



# AT HOME WITH JAPAN'S WORLD HERITAGE

The celebrated Jomon Sugi cedar, thought to be as much as 7,200 years old

World Heritage properties provide a window through which people can learn about Japan's nature, culture and history, and there is no shortage of foreigners living in Japan who have found themselves drawn to the appeal of Japan's World Heritage properties in this way. Toshio Matsubara and *The Japan Journal* introduce the World Heritage properties of Yakushima, Kumano Kodo and Hiraizumi through the eyes of three non-Japanese.

## THE PARADISE OF YAKUSUGI

“It rains thirty-five days a month on Yakushima.” That’s what they say about the rainfall on this island. With annual precipitation of over 4,500 mm (it is about 1,500 mm in Tokyo), the island is one of the rainiest areas in Japan. That abundant rain has nurtured the diverse nature found on Yakushima, forming scenery including a forest of Yakusugi cedar trees more than 1,000 years old which stand atop mountainous terrain more than 500 meters above sea level, and waterfalls from rivers and cliffs fed by huge amounts of water. Moving off the beaten track, one can also encounter Yaku-

shima macaques living in groups and *yakushika* deer sporting magnificent antlers. Yakushima is also the Pacific Ocean’s largest egg-laying sites for the green turtle, and from May through August each year visitors can even observe the turtles laying their eggs.

“Yakushima is an amazingly beautiful island. If you go just a little way off the track you can encounter wonderful aspects of nature such as beautiful flowing rivers, natural pools, cascading waterfalls and cedar forests,” explains American William Brouwer.

For twenty-five years, Brouwer worked in the United States designing and producing furniture

The forest road that runs along the western side of the island is known as the “Green Tunnel.” Here one can encounter large numbers of monkeys and deer.

and working on building alterations and extensions, but after the chance viewing of a collection of photographs of Yakushima, he decided to visit the island with his Japanese wife and became fascinated by its nature. From 1993, as chance would have it the

same year Yakushima was inscribed on the World Heritage List, Brouwer began his life on the island together with his wife and their newborn son.

His first job on Yakushima was to build a workshop and home. He chopped down the trees himself, created the foundations and built their home in around eleven months. Yakushima cedar is used liberally in the home, which features a beautiful view of the ocean. There is also a large bath lined with stones collected from the seaside. After building their home,



MASATOSHI SAKAMOTO

Brouwer built further extensions on the premises, including a library for his wife, a workshop, a home for his parents-in-law and a design studio.

“I always wake up just before sunrise, when the view of dawn is truly beautiful. I love the night as well. There are an amazing number of stars shining and it’s so bright that you can write a letter by moonlight,” says Brouwer. “The weather can be severe at times, but with its rich nature, it’s ideal as a place for raising children.”

Brouwer makes his living designing and constructing buildings such as homes and restaurants, and producing furniture. While a regular architect only designs buildings, Brouwer also does most of the construction himself. The structures he builds on Yakushima are characterized by the fact that they are wooden buildings designed to blend in with the island’s nature. Brouwer exercises ingenuity in house shape and the positioning and size of windows so that the nature of Yakushima, the sea, rivers and forests, can be enjoyed even from inside the home.

Brouwer has also expanded beyond Yakushima. He has designed a facility for the elderly which is currently under construction in Kagoshima.

“Looking ahead, while the island residents are aging, I also think the number of elderly people migrating to the island from elsewhere will increase. In the future, I’d like to build facilities for the elderly on Yakushima as well,” says Brouwer.



MASATOSHI SAKAMOTO

William Brouwer cuts timber with a century-old American handsaw in the workshop beside his home.

# KUMANO KODO: A CULTURAL LANDSCAPE



YOSHIFUSA HASHIZUME

Brad Towle of Tanabe City Kumano Tourism Bureau on the Kumano Kodo pilgrimage route

Inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2004, the “Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range” refers to the three sacred sites of Yoshino & Omine, Kumano Sanzan and Koyasan, and the three pilgrimage routes that link them, namely the Kumano Sankei-michi (usually referred to as the “Kumano Kodo”), Omine Okugake-michi and Koyasan Choishi-michi.

The Kii Mountain Range is situated in mid-west Honshu and spans the three prefectures of Mie, Nara and Wakayama. The range accounts for the greater part of the Kii peninsula that juts out into the Pacific Ocean and is covered in dense forest growth. It is thought that the area was already being referred to as Kumano by around the eighth century. Kumano is a special place regarded as the abode of the gods. Worshipped by people from ancient times, at its heart lie the Kumano Sanzan (the Three Grand Shrines of Kumano) made up of the Kumano Hongu Taisha, Kumano Hayatama Taisha and Kumano Nachi Taisha. From around the ninth century, a great many people, from nobles and warriors to ordinary people set out for the Kumano Sanzan from Kyoto, Osaka and Nagoya along the Kumano Kodo. People believed they would be purified of their sins in previous lives from the Kumano Hayatama Taisha, attain the grace of the gods in their present life

from the Kumano Nachi Taisha and find salvation in their future lives from the Kumano Hongu Taisha. The crowds were such that the sight of pilgrims extending along the road was likened to a “procession of ants.”

The area’s world heritage listing has prompted re-invigorated efforts to deepen Japanese and foreign visitors’ understanding of the Kumano Kodo through activities led by the respective local governments. One of the organizations engaged in those activities is the Tanabe City Kumano Tourism Bureau, established in 2006 by Tanabe City in Wakayama Prefecture.

“I have visited mountain environments around the world, but the Kumano region has a truly special atmosphere,” says Canadian Brad Towle, the Bureau’s International Tourism Promotion and Development Director. “What especially attracts me to the Kumano Kodo is that people’s lives, culture and beliefs closely intertwine to produce a unique cultural landscape.”

Prompted by his having worked in the area for three years from 1999 as an assistant English teacher, Towle has been working at the Tourism Bureau since its founding.

To date, the Tourism Bureau has implemented various initiatives to create a high quality, sustainable tourism destination open to the world. One way



YOSHIFUSA HASHIZUME

Kumano Hongu Taisha

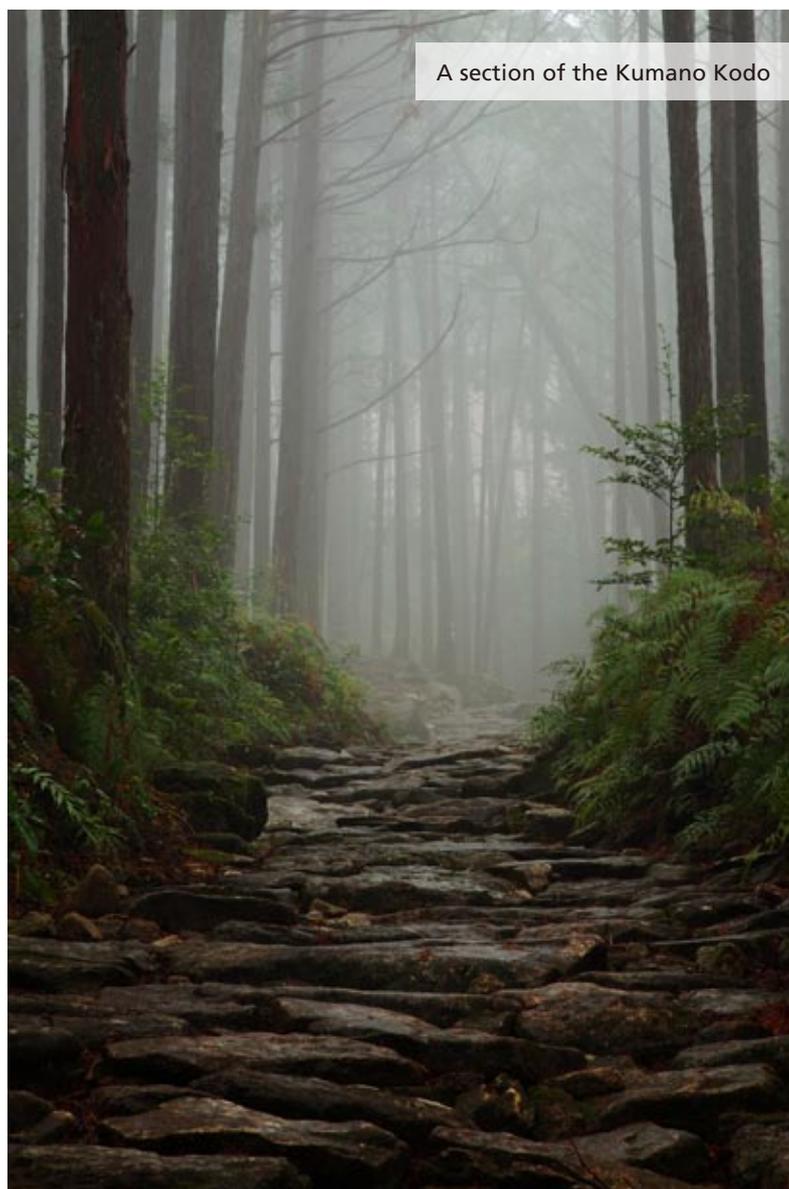
is through the introduction of “Community Tourism.” This unique community based tourism model allows tourists to experience the local lifestyle, culture, and industry. The Tourism Bureau held repeated workshops for people involved with inns, bus operators, shrines, and local governments, and discussed with local residents how to accommodate foreign tourists.

“Sometimes service providers can be very friendly and over-adapt to guests’ needs, which may lead to a loss in the authenticity of a visit to the region,” says Towle. “It is vital that the local culture is preserved. In fact, this is actually what international visitors are searching for when walking the Kumano Kodo pilgrimage route, an immersive cultural experience.”

One of the main issues for both visitors (who do not speak Japanese) and service providers (who do not speak foreign languages) is communication. To bridge this gap, the Tourism Bureau worked closely with the service providers to increase cultural awareness and create customized translation sheets to facilitate smooth and efficient communication. So by pointing to these “communication sheets,” which are written in both English and Japanese, hotels and inns could explain to international guests how to use their facilities. The Tourism Bureau also developed an international award-winning online community reservation system allowing visitors to easily book accommodation, tours and activities, and travel services in both Japanese and English.

As a result of these efforts, the number of foreign tourists visiting Kumano Kodo has tripled over the last seven years.

In 2008, Tanabe City forged a partnership with Santiago de Compostela in Spain, which is also inscribed on the World Heritage List for its pilgrimage



route, and joint promotions have continued. These efforts have yielded results in the form of an uptick in visitors to the Kumano Kodo from Spain, and in the number who visit Kumano after first visiting Santiago de Compostela. 2013 represents the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of exchanges between Japan and Spain, and while the details are yet to take shape, joint events are being planned.

“Tanabe City is currently working towards adding sections of the Kumano Kodo to the World Heritage site in 2015,” says Towle. “Restoring and maintaining the Kumano Kodo is vital, including sections that are not on the World Heritage list. I hope that the entire length of the Kumano Kodo will be regenerated and preserved for future generations to experience Japan’s spiritual roots.”

## EXPLORING THE SOURCE OF HIRAIZUMI

**H**iraizumi in Iwate Prefecture is the area where the Oshu Fujiwara clan of warlords built their stronghold in the twelfth century and flourished for around a century thereafter. The Chuson-ji, Motsu-ji, Kanjizaio-in Ato, Muryoko-in Ato and Mt. Kinkeisan sites remaining in the area, which form a group of temples and gardens built by the Fujiwara clan based on the Pure Land Buddhism it promoted, were inscribed on the World Heritage List as “Hiraizumi—Temples, Gardens and Archeological Sites Representing the Buddhist Pure Land.”

“One aspect of the appeal and value Hiraizumi holds is that the culture was formed in the midst of international exchanges with East Asia,” explains

Special Associate Professor Haiyu Liu of Iwate University’s Center for Hiraizumi Studies. “That characteristic is especially well preserved in the remains of Hiraizumi’s gardens.”

Dr. Liu is an expert in Chinese archaeology originally from Qingdao, China. Since around 2005, he has worked tirelessly conducting joint research projects with Japanese researchers, presenting papers on Hiraizumi research in Chinese and inviting Chinese researchers to Hiraizumi to support Hiraizumi’s World Heritage property listing. From October 2012, he has been conducting comparative research on the gardens of Hiraizumi and ancient China at the Center for Hiraizumi Studies.

At each of the Chuson-ji, Motsu-ji, Kanjizaio-in



A view over Oizumigaiké pond in the compound of Motsu-ji temple



Hondo main hall in the center of the Motsu-ji temple compound

are from the late twelfth century and brought up to Hiraizumi from Kyushu via Kyoto through trade with China. The fact that the Fujiwara clan possessed ceramics which were extremely valuable in Japan at the time is regarded as testament to just how much power the Fujiwara clan commanded. It is also believed that at the same time, gold was exported to China from Hiraizumi.

Today, China is preparing its application to have the Silk Road which runs through Central Asia inscribed on the

Ato and Muryoko-in Ato sites, there are Pure Land gardens thought to directly express Buddhist Pure Land on this earth. While the Pure Land gardens of Hiraizumi are fashioned from concepts learned from Kyoto's gardens, they also offer a brief glimpse into the influence of ancient Chinese gardens. For example, at the Oizumigaike pond in the compound of Motsu-ji temple, the water of the pond is currently being partially drained for research, and several "seagull rocks" (rocks where shellfish have made holes) roughly a meter in size were discovered from the base of the pond. Dr. Liu believes that the fact that seagull rocks usually only found by the sea are in the pond indicates that the garden was fashioned with the pond made to resemble the sea. The idea of creating ponds resembling the sea in gardens was originally thought to have originated in ancient China.

"Almost nothing is left at the remains of ancient Chinese gardens, but at Hiraizumi, the remains of gardens which convey the styles used during that time are preserved in excellent condition," says Dr. Liu. Research into the gardens of Hiraizumi is extremely important for the research of ancient Chinese gardens as well."

Archeological research work is underway at Hiraizumi even today, and precious artifacts that offer evidence in support of the Fujiwara clan's relationship with China have been discovered. Chinese-made ceramics are one such example. Most of them

World Heritage List, and it is also seeking listing of the remains of eight port towns which served as the starting point for trade routes between China and the world from ancient times as the "Maritime Silk Road." Academic support providing the historical importance is required for World Heritage Site listing. In this sense, research into Hiraizumi will also help in the efforts to gain heritage listing.

"Many Chinese scholars have considered that Kyoto is the end-point of the Maritime Silk Road, and many scholars now think it was Hiraizumi," says Dr. Liu. "International exchanges between Chinese and Japanese researchers are yielding significant academic accomplishments." 

---

*Toshio Matsubara is a freelance writer.*



AKIHIRO MURAKAMI

Dr. Liu beside the Oizumigaike pond in the compound of Motsu-ji temple. The pond and the stream of water flowing into it were upgraded based on archaeological research. Motsu-ji is a favorite place of Dr. Liu.

# The 100-Square-Meter Movement Protecting Shiretoko

The Shiretoko Peninsula is a peninsula in the northeast of Hokkaido which juts out into the Sea of Okhotsk. The Shiretoko Peninsula is home to a diverse natural environment that includes steep mountains, coastal cliffs, wetlands, lakes and marshes, and pristine forests. It is also a treasure-trove of precious fauna such as brown bears, seals, Steller's sea eagles and Blakiston's fish-owls. Some 71,000 hectares including the Shiretoko Peninsula and surrounding sea was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2005.

Nature conservation efforts on the Shiretoko Peninsula began in the form of the Shiretoko 100-Square-Meter Movement started as an initiative by the local town of Shari. At the time, the Shiretoko Peninsula faced an overdevelopment crisis as real estate businesses bought up more and more vacant farmland. With this happening, the mayor of Shari at the time was inspired by the National Trust in the United Kingdom and solicited donations from around the country to finance land purchase costs for the equivalent of 100-square-meters of land with the aim of preventing overdevelopment and restoring forests on vacant farmland. The Shiretoko 100-Square-Meter Movement continued for twenty years, and using donations from about 50,000 people in Japan and overseas, 472 hectares of land were purchased. The purchased land will be perpetually conserved and managed by the town of Shari. While the land purchased through this movement represented only a part of the Shiretoko Peninsula, the movement trig-



gered to a broader region-wide movement to protect the Shiretoko Peninsula, and was a key factor behind Shiretoko's being inscribed on the World Heritage List.

From 1997, the spirit of the previous movement was carried forward with the inception of the 100-Square-Meter Forest Trust. Looking a century in to the future, the Trust aims to restore lost pristine forest and declining or extinct populations of fish and mammals across the land already purchased and a further 390 hectares of adjacent land owned by the town of Shari (total 862 hectares). Each year, activities such as nature classes aimed at elementary, junior high and high school students and tree-planting efforts are conducted by the Trust's supporters on the land. 



Ezo-jika deer are among the region's rich variety of fauna



Exploring Shiretoko's natural beauty in summer