have signed them behind.

In Japan, Airports are also multi-mode transport hubs. You can book your Japan Train pass, buy Shinkansen tickets, Bus

tickets, Subways, Taxis, Tour packages... all at the airport.

If you are carrying lots of luggage, you have an option to send luggage by special courier.

Your luggage will be delivered to your hotel or your next stop in the next city.

One other experience to definitely try is to buy a travel post-card and send it back home. All Japanese Airports invariably have a Japan Post Office. They also sell collector's stamps.

If you are hungry, dash off to your favourite restaurant offering everything from traditional Japanese to International Cuisine or fast-food. We did not eat at the airport as I was already full, thanks for my lunch on the flight.

We were out of the airport bag and baggage in tow. And, this was just the beginning of a cultural explosion.

Imagine what the land of the "Rising Sun" can offer if just an Airport has so much to offer... Visit Japan at the first instance and you will carry memories for a lifetime.

Arigatou Gozaimasu!



NARA – JAPAN'S ANCIENT CAPITAL

BY ICHIRO TEZUKA – NIPPON TAIYO HOSPITALITY

Before Kyoto, Heijo (now Nara) was the capital city of Japan and it has abundance of shrines, temples, gardens, traditional houses and lots of deer to delight you. Located within an hour's distance from Osaka and Kyoto, makes it a perfect getaway for a day trip while staying at any of those locations.

Take a JR Train to Nara station, which should take around an hour and ten minutes approximately. Start your Nara sojourn with visit to one of the oldest and most famous Buddhist temples in Japan, Kofuku-Ji temple. It was established in 711AD and was one of the most important temples of its time, as it had an active role in politics and economic affairs of the state. The 50m high five storey

pagoda is the second-tallest wooden pagoda in Japan.

Later continue to Nara park, which is part of an extension to Kofuku-Ji temple and some of the nearby attractions are Toda-Ji temple, Kasuga Taisha, Nara National Museum and hundreds of free roaming deer. It is also a great place to be during the Cherry Blossom season. One of the fun activities while visiting Nara Park, is buying deer crackers and feeding them. Some deer have learned to bow to visitors to ask to be fed.

A short walk from the park, Todai-ji Temple or the Great Eastern Temple is located. First built in the 8th century, Todaiji Daibutsuden is one of the largest wooden structures in

the world and it houses one of Japan's largest bronze statues, 15m tall Buddha. While visiting the temple, one can encounter deer, as they roam freely in the temple complex.

The tour ends with visit to Naramachi which was the former merchant district of Nara. It has several well-preserved traditional houses and warehouses, some of which are open to the public. Traditional houses are called machiya (long and narrow town houses). Koshi-no-Ie Residence is a former merchant home open to the public. This area is also famous for souvenir shopping and savouring authentic Japanese food.

After the Naramachi and deer feeding experience, take a JR Train to Osaka or Kyoto.

AN INDIAN ANIME ARTIST IN JAPAN

BY KUSHAGRA KUSHWAHA - METASKY

It was only yesterday back in 2000s that my hands were drawing the anime and manga images with whatever medium I found, scribbling at the back of my school notebooks. Fast forward 2021, here I am working in the heart of Tokyo, bringing back my social norms from india and proving my mettle in the anime industry.

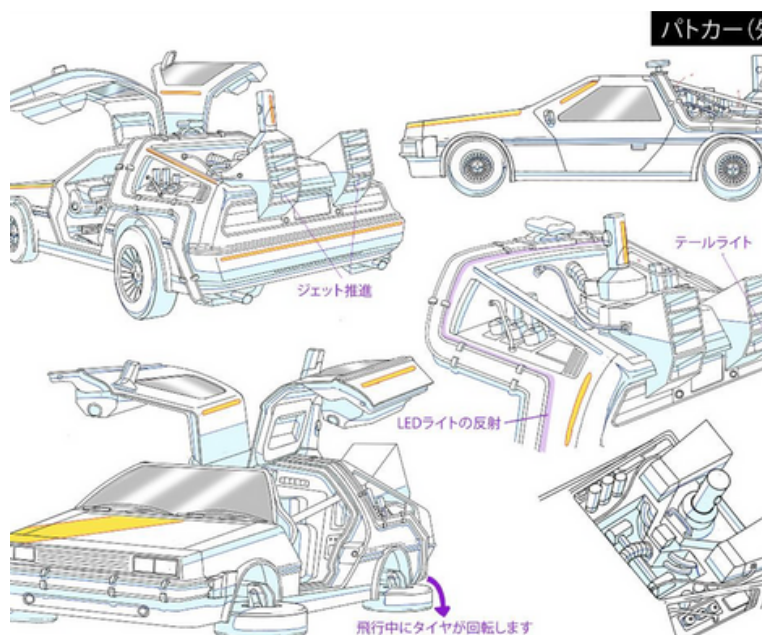
It hasn't been an easy ride at all to be able to land myself a job in the heart of the anime studios based here in Ogikubo, Suginami-Ku(which is actually famous for being the animator's locality in Tokyo). From infinite Japanese language learning hours in the Japanese language school, to trying to working in Ryokans(Japanese traditional hotels) as a butler or to bring a part time janitor in seven eleven, I have had it all.

Having completed my graduation from Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati in Design, I have had stints to work with eastern culture and arts. I did a small internship with Association of comic Artists, Singapore. Soon after my experience in Singapore, I strolled into the mystique land of Kham, Tibet to learn the sacred art of Tibetan Thangka Painting. And soon after perusing visual arts in South Korea for an year. I went off to work for an year in the mountainous region of Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh, working with an NGO called Art for Cause. I worked for a good amount of time with various expats there as a comic journalist.

The culmination of all my experiences led me to further believe that I would want to venture into the art of anime and manga and took up the decision to fly over. After 6 months of language training, I applied to various 150 anime studios out of which I got accepted in 3 of them. Soon thereafter, I took up the job as a junior animator in Seven Animation Studio. This was where I found hard time adapting in the culture, modifying my ways of thinking in terms of design, trying my lines to be more Japanese aesthetically. These are the fair share of challenges which any foreigner faces if they land a job in Japanese society.


From working as a douga man(an in betweener) I was hardly making enough money to be able to pay my monthly rent. But the dedication and the love for the art of anime kept me going. After an year of being a douga man I started working as an assistant director and nigenga man(second key animator). Having worked on various famous anime shows such as Hensuki, kyoto Tera Machi and try knights, and gaining good amount of experience for 3 years at seven animation, I took a leap of faith and started working as a design director and free animator in japan. I have been lucky to get involved with some big names now such as Jojo, yowamushi pedal, tennis prince, edens zero. Currently, I can be found building multiple creative projects with Metasky, bringing Japanese anime into the Metaverse!

4 years in the industry, i now find myself having set up my name as being the only Indian artist in the anime space. I do enjoy the recognition that I get from the masses, but am also sincerely aware of the kind of responsibility it brings of me representing India and it's people in Japanese animation industry. In the future, I would like to bring this work culture from japan to India and pioneer our own way of making animation on Indian stories, for the future to reap the benefits of the unending stories from India.



Fuel my Wanderlust for Japan

We asked travellers what they would like to experience on their trip to Japan, be it for the first time or a repeat trip. It could be any city, activity, or experience that they want to tick off on their bucket list, and we got some amazing answers.



NAGASAKI
Lesser Known place of Japan, is still not explored by many.



HIROSHIMA
I wish to visit Hiroshima during Cherry Blossoms!



AMUSEMENT PARKS
Disneyland, Disneysea, USJ, Legoland, Huis Ten Bosch.



KABUKICHO, SHINJUKU
To experience Izakaya restaurant, pachinko, nightclub and karaoke.



TRAIN RIDES
Shinkansen ride is must but would want to experience Scenic Train rides like Sagano scenic railway.



TRADITIONAL JAPANESE DESSERTS
Parfaits, ice-cream, cheesecakes, Doriyaki, Mochi, Mizu Yokan, Wagashi- you can gorge on desserts anytime.



ADVENTURE SPORTS
Wish to try atleast one activity snow biking, snorkeling, hot air balloon ride, SUP etc



STAY CLOSE TO NATURE
Try Onsens, Forest therapy, farm experience in off beat destination like Kyushu or Kyoto by the sea region.



Useful
Expressions in
Japanese

Let us
learn



HAPPY NEW YEAR – SHIN NEN AKEMASHITE

OMEDETOU GOZAIMASU

**HAPPY HOLIDAYS – OYASUMI TANOSHINDE
KUDASAI**

**HAVE A GREAT WINTER VACATION! – YOI
FUYUYASUMI WO**

**I WANT TO GO TO __ – __ NI IKITAI
STOP, PLEASE – TOMETE KUDASAI
TICKET – KIPPU**

NON-SMOKING SEAT – KINEN SEKI

BULLET TRAIN – SHINKANSEN

WHICH TRAIN? – DONO DENSHA?

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