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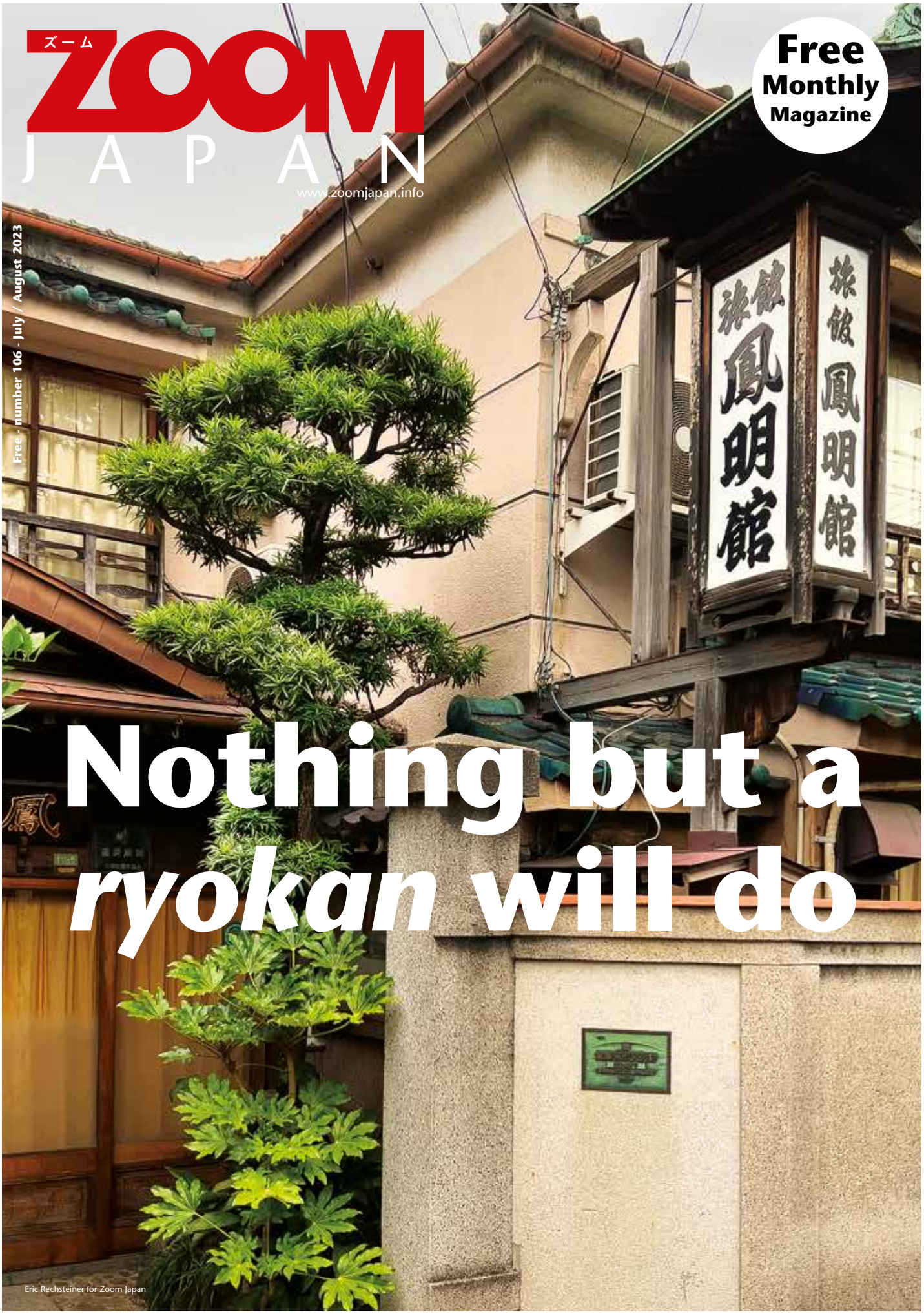
Nothing but a *ryokan* will do



Eric Rechsteiner for Zoom Japan

Eric Rechsteiner for Zoom Japan

Ryokan Yuen Shinjuku is one of Tokyo's leading inns.

The unique *ryokan* experience

A symbol of Japanese hospitality, the traditional inn is still a great place to stay.

Staying at a *ryokan* – a traditional Japanese inn – means spending a night completely wrapped in the living tradition of local history; an unadulterated deep dive into Japanese culture. Thus, a *ryokan* is the ideal base from which to explore your surroundings while enjoying hospitality at its best.

There are things we cannot experience at home, and every aspect of a stay in a traditional inn is designed to provide an unforgettable experience. After soaking in a hot spring, you can enjoy the local cuisine and learn about the culture and history of the area.

Since ancient times, many people have travelled and recorded their thoughts and feelings of the places they visited. Though the hospitality industry was still small in size, court nobles and aristocrats used to monopolise travel. In the Middle Ages, there were inns for people who went on religious journeys such as the famous pilgrimage to Kumano. In modern times, post stations were established, roads were maintained, and post towns were built and developed. People became a little more reassured, and under the guise of a pilgrimage, they visited mountain areas. During the Edo period, when tourism was booming, famous poet Basho wrote *haiku* (traditional Japanese three-line poems) about his travels and lodgings, while popular novelist Jippensha Ikku described the journey between Edo and Kyoto along the Tokaido highway in his comic picaresque novel *Tokaidochu Hizakurige*, arguably his best-known work. Even artist Utagawa Hiroshige depicted scores of inns in his paintings, showing the changes they went through. Today, with travel more popular than ever, the appearance of *ryokan* have changed in many ways. The types of available accommodation has also diversified. If you look into the history of post towns and lodgings, some things remain unchanged while many others have changed with the times. Let's see how they evolved to become the jewels of Japanese hospitality.

The starting point of the Japanese hospitality industry as it is conceived today – combining the two functions of "staying" and "dining" – can arguably be traced to the temple lodgings of the Kumano Sanzan priests in the Heian period (794-1185). Each Shinto shrine had an *onshi* (priest) who took care of the people who visited Sanzan, providing prayers and guidance for the pilgrims to reflect on the spirit of hospitality.

Before the Edo period, it was common for travellers to bring their own food and bedding and cook for themselves. So an inn was a place that, besides accommodation, mainly provided firewood and water and received payment in exchange for use of those facilities. That is why they were called *kichin'yado*, which literally means "inn where you pay for wood". These cheap lodgings offered basic services. It was not uncommon

for guests to share a large room and pay for their own bedding, share rice and other foods, while they cooked their own meals and paid for the cost of their firewood.

In the Edo period, *hatago* (traditional Japanese inns) became popular, and *kichin'yado* came to be synonymous with low-cost inns. As such, they were favoured by itinerant merchants, servants and travelling entertainers. The main concern for budget travellers, more than eating a nice meal, was finding cheap places to keep warm and dry.

At the beginning of the Edo period, the Tokugawa shogunate (military government 1603-1868) indirectly contributed to the development of a national network of lodgings when it established the *Sankin Kotai* system, which required all *daimyo* (feudal lords) to alternate yearly between living in their own domains and Edo. The expenditure necessary to maintain lavish residences in both places and for the household to regularly travel to and from Edo placed financial strain on the *daimyo* reducing their wherewithal to rebel.

A beneficial side-product of the *daimyo*'s frequent travels meant road building and the construction of inns and facilities along these routes was encouraged, generating economic activity. At the heart of this network was the *honjin*, a post station and lodging facility specifically designed to accommodate *daimyo*, imperial envoys, court nobles, shogunate officials and high priests. These post stations were reserved for high-ranking people, and for the most part lodging for the general public was not permitted, so they cannot be called to be inns in the traditional business sense. In many cases, the residences of merchants and village heads were designated as *honjin*.

Along with the designation of *honjin*, the master of the house was granted privileges such as the ability to establish a family name and keep a sword, the financial reward for hosting such VIPs was often meagre and not enough to cover operating expenses. In fact, some families faced ruin due to the increased expenditure, and in the latter half of the Edo period, many former *honjin* families went bankrupt due to the deterioration of the clan's finances and the strain on the family's main business (commerce, agriculture, etc.).

It was not until the Edo period that ordinary people were able to enjoy travel around the country. In the early years of the Edo period, when many political, legal, cultural and ideological changes took place, the government started a process of reorganisation and renewal of Japan's thousand-year-old highway system. Five roads were formally nominated as official routes for use by the shogun and other *daimyo*, and to provide the Tokugawa shogunate with the communications network that it needed to stabilise and rule the country.

Travel boomed in earnest from 1601 when Tokugawa Ieyasu established post stations on the Tokaido, a highway that connected Edo to Kyoto following Japan's eastern coastline. Finally, in 1624, all 53 stages of the Tokaido were completed. Many people came and went along the highway. Tourist destinations were created, and along the route castle towns and *monzen* towns (towns formed around a powerful temple or shrine, which attracted a large number of pilgrims) flourished. Undoubtedly the development of the 53 stations along the Tokaido was a major project that encouraged people to travel. As new post towns were built, specialised traders appeared, starting transport-related businesses such as lodging houses and teahouses.

Another one of the Five Highways, the Nakasendo, connected Edo to Kyoto through the central mountain ranges of Honshu, the largest island of Japan. Many shorter routes already existed at that time, connecting towns over various distances. Eventually, all those routes were connected, and 69 stations were created for travellers to stop along the road.

It was during the Edo period, with the start of the travel boom for the lower classes, that the *hatago* came to the forefront. The etymology of the word *hatago* (literally "travelling basket") comes from the baskets carried by travellers containing food for horses. Later, they were used to carry their own food and goods. Shops that prepared and sold food for travellers were called *hatagoya* (the suffix "*ya*" meaning "shop") but the name was eventually shortened to just *hatago*. These lodgings were the original version of what would later become the *ryokan*. In the Edo period, they were built at post towns along the national highways and were used by both samurai and ordinary people.

Nowadays, one lone *hatago* still stands along the old Tokaido. Ohashiya is located in Toyokawa, Aichi Prefecture, in what used to be the Akasaka-juku, the 36th post station counted from Edo. Founded in 1649, it was both depicted by Utagawa Hiroshige in his *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido* series and included in a *haiku* by Matsuo Basho, who is said to have stayed at the inn. In 1878, it was also used as an imperial residence during Emperor Meiji's tour the Tokai and Hokuriku regions.

Ohashiya was the last *hatago* along the Tokaido to remain in business from the Edo period. During its 366 years of activity, it was rebuilt a few times and owned by different families until, in March 2015, its last owners closed it down and donated the building (designated as a cultural property since 1977) to Toyokawa City. Since then, it has undergone design and construction work for preservation and maintenance, including earthquake-proofing. Today the building is open to the public on certain dates.

Hatago received a further boost in activity when an increasing number of people began to go on pilgrimages. As a religious act, a typical pilgrimage involves travelling around sacred places in a certain area. In Japan, where this activity is very popular, it is believed that by visiting several shrines, you can experience psychological, social and spiritual benefits.

However, religion aside, *hatago* and similar lodgings became increasingly popular with travellers when they began to employ *meshimori-onna* (meal-serving women) to serve guests, reinforcing the "one night with two meals" principle.

While originally the *meshimori-onna* were just maidservants hired by the inns, as traffic along the highways and competition between the inns intensified, they became increasingly engaged in prostitution to attract a larger number of travellers. This practice became so widespread during the Edo Period that in 1718 the Tokugawa shogunate passed a law limiting the number of *meshimori-onna* to two per inn, thus giving them tacit permission to employ a limited number of prostitutes.

Always committed to controlling every aspect of social life around the country, the Tokugawa regime prohibited people from travelling as they pleased. The shogunate was particularly strict regarding the movement of women and weapons. As a matter of fact, only pilgrimages to the sacred Ise Shrine were permitted, while the *onshi* were allowed to travel around Japan to spread the word and recommend a visit to Ise. They also worked as travel agents and in the management of inns. This led to Ise shrine visits becoming popular among the common people, sparking another travel boom. In time, people started combining religious trips with mountain-viewing trips.

The *onsen* (hot springs) is somewhere else *ryokan* have established themselves as premier lodgings. Historically in Japan, hot springs were mainly used for treatment and recuperation. Already in the 8th century, the emperor and aristocrats often used hot springs for healing purposes. For example, the *Nihon Shoki* (*Chronicles of Japan*), the second-oldest book of classical Japanese history, which was completed in 720, records that Emperor Jomei visited Arima Onsen and Emperor Saimei visited Iyo no Yu. During the Middle Ages, as religious and sightseeing trips became popular among the common people, recreational use of hot springs took off and their popularity spread around Japan when writers visited these resorts and recorded them in their travelogues and journals.

Ishibe-juku was the 51st post station along the Tokaido. Print by Utagawa Hiroshige from the series The Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido.

These days, *ryokan* continue to attract people who want to slow down or leave behind their hectic lifestyles for a few days or even just one night, and be pampered in a traditional setting. They are mainly attracted by three key elements: location, cuisine and bathing.

Some *ryokan* are located in beautiful natural areas steeped in history and tradition. The guest rooms are Japanese-style rooms with *tatami* mats, and each room is designed for two or more people. In relatively low-priced *ryokan* (so-called business *ryokan*) one person per room may be allowed, but many tourist inns, hot spring inns, and especially high-class *ryokan* operate on the premise that one room should be used by two or more people. If one person is allowed to stay on their own, the cost is significantly higher.

When the guests are shown to their room, they typically find a low table on which a tea caddy containing green tea leaves, an electric teapot filled with hot water and a tea bowl have been laid out. In addition, sweets are often served on the table.

Superior customer service is another element that sets *ryokan* apart from other hotels. In addition to guiding guests to their rooms, waiting staff also help with raising and lowering the *futon* (traditional mattress used for sleeping) and serving meals. In many cases, the female manager of the *ryokan* – the *okami* (landlady / general manager) – plays an important role in customer service and sales. She is usually the wife of the owner or a female proprietor herself and typically wears kimono when serving customers. At high-class *ryokan* and inns that have a policy of respecting tradition, a *nakai* (member of staff / female waitress) is in charge of serving customers in each room. They are often dressed in kimonos like the *okami*.

The Japanese are famous for loving food, and exquisite cuisine is one thing that unites all great *ryokan*. One of the main differences between Western-style hotels and Japanese inns is whether or not they include meals. Moreover, it is fair to say that in these modern hotels there is almost no room service. On the other hand, Japanese lodgings are based on the concept of "a one-night stay with two meals", dinner and breakfast. However, lower, end *ryokan* allow overnight stays without meals, or either dinner or breakfast only.

A traditional breakfast at a *ryokan* may include grilled fish, *dashi-maki* omelette, rice, *tofu*, Japanese pickles, and *miso* soup. Many *ryokan* offer high-quality meals based on local cuisine and dishes made with locally-produced ingredients as a selling point. Dinner usually follows the multi-course *kaiseki* model with a set succession of several dishes (anywhere between seven and a dozen) which include a fish of some kind, *sashimi*, a meat-and-vegetable combination and, of course, dessert.

The original form of serving meals at a Japanese inn is the so-called *heyashoku* where the waitress brings the food to the guest room and serves it on a low table. However, during the Heisei era (1989-2019), the number of places where meals are served in large dining halls have increased to save on time and personnel.

The third key element that attracts a constant stream of customers to the *ryokan* is the bath. Since many *ryokan* are located in hot spring areas, their mineral-rich water is favoured by health-conscious guests. Many offer a mixture of bathing options, from large communal areas that might include a *rotenburo* (outdoor bath) to small private en-suite baths. The latter option has recently become popular, especially in high-class inns, and some *ryokan* provide rooms with open-air baths. However, in the case of hot spring inns, there is a limit to the amount of hot water supplied from the source,

These days, many *ryokan* are caught between two opposite trends: on the one hand, business is booming, especially with an increase of inbound tourism. On the other, some of the old *ryokan* and their owners are aging, and due to the declining birthrate, they are unable to find successors. As a consequence, even if the business is profitable, they have to close. However, there is no shortage of *ryokan* across the Japanese archipelago. So, pick your favorite one – depending your tastes and budget – an enjoy your stay.

Gianni Simone

TRAVEL Nothing but a stay at an inn will do

Visiting Japan without spending a night in a *ryokan* is a mistake you should not make.

Never without a stay at a *ryokan* (traditional Japanese-style inn). That is how I could describe my numerous trips around the Japanese archipelago over the past four decades. It would be like a foreign tourist visiting France without having at least one coffee at a pavement café. Just as a coffee may sometimes cost you up to £8.50 depending on the city or your choice of district, one overnight stay can cost four times as much at one *ryokan* as another depending on its location, the time of year or the day of the week. Of course, it is more expensive than a night in a regular hotel, but it is an experience that transforms a trip into an unforgettable memory, as the few hours spent in this place will awaken all your senses.

With good reason, the importance of Japanese-style hospitality is stressed to justify staying at a *ryokan*. The term "*omotenashi*", which became popular in 2013 when Tokyo was selected to host the Olympic Games, is often associated with the quality of service in those establishments where the staff take great care of their customers and anticipate their every wish. This is obviously important, but it is not the deciding factor. After all, many regular hotels offer their clients customised service, but unless you are staying in an exceptional establishment, you will not be left with lasting memories. On the other hand, I can cite numerous *ryokan* where I have spent a single night, yet which personality has given meaning to another Japanese expression "*ichi-go ichi-e*", which can be translated as "a once-in-a-lifetime encounter". It is interesting to note that this expression originates in the tea ceremony, in whose ritual participants are required to be completely immersed; to be present in body and spirit in order to appreciate it fully. For me, a stay in a *ryokan* resembles this unique and powerful moment because this hands-on experience includes opportunities to meet other people.

During my last trip to Japan, I visited Kaminoyama Onsen, a spa resort in Yamagata Prefecture in the north-west of the country. After some research, I chose the Saikatei Jidaiya inn (9-5 Hayama, Kaminoyama, tel. 023-672-2451, https://saikatei-jidaiya.jp) situated 2 kilometres from the station. The minute I entered the inn, after making sure to remove my shoes, I was enveloped by that sense of well-being that always greets you in the best of these quintessentially warm and welcoming places. Welcomed by the *okami* (landlady / general manager) who knows how to put you immediately at ease and led to your room by a *nakai* (member of staff / female waitress) who will always be on duty, you enter a space where all your senses are stimulated. What a pleasure to experience the characteristic smell of *tatami* as you enter the room, as well as the softness of the *futon*! If you add to this the time spent eating and bathing – the Kaminoyama Onsen waters have been famous since the 7th century – my stay in the Saikatei Jidaiya Inn confirmed my rule for the perfect journey to Japan: nothing but a visit to a *ryokan* will do!

Odaira Namihei

Odaira Namihei for Zoom Japan

Saikaitei Jidaiya is a medium-sized inn where you will feel like a pig in clover.

COMMERCE The secret and art of renewal

Thanks to the commitment of local people, a fishmonger has opened in a neighbourhood in decline.

In Japan, as elsewhere, local businesses are rapidly being replaced by large supermarket chains and online shopping. Once bustling districts now feature rows of permanently closed shops; they are becoming what is known in Japanese as *shatta shotengai* (shopping district with closed shutters). But that is not to say that every small shopkeeper has thrown in the towel. One new initiative first saw the light of day five years ago, the opening of a community fishmongers in Kamakura, in collaboration with the fishermen from the city of Akune in Kagoshima.

It all began thanks to the inhabitants of Imaizumi district, which is situated at the top of a hill where a large number of elderly people live and where all the shops had closed one after another. Faced with this problem, about twenty local inhabitants set up a scheme partly to solve the problem and partly to create a social hub.

To start with, they organised events in collaboration with small, independent fishermen from Akune and, following successful sales of fish, they decided to make the scheme permanent and opened a fishmonger's in a deserted shopping district by launching a crowdfunding project.

As a consequence, the Sakanaya Marukama fishmonger's opened in April this year. Fish is delivered every day by aeroplane and it is so fresh that it can be eaten raw. If requested, the fishmongers are able to prepare sashimi; in addition, ready meals are on sale as in years gone by, so that customers are able to discover a multitude of ways to eat fish. Seafood from Kamakura is also available there.

Sekiguchi Ryóko for Zoom Japan

Sakanaya Marukama fishmonger's sells ultra-fresh produce and much more besides.

Formerly, local shops were owned by professionals in the trade: bookshops, record shops, and market gardeners also gave advice about books, music, and fruit and vegetables. Here, too, the employees can give the customers advice (the best way to prepare fish, simple recipes, etc.). Being more than just a retail outlet, this fishmonger's hosts courses for secondary school students from the town of Akune, offers cookery classes and organises occasional sales in other neighbourhoods. In fact, the fishmonger has become a meeting place for customers from every background (young mothers with their children, the elderly, people from other districts and so on). Since then, other shops have opened in the same street: a traditional café, a small tableware shop and a shop selling made-to-order *taiyaki* (sweet fish-shaped cakes).

The best thing about this is the sense that this kind of initiative does not need to remain an abstract idea but is a feasible, realistic and achievable project.

While around a hundred fishmonger's are closing down every year, Sakanaya Marukama is a promising example of a community-led initiative where the project's two main players, the city of Kamakura and Akune's fishermen, are working together to provide a solution for everyone.

Sekiguchi Ryoko

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HARUYO RECIPE

Cold mackerel soup
(Saba-kan no Hiyajiru)

RECIPE

01 - Slice the cucumber, stir in the salt and leave aside for 5 minutes.
02 - Slice the leek and tear the *shiso* into large pieces.
03 - Rinse the cucumber, then drain well.
04 - In a bowl, flake the mackerel, then mix in the cucumber, leek and *shiso*.

05 - In another bowl, put the *miso*, white sesame seeds, then add the stock and 400ml cold water.
06 - Pour over the cooked plain rice while hot. Serve immediately.

Tips : You can, of course, use fresh grilled fish. You can also add tofu to increase the size of the servings.

INGREDIENTS (for 2)

- 1 tin mackerel (in brine)
- 1 cucumber
- ½ leek
- 4 *shiso* leaves (aromatic mint-like herb)
- 1 tablespoon *miso* (fermented soy bean paste)
- 1 tablespoon *shiro dashi* (white soup stock)
- 1 tablespoon crushed white sesame seeds
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 bowls plain cooked rice

Tokyu Corporation

The skyscraper, which opened its doors on 23 April, stands out among the other buildings surrounding it in the district of Shinjuku.

Kabukicho Tower is a tour de force

This new skyscraper, the first to be designed by a woman in Japan, is entirely dedicated to entertainment.

Tokyo never ceases to amaze us. From world-renowned pop culture and phantasmagorical architecture to cutting-edge technology and unending nightlife, it is a city that never sleeps, but is instead ceaselessly innovating and evolving. This year alone, the number of new projects opening up is overwhelming. Summer 2023 will see The Making of Harry Potter Warner Bros. Studio Tour, which is as big as two Tokyo Domes. Spring 2023 the 45-floor Tokyo Midtown Yaesu shop and office complex opened up, which includes an elementary school and a six-storey Bulgari Hotel featuring delivery robots and face-recognition technology. The Animate Ikebukuro flagship store (which opened in March 2023) is the world's largest anime store, and one of the 88 certified Anime Pilgrimage spots for 2023.

One of the most dazzling new additions to the Tokyo skyline is the colossal Tokyu Kabukicho Tower, which opened on April 23rd in the Shinjuku neighbourhood of Kabukicho, one of Tokyo's favourite entertainment districts. Kabukicho Tower – devoted entirely to entertainment and leisure – boasts a staggering 53 floors of fun, including 48 floors above ground and a further five floors underground. Unsurprisingly, it is one of Japan's largest entertainment and hotel complexes.

"We want it to be a facility that specialises in entertainment and motivates people to come to the area," said KIMURA Tomoo, an executive officer at Tokyu Corporation, the company that masterminded the project. Their aim is to create a space that reflects the blend of youthful energy, art and music that characterise Shinjuku's spirit. To help achieve this goal, 26 artists were commissioned to create large-scale installations throughout the building.

The lower to middle floors hold restaurants, art galleries, stage theatres, cinemas and shops. The entire second floor is occupied by *yokocho* style eateries (*yokocho* literally means side streets, usually narrow and crammed with bars and food stalls). To add to the fun, this food hall has been designed with a festival-like atmosphere, including music, a DJ booth, a stage and karaoke. The third floor is given over to pop culture, featuring Bandai Namco's giant arcades and popular anime, manga and video game characters. Sony Music Entertainment takes up the whole of the fourth floor to offer a hi-tech experience including escape game rooms, dungeons and lots of other weird, wild stuff. On the fifth floor, you will find a health and wellness zone, complete with a 24-hour gym, private sauna and pool terrace.

Floors six to eight will be home to Theatre Milano-Za, a cutting-edge performance stage that can accommodate approximately 900 people. 109 Cinemas Premium, with eight screens, is on the 9th and 10th floors, promising "a viewing experience that is completely different to current cinemas". On the 17th floor you will find a restaurant, bar and terrace.

The higher floors are occupied by two hotels (which opened on 19th May). Groove Hotel Shinjuku occupies the 18th to 38th floors. Groove is a lifestyle hotel where, according to the owners, you can "feel the culture of art and music that continue to excite Shinjuku". This even includes art installations in 4 specially-themed rooms. Finally, on floors 39 to 45, the Bellustar Hotel is so luxurious it bills itself as your "private villa in the sky" (and at that altitude, you can be sure that the views are jaw-dropping).

Down in the basement, the entire five floors are devoted to Zero Tokyo - a nightlife zone of live music, clubs and performance space. The popular live music venue Zepp Tokyo, which originally closed down in 2022, has reopened

Tokyu Corporation

The blue and white façade of the tower was designed to evoke the idea of a fountain.

Tokyu Corporation

Nagayama Yuko designed this impressive skyscraper.

Tokyu Corporation

Though there are many other attractions here to draw in visitors, its architecture is also bound to arouse interest.

in this underground area. It is sure to be one of the basement's big attractions, promising to maintain its policy of hosting a large variety of live gigs by both national and international famous artists.

But Kabukicho Tower is not just noteworthy for the head-spinning vertical world that awaits you inside. The most remarkable aspect is the building's design itself. The striking blue and white façade of the 225-metre-tall tower is designed to look like a fountain, cascading and shimmering amid the more conventional towers around it, as it reaches up and merges with the blue of the sky.

Moreover, unlike other towers, Kabukicho Tower does not contain any offices. This building is all about entertainment – a first for Japan. It is also the first time that a Japanese skyscraper has been designed by a female architect, Nagayama Yuko. So where did she find the inspiration for the fountain theme?

"The design was inspired by water because the Shinjuku area used to be a swamp. In particular, since this location is closely linked to the post-war reconstruction achieved by local people, we imagined a fountain rising up from the ground. Since this building is the first skyscraper in Japan devoted to entertainment, I imagined it to be ephemeral and erected in such a way that it would disappear without any impetus from the population. In the plaza in front of the building, there used to be a symbolic fountain, but it is no longer there. You could say that we have revived it."

Nagayama also points out that there is a Buddhist "goddess of water" called Benzai Ten, commonly referred to as Benten, who is the only female member of the *shichifukujin* or Seven Gods of Good Fortune. She is an appropriate symbol for this ambitious tower as Benten is also the goddess of femininity and music. She is usually depicted playing a *biwa*, or Japanese lute. So, can women bring a different sensitivity to architecture (and design in general) in comparison to male architects?

"I feel that individual differences are stronger than gender differences," says Nagayama. "However, I personally think women's designs sometimes seem more flexible."

Certainly, in an interview with world-architects.com, Nagayama commented that "office towers can be seen as symbols of power, but Kabukicho Tower is more fragile, dissolving visually into the sky".

This gives it a very different appearance to the rectangular box-like shape of many skyscrapers. Indeed, Kabukicho Tower's fluid, flowing lines recall the way Catalan architect Antoni Gaudi also challenged the tyranny of the straight line over 100 years ago. Gaudi took his inspiration from nature, calling it "the great book which we should all read". By taking her inspiration from water, Nagayama also seems to have read the great book. Is she familiar with Gaudi's designs?

"I went to Barcelona when I was a student to see Gaudi," she answers. "I went to the Sagrada Familia, Parc Güell, and Casa Mila. I thought the organic and structural rationale of their forms was very beautiful."

Nagayama's next project is no less ambitious – designing the tallest building in Japan.

"I am currently designing the low-rise part of a super-high skyscraper, which will be the tallest in Japan. We wanted the façade to express the idea of activity itself , so we wrapped a walkway around the building which is 2 kilometres long and 60 metres in height. Escalators and lifts are the basic way of getting around inside the skyscraper, but this is also a building that you can climb up on foot. The pavements around the building turn the front-facing part of the building into a street-level shop window, allowing the activity inside to spill out."

Tokyo's capacity to keep us surprised looks likely to thrive for a long time yet.

Steve John Powell
& Angeles Marin Cabello

How to get there

1-29-1 Kabukicho, Shinjuku City, Tokyo
Tokyu Kabukicho Tower is a few minutes' walk away from Seibu-Shinjuku Station and JR Shinjuku Station.
The most convenient way is to take one of the shuttle buses to and from Haneda and Narita airports, which stop directly outside the basement of the tower. Or you can catch an express bus from Tokyo Station to Sawara. The bus leaves from the Yaesu exit and the journey takes 90 minutes.

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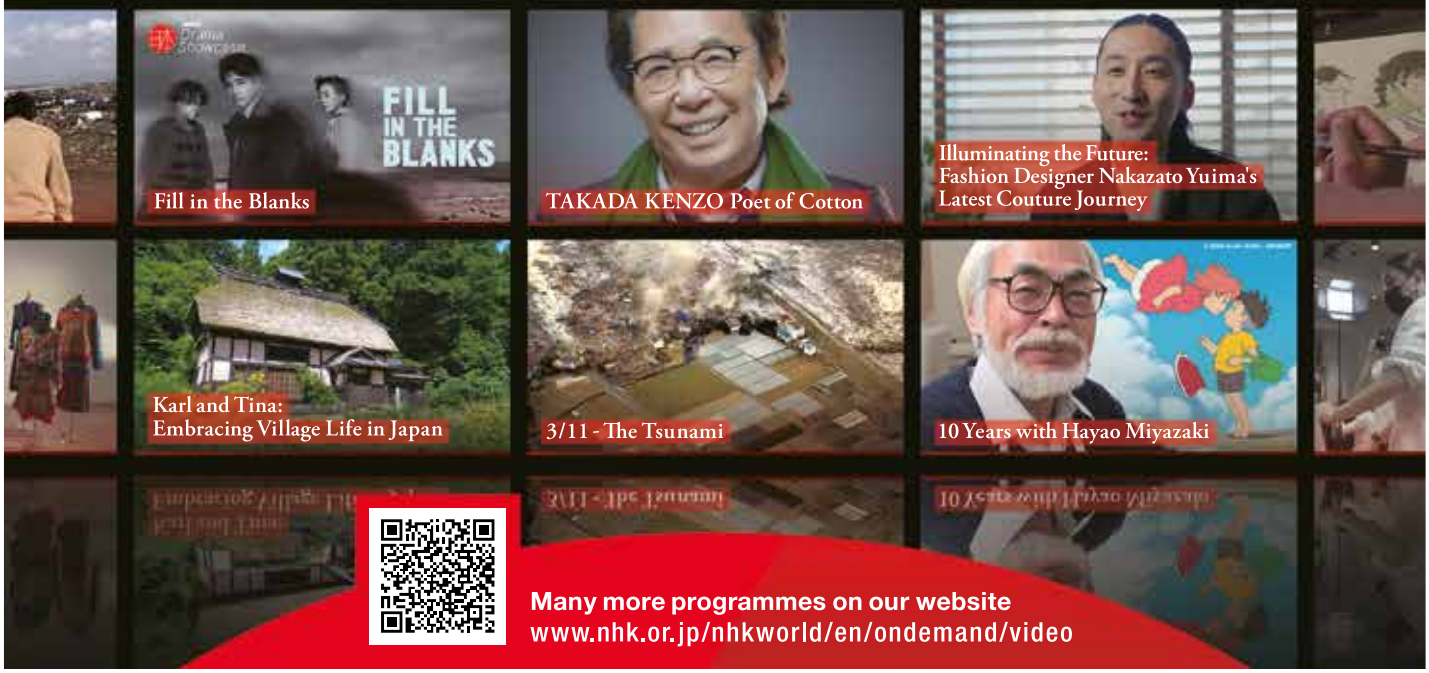

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