SHIZUOKA
AN UPLIFTING EXPERIENCE IN THE LAND OF MOUNT FUJI

SELENA HOY

SHIZUOKA Prefecture is only about an hour and a half southwest of Tokyo on the Shinkansen, yet it seems a world away from the endless churn of the big city. Wrapping around Suruga Bay, Shizuoka holds many treasures: to the east, the Izu Peninsula offers tranquil beaches, stunning cliffs and myriad hot springs. To the west are Shizuoka’s centers of commerce and serene green tea plantations. To the north, the crown jewel of Mount Fuji—known as Fuji-san—is queen of all she surveys.

The Suruga Bay Ferry—which runs between Shimizu and Toi on the Izu Peninsula—is a pleasant and convenient way to cross from one side of the prefecture to another. Mount Fuji looms in the distance, wearing the morning fog like a robe. As passengers settle into cozy chairs, sipping drinks and gazing out the window, the ship moves past Miho no Matsubara, the scenic seven-kilometer-long pine-lined stretch of coast featured in one of Hiroshige’s *ukiyo-e* prints. Seagulls swoop and dive over the ship’s wake, hunting for their breakfast while a dolphin surfaces in the distance. The ferry route, by the way, was officially recognized as Route 223 in 2013, becoming Japan’s only prefectural "road" on the sea—and the only one with no traffic jams.

As the ferry cruises over the 2500-meter-deep Suruga Trough—the deepest part of Suruga Bay—the haze dissipates, revealing Mount Fuji’s full height, a few clouds clinging like a skirt around her midriff. Depending on the vantage, the season and the weather, the iconic mountain’s aspect changes greatly, but this view surely reveals one of her most magnificent poses.

On the west coast of Izu, Toi is a perfect place to begin to sample the peninsula’s sandy beaches,
scuba diving and snorkeling. There are also attractions for those who want to linger in Toi, an old gold-mining town, and you can soak in one of the many local hot springs overlooking the rocky coast with Mount Fuji in view. The city also boasts the world’s largest flower clock, with an outer path of pebbled surfaces from smooth to jagged.

In Shimizu, visitors to S-Pulse Dream Plaza can ride the Ferris wheel and enjoy a panoramic view of Mount Fuji. Dream Plaza also has a sushi museum and a restaurant area of eight sushi restaurants called Shimizu Sushi Yokocho (Sushi Alley). They serve mainly locally caught delicacies like tuna, sakura-ebi (cherry shrimp), and shirasu (whitebait).

About half of the tuna Japan consumes is offloaded at Shimizu Port, including most of the country’s frozen tuna. Whitebait are caught from mid-March until mid-January. Sakura-ebi are only found in Japan in Suruga Bay, Tokyo Bay and Sagami Bay, and Suruga Bay is the only place they are caught. These ocean delicacies can be eaten at local restaurants and purchased in the shops at S-Pulse Dream Plaza. This is the best place to enjoy Shizuoka’s delicious seafood.

Naoki Kobayashi, a Shizuoka native working at the Tourism Promotion Division of Shizuoka Prefecture, lives at the base of Mount Fuji in a town called Fujinomiya. “Life is good here, eating seafood and looking at Mount Fuji every day,” he says. “I guess it’s simple, but it makes me happy.” Like Kobayashi, travelers will also find that Shizuoka’s charms keep them coming back for more.

A seafood dish topped with sakura-ebi (cherry shrimp), shirasu (whitebait) and other delicacies

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