

niponica

Discovering
Japan

にほにか

no. 31



• Special Feature • **Taking a Little Break, Japan-Style**

• Special Feature •

Taking a Little Break, Japan-Style

In beautiful natural environs, or traditions passed down through generations, even in a corner of a bustling city, Japan offers an array of items and environments to heal and relax. Let's learn to take a break, Japan-style.

- | | | | |
|----|--|----|--|
| 04 | Take a Little Break in Japan | 16 | A Virtual Journey through Japan
Hot Springs Tour across Japan |
| 06 | Lessons in Zen:
Regulating Mind and Life | 18 | Tasty Japan: Time to Eat!
Kanmidokoro |
| 10 | The <i>Kominka</i> Experience:
Recharging Mind and Body | 20 | Strolling Japan
Hakone |
| 12 | Napping in the Big City | 24 | Sourvenirs of Japan
Mamezara |
| 14 | Relaxing in Japanese
Loungewear | | |



Cover photo: A place to stop and rest among the bamboo trees
Photo: Aflo

niponica is published in Japanese and six other languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish) to introduce to the world the people and culture of Japan today. The title *niponica* is derived from "Nippon," the Japanese word for Japan.

no.31 R-031018

Published by: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan
2-2-1 Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku,
Tokyo 100-8919, Japan
<https://www.mofa.go.jp/>

A moment of relaxation
with Japanese sweets and
green tea
Photo: Aflo





2



3

1. A *tsukubai* in a Japanese garden. Visitors wash their hands before entering the tearoom to relax. Photo: Aflo
2. A sunny, garden-side verandah is the perfect place for a cat to take a nap. ©MITSUHIRO KAWAMATA/MottoPet/amanaimages
3. Japanese houses with large sliding doors provide excellent ventilation for a cool and comfortable space in summer. Photo: Aflo

Take a Little Break in Japan

Rest is essential for nursing a tired body, changing pace, or nourishing the creative mind—indeed, for living a fulfilling life. Every culture has its own ways of recharging and takes different amounts of time off in a year. Since Japan is sometimes seen as a culture with long work hours, many may imagine that the Japanese are not good at relaxing. The reality, though, may be surprising. The Japanese people have actually devised a number of high-quality, satisfying

ways to rejuvenate within a limited amount of downtime.

Real rest is a whole lot more than just lounging idly. The mind and body can actually recharge through activities different from the usual routine, or by trying on a new way of thinking. Practicing *zazen* sitting meditation or exercising outdoors are both excellent ways to refresh the body and soul. Surround yourself with lush greenery to relax the eyes, soak in a hot spring bath to restore tired muscles, or

eat a special meal that aids digestion and helps the stomach relax. In Japan, all of these are ways to recharge a tired body and get ready for tomorrow.

Japanese culture encourages taking quick breaks throughout the day. For a change of pace, Japanese people take advantage of many places around the city to unwind on their own, as well as many items for relieving fatigue at the end of the day. Japanese people are, in fact, very

good at taking time to rest.

In the search for more prosperous, comfortable lives, it is always good to rethink conventional ideas of work and rest. Japanese ways of taking a little break may just offer helpful hints.

A man with a shaved head and glasses, wearing a black robe, is sitting in a meditative posture (zazen) on a tatami mat. He is looking out a window on the left side of the frame. The room has wooden walls and a wooden bench in the background. The lighting is soft and natural, coming from the window.

Lessons in Zen: Regulating Mind and Life

Zen arrived in Japan primarily in the 12th and 13th centuries via India and China. Deeply rooted in modern Japanese culture, this philosophy teaches us that a peaceful mind comes from an ordered life. The wisdom that comes from Zen helps clear the mind and simplify everyday life.

Photos: Kurihara Osamu



1



2



3

Focus on the Present Moment

It is 5 o'clock in the morning. The sun is rising, and the air is clear and crisp. Yoshimura Shoyo, deputy chief priest at Fumonji Temple in Hiroshima, is now ready to do a period of sitting *zazen* meditation. Breathing slowly and gently lowering his gaze, he sits for around 40 minutes, facing a wall. There is a sense of dignified beauty in his stature as he holds the correct posture in silence.

“What is important in Zen is to focus on the present moment. Sitting *zazen* gives us a chance to be aware of this,” explains Yoshimura. “*Zazen* is not for making the mind blank. Miscellaneous thoughts are not to be swept away; there are simply to be accepted. It is a way of looking at oneself objectively, with all the thoughts and feelings that arise, to look at one’s mind and heart.”

“We all as people tend to dwell on the past, worry about the future, and be disturbed by things that are not part of the reality before us. If, through *zazen*, you can release the tension in your mind and body and face yourself as you are, in the present moment, you will not get caught up in unnecessary concerns.”

Every Action Is Zen Practice

After sitting *zazen*, Yoshimura reads sutras, eats, and cleans. Every movement is efficient and done with great care.

“The Zen philosophy is that every movement and every action is a form of practice. You must approach each one with serious intent and not take shortcuts.”

Cleaning, an activity often neglected, is actually a practice that lends itself to examining one’s state of mind. Yoshimura also spent a great deal of time cleaning during his two years and two months training as an ascetic at Eihei Temple, the head temple of the Soto sect of Buddhism. To keep the large temple and grounds clean, he cleaned constantly, following specific rules.

“You move your body before you can begin thinking. This is precisely what we mean by focusing on the present. Cleaning and *zazen* have the same effect.”

In the same way, eating a meal is also meaningful. According to Zen teachings, not one grain of rice or the smallest leaf should be wasted. Each ingredient is to be savored, and nothing is left behind. This is why meals are eaten according to very specific rules. There is no speaking, only intentional eating. Complete attention is paid to the meal.

“Zen monks, who do not believe in killing living things, eat mainly vegetables with no meat or fish. This is called *shojin ryori* (devotional food), because the meal itself is a Buddhist practice. There is meaning in paying complete attention to the meal as a way to experience the present moment fully.”

Rethinking Daily Life from a Zen Perspective

While it might seem difficult to fit these complete Zen practices into contemporary daily life, it is actually quite possible to incorporate Zen philosophy into each day.

For example, even setting 10 minutes aside each day to clean with care and attention can be enough. During meals, concentrate on the act of eating without being distracted. What is important is to set aside time in your daily activities to be mindful of the present moment, to carefully savor it, and accept it as it is.

“It is a mistake to try to do something to regulate your mind. Rather, cleaning, eating, and even sitting *zazen* are simply a means of practice. By practicing this principle, you will find yourself naturally settle. The Zen way of thinking says that, by continuously practicing in your daily activities, you can naturally regulate your mind.”

Though these rules may seem rigid, there is in fact a surprising amount of peace of mind that comes from an ordered life. Rethinking your everyday life according to Zen principles may just be the way to go.

Yoshimura Shoyo
Born 1977. Deputy chief priest at the Soto sect Fumonji Temple, Hachiyasan (in Hiroshima). Yoshimura is also a clinical psychologist and works at a hospital in Hiroshima Prefecture, in addition to lecturing and writing. He is the author of such books as *Kokoro to kurashi ga totonou zen no oshie* (“Zen Teachings for Regulating Mind and Life”) and *Shojin ryori ko* (“Principles of Shojin Ryori”).

1. Sweeping the grounds of fallen leaves and trash with a bamboo broom.
2. In *zokin-gake* cleaning, rags made from used cotton cloths are used to clean the floors and other surfaces. The weight of the body is used to push the cloth with both hands. Using one’s own weight in cleaning makes it easier to focus on the present.
3. Tightly wringing out the cotton cloth removes as much dirt as possible from the rag.
4. Yoshimura carefully grinds sesame seeds by hand. The kitchen is kept clean and tidy, even while meals are prepared.
5. His breakfast is similar to the meals he ate when training at Eihei Temple. From left: rice porridge, pickles, sesame salt.
6. Using both hands to hold the spoon and bowl is one of the rules for eating mindfully.



4



5



6



2

The *Kominka* Experience: Recharging Mind and Body

Kominka stand quietly in villages nestled in the mountains. Bringing back feelings of warmth and nostalgia, these traditional homes are a study in relaxation.

Photos: Kurihara Osamu, PIXTA



3



4

1. The house is believed to have been built around the 18th to 19th century.
2. Tougenkyo-lya Mountain Village – Fusho, a traditional *kominka* inn built at the highest point in Ochiai Village, presents magnificent mountain views.
3. Ochiai Village is dotted with *kominka* scattered across the mountain slope.
4. The interior features a high ceiling and wooden floor.
5. Meal served around the *irori* sunken hearth.



5

Kominka are old residences built with traditional Japanese construction methods, and it is not uncommon to come across one more than 100 years old. Carefully repaired and handed down over generations, some are even considered highly prized items of cultural heritage in Japan.

An increasing number of *kominka* are being restored and repurposed as cafes or restaurants, perhaps because these spaces, steeped in history, exude a sense of comfort. In many places, especially rural areas with ever-dwindling populations, *kominka* have been a catalyst for promoting tourism. Take, for example, the *kominka* converted into inns in Ochiai Village in Tokushima Prefecture's Iya Valley.

Here, the age-old mountain village landscape remains undisturbed. Traditional homes with thatched roofs made of Japanese pampas grass or other materials have been reborn as charming lodgings that are becoming more and more popular as travel destinations.

Enter a *kominka*, and step into a space where time stands still. Sunlight stays at the outer edges of the rooms, leaving the interior bathed in shadows. The colors of the original pillars, beams and mud walls are organic and muted, and the floorboards have been polished to a shiny black. These well-ventilated rooms encourage the flow of natural cool air, leaving visitors rested and relaxed.

The heart of a *kominka* is its *irori* sunken hearth. A square is cut from a portion of floorboard and a pit dug in the soil below then lined with mixed mud or concrete, to create a place for a fire lit with wood or charcoal. This is where the family gathers, sitting around the hearth to eat and keep warm.

In the past, the hearth was kept burning year round. During the rainy season, the fire would act as a dehumidifier, and in the summer, it would create airflow that brought cool breezes in through the windows. The rising smoke would also protect the thatched roof by making it more insect- and water-proof. Traditional Japanese people truly

knew how to create comfortable, long-lasting homes.

Of course, *kominka* are no longer just old houses. They are now well equipped with electric equipment such as modern kitchen appliances, baths, and air-conditioning. These inns blend historic charm with just enough modern convenience, for the ultimate in comfort. The perfect spot to gaze out on the countryside and ponder life long ago, while savoring local foods, the *kominka* quietly restores mind and body.



A Bookstore-Like Hostel

Japan is home to many *manga kissa* cafes, cafes where customers can relax while freely reading a *manga*, but some special hostels are the latest to take the concept a step further. These hostels feature spaces for readers to stretch all the way out while enjoying their favorite *manga*. Book a room for the night, or even just an hour during the day. You'll find a wide range of not just *manga*, but magazines and books, as well.

Relaxing Spa Facilities

Public bathhouses provide everything you need to truly relax, from different types of hot-water baths designed to relieve fatigue, to saunas, bedrock baths, and even meals. Feel free to stretch out for a nap after a bath, as well.

Ryugoku Yuya Edoyu, located in an area associated with the renowned *ukiyo-e* artist Katsushika Hokusai, features his famous Mt. Fuji on one of its walls.



Unwind in an Urban Forest

Tokyo may be a metropolis, but the city actually possesses many lush parks. One of these natural havens is Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden, which first opened over 100 years ago. On a sunny day, the park is a perfect place to lie back on the grass and do some cloud watching.

Skyscrapers peek out from behind the trees at Shinjuku Gyoen.
Photo: Kurihara Osamu

Napping in the Big City

Tokyo may be one of the busiest cities in the world—but did you know there are plenty of places where you can lie down for an afternoon nap or even just to relax? Read on to discover some unexpected locations to get a bit of rest during or after a day of fun and sightseeing.



Pages from *manga* series hang from the ceiling at Book and Bed Tokyo Shinjuku. Beds are nestled among the bookshelves.
Photo: Kurihara Osamu

Lying Under the Stars Indoors

This state-of-the-art optical planetarium is fitted with mats and cushions along with regular seats. It's a wonderful place to lie back and enjoy the starry skies. Some viewings are even accompanied by music and aromatherapy to relax and refresh the body and soul.

The cutting-edge equipment at Konica Minolta Planetarium Man-ten projects some 400,000 stars overhead.



Relaxing in Japanese Loungewear

Function, comfort, fashion. Japanese loungewear delivers all three, adding a bit of luxury to time spent at home.



Comfortable as a Fluffy Sweet

Pastel colors that bring to mind icing on a cake. In fabrics so soft, they're a pleasure on the skin (left). In designs so sweet, they bring a thrill each time you put them on. The popular Japanese brand *gelato pique* turns loungewear into fashion. (Photo courtesy of MASH Style Lab Co., Ltd.)



Bare Feet Fun

Made long ago of straw and bamboo, Japanese traditional *zori* sandals have been transformed into brightly colored fashion slippers for indoor wear. Cloth *zori* (above) are woven from strips of fabric and feel great against bare feet. They also add a stylish accent to interior decor. (Photo courtesy of MERIKOTI)



Stay Cool in Summer with Traditional Fabrics

Children's clothing made from brightly dyed and patterned Takashima Chijimi, a ramie crepe fabric produced for centuries in Takashima city, Shiga Prefecture. The fabric's puckered texture (top left) wicks away moisture and feels smooth and pleasant on the skin. (Photo courtesy of SOU・SOU)

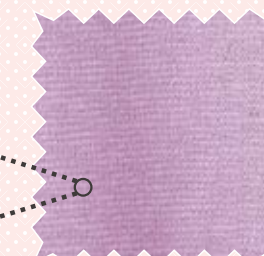
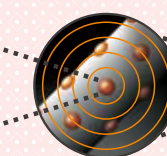


Pajamas in Denim

Pajamas made from fabric woven in Kojima, a town in Okayama Prefecture known as "the birthplace of Japanese denim." This sleepwear is made from denim that is thinner, softer on the skin (right), and keeps its color longer than usual jean denim, yet is just as fashionable. (Men's pajamas pictured above.) (Photo courtesy of Kaimin Labo)

Clothing for Better Rest

"Recovery wear" is made from yarn spun with PHT (platinum harmonized technology) fibers (below) that contain nano platinum and other minerals. These fibers stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, which helps restore the mind and rejuvenate the body. Just wearing this clothing can help relieve fatigue. (Photo courtesy of VENEX Co., Ltd.)





A Virtual Journey
through Japan

Hot Springs Tour across Japan

Every location has its own unique hot spring resort. Japanese *onsen* always try to make the most of the special characteristics of their surroundings. Enjoy some time and space truly relaxing in hot spring baths, embraced by scenic views.

Hyogo

Arima Onsen Taketoritei Maruyama

Arima Onsen is an ancient hot springs with a history so old it is mentioned in the oldest historical books in Japan. Taketoritei Maruyama offers open-air baths for guests to try out the two types of baths the area is known for. Which do you prefer—the golden brown, iron-rich *kinsen* waters or the translucent silver *ginsen* waters containing traces of naturally occurring radium?
(Photo courtesy of Taketoritei Maruyama)



Kagoshima

Sunamushi Onsen Sayuri

Buried to your neck in hot sand, you gaze at the ocean in front of you and are lulled by the sound of the waves as your entire body warms and releases sweat. Then emerge and wash off the sand feeling totally refreshed. A memorable and totally unique hot spring experience.
(Photo courtesy of Ibusuki City Tourism Association)

Akita

Nyuto Onsen Village Tsuru No Yu

These baths are known as *bijin no yu* ("hot springs of beauty") for their milky white waters that leaves skin smooth and soft. Located in a hot springs village deep in the mountains, Tsuru No Yu is a traditional Japanese row house with thatched roof offering views of old Japan from its outdoor baths.
(Photo: photolibary)



Hokkaido

Lake Shikaribetsu Kotan Ice Village Outdoor Onsen

A hot spring bath on a frozen lake?! Lake Shikaribetsu, the highest lake by altitude in Hokkaido, creates an instant *onsen* bath by pumping hot spring water through a pipeline into an in-lake bathtub. Open for two months from the end of January to the end of March.
(Photo courtesy of Lake Shikaribetsu Nature Center)



Aomori

Koganezaki Furofushi Onsen

Inviting guests to bathe at the edge of the Sea of Japan, this outdoor bath is constantly refilled with fresh hot water drawn from underground sources. The name "Furofushi" translates to "never grow old or weak," and as it suggests, the reddish-brown, iron- and salt-rich waters offer heat-retaining and antibacterial effects to warm the body from its core.
(Photo courtesy of Koganezaki Furofushi Onsen)



Yamanashi

Fujigoko Shojikohan Yamadaya Hotel

Immerse yourself in an open-air *onsen* with bathtubs made of fragrant cypress and views of sacred Mt. Fuji. Reserve a private bath in advance for a bit of luxury time all to yourselves. If the skies are clear, you might get the chance to witness Mt. Fuji reflected upside-down in Lake Shoji.
(Photo courtesy of Yamadaya Hotel)



Miyagi

Sakunami Onsen Yosenkaku Iwamatsu Ryokan

50 minutes by car from Sendai, the largest city in the Tohoku region. Nestled in the mountains on the banks of the Hirosegawa river, this long-established hot springs first opened 200 years ago. Soak in a rock bath surrounded by wildlife as you take in the babbling mountain stream and the beauty of the season—cherry blossoms, spring greenery, autumnal leaves, or a snowy landscape.
(Photo courtesy of Sakunami Onsen Yosenkaku Iwamatsu Ryokan)



Nagano

Jigokudani Monkey Park

Humans are not the only ones that love the hot springs. Wild Japanese macaques living in this 850m-high valley have long used the open-air baths to keep warm during the harsh winter months. The only place to see monkeys taking a hot spring soak, the park attracts tourists and researchers from all over the world.
(Photo: PIXTA)



Kumamoto

Kurokawa Onsen Shinmeikan

The Kurokawa hot spring resort is popular for its Bath Pass, which lets visitors soak in outdoor baths at any 3 of its 28 inns. Shinmeikan is one of these and known for its 30m-long cave bath hand-carved by the innkeeper, who spent 10 years digging it with chisel and hammer. Feel like an explorer and soak in a hot spring bath. It's the best of both worlds.
(Photo courtesy of Shinmeikan)



Kanmidokoro

Savor a Quick Break
with a Retro Vibe

Photos: Arai Akiko



The interior (left) and exterior (top right) of the serene and elegant Hatsune sweets shop. The dark stained wood tells the story of time passing. Bottom right: Deliciously mild tea is brewed with water boiled in an iron teakettle.

In cities across Japan, you can find *kanmidokoro* (literally meaning “sweet taste place”) which, as the name suggests, are cafes specializing in sweet treats. Thought to have emerged in the late Edo period, around the start of the 19th century, these cafes boast a longer history than Japan’s *kissaten* tearooms that double as coffee shops. In contrast to *kissaten* menus, which mainly feature coffee, cakes, sandwiches and other items from the West, *kanmidokoro* are devoted to serving traditional Japanese confections. Some even offer light savory snacks, as well. Decorated inside and out with wood and bamboo, these shops take you back in time to the streets of old Japan.

The essential ingredient for many of the choices offered on the *kanmidokoro* menu is adzuki bean paste. This sweet bean jam, made by boiling adzuki beans in water and sugar, comes in two varieties: *koshi-an*, which is strained to remove the skins, and *tsubu-an*, which is made with the

skins left in.

Sweet *shiruko* soup is made from adzuki paste and served with grilled *mochi* rice cake, filling enough for a meal. Diners looking for a light, refreshing dessert opt for *mitsumame*, a combination of red peas and agar made from a type of seaweed called *tengusa*, topped with plenty of white or brown sugar syrup. In 1930, a *kanmidokoro* in Ginza topped *mitsumame* with a scoop of adzuki paste in a sundae-like confection that it called *anmitsu*. To this day, *anmitsu* continues to be one of the most popular items served at *kanmidokoro*.

Most of these sweet confections are difficult to prepare in advance. *Shiratama*, small white balls of glutinous rice flour dough, lose their firm texture if left soaking for too long after being boiled. Agar gets soggy soon after it is cut into cubes. To serve with just the right texture, *shiratama* and agar are made after the customer orders. It is the chewy, smooth *shiratama* and agar paired with sugary

syrup and richly sweet adzuki paste that delights the senses. Relaxing with one of these special dishes is simply the best!

Hatsune, established in 1837, is a *kanmidokoro* in Tokyo’s Ningyo-cho neighborhood. According to eighth-generation owner Ishiyama Miyuki, most of the oldest *kanmidokoro* are located in *monzen-machi* towns that grew up around influential temples or shrines.

“Long ago in Japan, restaurants in town were frequented only by men. At that time, *kanmidokoro* were really the only place where women and children could sit down to enjoy a comfortable time having a bite to eat. After a visit to a shrine or temple, women and children loved stopping by these sweet shops.”

Kanmidokoro are precious spots for enjoying traditional handmade sweets and a nostalgic atmosphere. Today they welcome everyone, men and women, young and old—anyone with a sweet tooth.



Anmitsu

Left: Adzuki bean paste, *gyuhi* (*mochi* made from rice flour and maltose syrup), and fruit served in a colorful presentation. Drizzle with white or brown sugar syrup and enjoy!
Right: Hidden among the rest are agar and red peas. Glossy agar is the standout star of *anmitsu*.



Zoni

Zoni, a broth-based soup with *mochi* and other ingredients, is not only an essential part of Japanese New Year’s celebrations, but an everyday dish, as well. Many *kanmidokoro* include *zoni* on their menu as a light snack. Pictured above is the Egg *Zoni* served at Hatsune, featuring beaten egg, seaweed, and Japanese parsley.



Shiruko

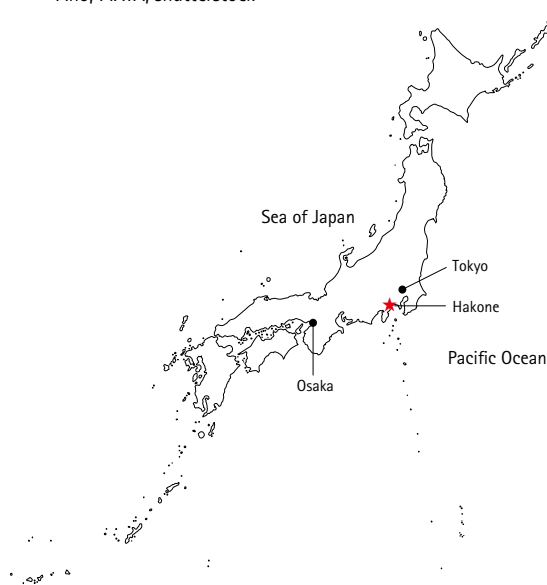
Soupy adzuki bean paste with grilled *mochi* makes for a hearty, sweet soup dish. This is accompanied by pickled perilla seeds or another small dish to cleanse the palate after the meal.

Traditional traveler's rest spot with hot springs and historic sites

Hakone

Nestled in a majestic landscape dotted with bubbling hot springs, Hakone has long been a haven for weary travelers. One of Japan's leading resort areas, located not far from Tokyo, Hakone is an ideal spot to unwind and reset.

Photos: Osaka Satoshi, Aflo, PIXTA, shutterstock



1. Woods of different grains and colors are combined to craft yosegi-zaiku wooden mosaics.
2. Lake Ashinoko, Hakone's most famous sightseeing spot, offers views of Mt. Fuji on clear days. Connecting the lake's four ports, the sightseeing boat offers views of the Hakone Shrine *torii* gate.
3. Hakone Tozan Railway powerfully climbs the steep mountain tracks. Passengers enjoy views of seasonal flowers from the windows. Photo courtesy of Hakone Tozan Railway
4. Art installations stand in scenic natural surroundings at Hakone Open-Air Museum. Photo courtesy of Hakone Open-Air Museum
5. Hakone Shrine boasts over 1,200 years of history.





6. The Hakone Daimyo Gyoretsu, an annual procession of people dressed as *daimyo*, or regional samurai lords, is held in November. The festival is a reenactment of the processions of *daimyo* and their retinues that travelled back and forth between Edo and their home provinces.
7. Amasake Chaya has been brewing *amazake* for some 400 years. Yamamoto Satoshi is the 13th generation owner of the teahouse.

Hakone has developed over the centuries as a staging post and inn town along the Old Tokaido Road, a major route which connected Edo (modern-day Tokyo) and Kyoto. The steep mountain passes near Hakone were considered the most difficult section of the roadway, but this very same geological feature also offers abundant access to hot spring waters, making the area one of the most popular tourist destinations in Japan to this day.

The last stop on the limited express from Tokyo's Shinjuku Station, is Hakone-Yumoto Station. From here, a number of trains and buses are available to take passengers further, but you might prefer to experience the Hakone Tozan Railway as it zigzags its way up the mountain slopes.

A great place to begin a Hakone visit is the area around Lake Ashinoko. Among the many historic sites here are Hakone Shrine, which has been a destination for Shinto

worshippers since the 8th century, and Hakone Sekisho, a faithful reproduction of a 17th century inspection station set up to monitor travelers along the road. On a clear day, a lake cruise also offers great views of Mt. Fuji in the distance. Lake Ashinoko also marks the halfway point in the Tokyo-Hakone Round-Trip College Ekiden Race, a New Year's tradition in Japan.

Another of Hakone's charms is its many museums. Japan's first outdoor museum, the Hakone Open-Air Museum, is located here. At the museum, visitors are free to roam among sculptures out in the fresh air or play with interactive exhibits, making a great day of fun for children and adults alike!

If you are a lover of Eastern art, Okada Museum of Art, established in 2013 is the place to go. The museum boasts a collection of some 450 works, mostly early modern and



10. Resting at the footbath in front of the Okada Museum of Art is a great way to appreciate *Kaze Toki* ("Wind and Time"), a massive mural by Japanese painter Fukui Kotaro. Chocolates decorated with *ukiyo-e* woodblock motifs are a popular item at the museum gift shop (as of October 2021).
11. Hatsuana Soba is known for its *seiro soba*, which is served with a dipping sauce made with *dashi* broth and Japanese yam. Photo courtesy of Hatsuana Soba
12. *Yumochi*, yuzu-flavored *mochi* with thin slices of bean paste jelly inside, are the signature of Chimoto, a long-standing traditional sweets shop in Hakone Yumoto.



11

12

modern Japanese paintings and East Asian ceramics made around the 17-20th century. Many of the beautiful works on display here have been designated National Treasures of Japan. The massive mural, *Fujin Raijin-zu* ("Wind God and Thunder God"), 12m high and 30m wide, is particularly awe-inspiring in both size and grandeur.

Yosegi-zaiku wooden mosaics are a traditional Hakone artisanal craft with a 200-year history. Geometric patterns of exceptional beauty are formed with elaborate combinations of woods of different species and color. Hakone souvenir shops offer a dizzying array of boxes, vases, and accessories crafted in this style.

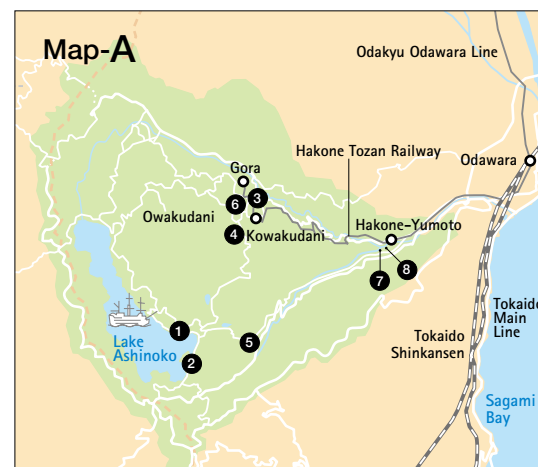
After a stroll through town, a traditional *chaya* teahouse offers a welcome break. Amasake Chaya is named after its signature *amazake*, a sweet low-alcohol drink made from

rice and other ingredients. Made today by the same method as in the Edo period (1603-1867), this sweet sake has a mild, mellow taste and is said to relieve fatigue. Weary travelers can also savor Hakone's famous hot spring baths. At traditional *ryokan* inns, guests can soak away all their cares—for as long as it takes—while other *onsen* facilities cater to shorter daytime bathers.

Come full circle, and the shopping streets outside Hakone-Yumoto Station are lively and bustling. Visitors try the area's famous soba noodles or pick up traditional sweets at one of the renowned shops to bring back home. Then, it's only 90 minutes back to Tokyo on the express train. Visit again and again to discover all the seasonal faces of Hakone.



8. Boasting a large open-air garden bath, Motoyu Mori-no-Yu is a great hot-springs for visitors on a one-day trip. Photo courtesy of Hakone Kowakuen Yunessun
9. *Yosegi-zaiku* artisan Tsuyuki Kiyotaka focuses on creating contemporary containers and accessories, as well as traditional wooden boxes.



Map of the Hakone Area

- ① Hakone Shrine
- ② Hakone Sekisho
- ③ Hakone Open-Air Museum
- ④ Okada Museum of Art
- ⑤ Amasake Chaya
- ⑥ Motoyu Mori-no-Yu
- ⑦ Hatsuana Soba
- ⑧ Chimoto

• Access
Hakone-Yumoto Station is approx. 90 minutes from Shinjuku Station on the Odakyu Limited Express.

• Contact information
Hakone Zenzan, the Hakone Town Tourist Association official website
<https://www.hakone.or.jp/>



Souvenirs of



Japan 22

Photos: Arai Akiko

Special Little Plates to
Brighten Up Your Table

Mamezara



Mamezara are great for serving small portions of various condiments, such as scallion or seaweed.
(Photo courtesy of scope)

Occasionally in Japanese cuisine, petite side dishes designed to refresh the taste buds and cleanse the palate between bites are added to the table. These are called *hashiyasume*, literally meaning “to rest the chopsticks.” Compared to other sides, they are served in the smallest portions, almost like a garnish, adding a touch of special color and flare to the meal. *Mamezara* are small plates around 6cm in diameter, perfect for serving *hashiyasume*. *Mamezara* enhance the look of

any side, from beans, pickles, and vinegared dishes, to condiments such as scallion and ginger, or snacks like fruit and nuts. Add whimsy to the dinner table with *mamezara* crafted in the shape of a flower, hand fan, or gourd. These little plates can be made of ceramic, glass, or lacquer and are often used to bring a seasonal or festive look to a meal. Light, easy to handle, and useful, *mamezara* are the perfect addition to any tableware collection.