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**JAPAN'S ROADSIDE STATION:  
MICHINO-EKI**

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The following are corrections made to Highlighting JAPAN Vol. 182 upon requests from the relevant ministries and agencies.

P9 [Original] A type of dried noodles made of wheat flour. According to the standards of the Ministry of Agriculture,  
[Correction] A type of dried noodles made of wheat flour. According to the food labeling standards of the Consumer Affairs Agency,

P24 [Original] The MOJ and TIJ co-hosted the Special Youth Forum in conjunction with the ASEAN-Japan Special Meeting of Justice Ministers (AJSMJ).

[Correction] The MOJ and TIJ co-hosted the Special Youth Forum with the support of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in conjunction with the ASEAN-Japan Special Meeting of Justice Ministers (AJSMJ).

P25 [Original] and thereby fresh perspectives of the youths were delivered to the international community. Providing these opportunities will help promote youth empowerment.

[Correction] and thereby fresh perspectives of the youths were delivered to the international community. The recommendations will also be submitted to the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ). Providing these opportunities will help promote youth empowerment.



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## THEME FOR AUGUST:

### Japan's Roadside Station: *Michi-no-Eki*

In Japan, there are approximately 1,200 facilities known as “*Michi-no-Eki*,” or roadside stations, that have been established across the country with the purposes of offering road users a safe and comfortable road traffic environment as well as fostering local community development. Each facility is designed to reflect the unique characteristics of its respective area. In this month's issue of “*Highlighting Japan*,” we will showcase these *Michi-no-Eki*, which draw a diverse range of visitors with their breathtaking scenic views, exclusive experiences, and the sale of attractive local specialties. We will also introduce the expansion of *Michi-no-Eki* internationally.



ON THE COVER: A view of the Forêt Nakakawane Chameikan. Characterized by its simple, rustic warmth, the structure blends in with its natural setting near the Oi River, surrounded by deep-green mountains

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#### PRODUCTION

FBI Communications, Inc.

#### MANAGING EDITOR

Fukuda Yasuhiro

#### EDITORS

Kato Naruho, Kimura Tetsuro, Koike Ginga

#### CONTRIBUTORS

Fukuda Mitsuhiro, Murakami Kayo, Oyama Yuzuruha, Tanaka Nozomi

#### DESIGN

Azuma Terutaka, Sawatari Rumi

#### EDITORS' NOTE

Japanese names in this publication are written in Japanese order: family name first, personal name last.

## FEATURES

# Japan's Roadside Station: *Michi-no-Eki*



Photo: Roadside Station Skydome Kamitaka



Photo: Roadside Station Shodoshima Olive Park



Photo: Roadside Station Kobe Fruit and Flower Park/Ozo



Photo: Kato Fumio

Above left: Visitors can enjoy video simulations of elementary particles and neutrinos projected on a large screen at the science museum.

Above right: Olive Ramen, with noodles kneaded in olive oil and topped with sliced lemon, is served at the Restaurant Sun Olive in the roadside station.

Below left: The Farm Circus Market offers a wide selection of locally grown vegetables and fruits, as well as alcoholic beverages and seasonings.

Below right: Two *Michi-no-Eki* facilities have been opened in Indonesia thus far. This one shows *Michi-no-Eki* Pakewa.

In Japan, there are approximately 1,200 facilities known as “*Michi-no-Eki*,” or roadside stations, that have been established across the country with the purposes of offering road users a safe and comfortable road traffic environment as well as fostering local community development. Each facility is designed to reflect the unique characteristics of its respective area. In this month’s issue of “*Highlighting Japan*,” we will showcase these *Michi-no-Eki*, which draw a diverse range of visitors with their breathtaking scenic views, exclusive experiences, and the sale of attractive local specialties. We will also introduce the expansion of *Michi-no-Eki* internationally.



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# Roles and Charms of *Michi-no-Eki*, and Prospects for a Global Brand

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“**M***ichi-no-Eki*,” or roadside stations, stand as distinctive Japanese establishments that foster vibrancy within local communities. We spoke with Niwa Katsuhiko, Director-General, the Road Bureau at the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, about the purposes, functions, establishment, current state, and prospects of *Michi-no-Eki* facilities.

Could you please explain what kind of facilities *Michi-no-Eki* are in Japan? Also, could you introduce the background of their establishment, the initial and current numbers, as well as their types?

“*Michi-no-Eki*” are rest facilities positioned along regular roads, designed to offer road

users a safe and comfortable road traffic environment as well as foster local community development. Their registration is overseen by the Road Bureau under the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, following applications from municipalities and other responsible entities. To attain *Michi-no-Eki* status, these establishments must provide 24-hour free parking and restroom facilities, platforms for giving road and local tourist information, and amenities for regional promotion.

Furthermore, those providers responsible for installation (the road administrator or municipality) frequently establish a wide array of facilities customized to the distinctiveness of each region based on creative concepts. These include



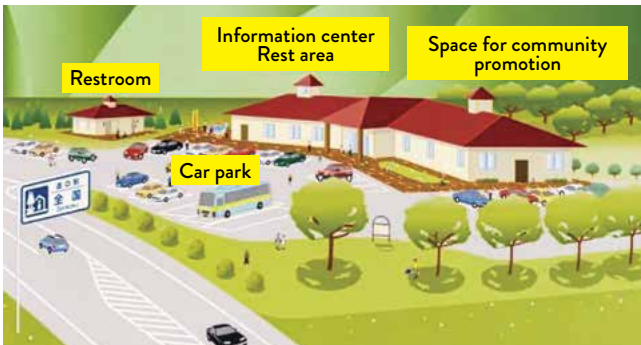
Niwa Katsuhiko  
Director-General, Road  
Bureau at the Ministry of  
Land, Infrastructure,  
Transport and Tourism



*Michi-no-Eki* Asobounosato Kugino was used as a base for relief efforts during the 2016 Kumamoto earthquake.

### Overview of typical *Michi-no-Eki* facilities

(Material provided by the Road Bureau, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism)



The car park, restroom, information center, and rest area will be developed by the road administrator or municipality

The space for community promotion (including culture sharing and tourism/recreational facilities, etc.) will be developed by the municipality

local specialty stores, markets for agricultural produce, dining establishments, hot springs and accommodation, recreational parks, sports fields, healthcare facilities, and services for the elderly.

The concept of *Michi-no-Eki* is said to have originated during a symposium planned by the former Ministry of Construction's Chugoku Regional Construction Bureau in January 1990. During the symposium, participants proposed the idea that it might be beneficial to have stations with restroom facilities on roads, similar to those found on railways. Following several rounds of social experiments and refinement, the system was formalized. In April 1993, the first round of registrations took place, giving birth to 103 *Michi-no-Eki* facilities. Subsequently, the concept spread across Japan, and as of August 4, 2023, a total of 1,209 stations have been registered as *Michi-no-Eki*.

### With over 1200 *Michi-no-Eki* facilities currently established throughout Japan, what factors do you attribute to the widespread proliferation?

The widespread presence of *Michi-no-Eki* can likely be attributed to the freedom and flexibility with which

Functioning as a comprehensive disaster prevention hub during major calamities, *Michi-no-Eki* are expected to serve as a central point for operations by the Self-Defense Forces, police, technical teams, and more, facilitating relief endeavors. Moreover, they are envisioned to play a crucial role as bases for restoring essential facilities including emergency supplies, and to aid in reconstruction efforts.



### Purposes of *Michi-no-Eki*

- Provide a safe and comfortable road traffic environment for road users
- Contribute to community promotion

### Functions of *Michi-no-Eki*

#### Rest

24-hour free parking and restrooms

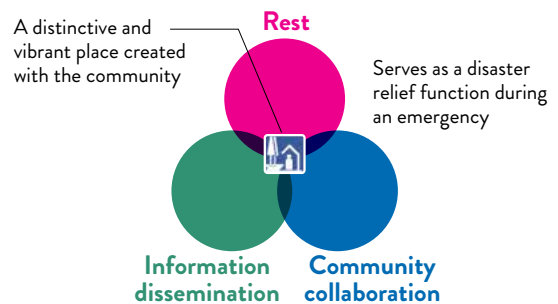
#### Information dissemination

Road, local tourism, and emergency medical information, etc.

#### Community collaboration

For promoting the area's cultural and recreational facilities

### Basic Concept of *Michi-no-Eki*



Purposes and functions of *Michi-no-Eki* (Material provided by the Road Bureau, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism)

they are established and operated, driven by the creative ideas and initiatives of local communities. The distinctiveness of each station plays a significant role. In *Michi-no-Eki*, it is crucial to encourage innovative and distinctive ideas that align with the unique circumstances of each region. Looking at it from this perspective, we convey the core idea of *Michi-no-Eki* as “a distinctive and vibrant space co-created with the local community, equipped with functions for rest, information dissemination, and community collaboration.” While the registration process involves governmental consent, the specific concept of each *Michi-no-Eki* is shaped by the local residents, emphasizing the importance of embracing diverse and creative thinking.

In the development of the *Michi-no-Eki* policy, its role has evolved over time. Initially, it served as a resting place for drivers (Stage 1). Gradually, it transformed into a destination for travelers (Stage 2) and now is expected to play a role in revitalizing entire regions, serving as a hub for local development, tourism, and disaster prevention (Stage 3). In this Stage 3,

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the most significant role entrusted to *Michi-no-Eki* is seen as “introducing the allure of the region and energizing the local community.”

*Michi-no-Eki* is expected to play a role in enhancing the appeal of each region and addressing local challenges. In response to these expectations, municipalities and others responsible for their installation have collaborated to generate various ideas and undertake innovative plans. A multitude of distinctive *Michi-no-Eki* facilities have emerged as a result of these creative endeavors, reflecting the unique character of each locale.

### What might be the allure of *Michi-no-Eki* for local residents and visitors alike?

In today's world where convenience stores and the internet provide access to almost everything, the allure of *Michi-no-Eki* lies in its unique offering: the experience and items that can only be found by going there. This aspect is of utmost importance. *Michi-no-Eki* serve as places for rediscovering local charm, where visitors not only take a break and shop, but also

resonate with and are moved by the region's attractions and assets. We anticipate that those who visit *Michi-no-Eki* become fans of the entire region, enhancing their understanding of the local cultural climate as the backdrop. This in turn will contribute to the overall vitality and excitement of the region as the number of fans increases.

Moreover, in disaster-prone Japan, *Michi-no-Eki* are also greatly anticipated to fulfill a role in disaster prevention. During significant events such as the Niigata-Chuetsu Earthquake in 2004 and the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, *Michi-no-Eki* played a vital role as shelters, platforms for giving road and disaster information, and bases for comprehensive rescue and recovery efforts. In disaster-prone Japan, the development of communities that can respond appropriately to various disasters will continue to be a very important issue. In light of these national circumstances, *Michi-no-Eki* are also expected to serve as a hub for disaster prevention, recovery, and reconstruction, contributing to the resilience of communities in times of crisis.



*Michi-no-Eki* Yunishigawa has a foreign tourist information center.





At the information center of *Michi-no-Eki* Niseko View Plaza in Hokkaido, staff from the local tourism association provide guidance on the town and nearby attractions. As a designated priority *Michi-no-Eki* to actively attract foreign tourists, it has implemented digital signage to provide regional information in English and provides WiFi access points that link to the Niseko tourism Facebook page, aiming to actively engage with English-speaking visitors.

**In recent times, there has been an increase in the number of tourists visiting *Michi-no-Eki*, including both domestic and international visitors. Could you please share your outlook for the future?**

After a quarter-century since the start of *Michi-no-Eki*, a new challenge has emerged since 2020: the goal to transform *Michi-no-Eki* into a global brand. This initiative aims to attract foreign tourists and promote *Michi-no-Eki* internationally. Enhanced efforts include offering multilingual support, establishing foreign tourist information centers, and introducing cashless payment systems to enrich basic services. Some *Michi-no-Eki* have actively embraced foreign visitors, offering cultural experiences and tourism services utilizing various means of transportation such as buses, bicycles, and rental cars to explore the region.

For instance, *Michi-no-Eki* Niseko View Plaza located in Niseko, Hokkaido, serves as a gateway for foreign tourists visiting the breathtaking natural landscapes and internationally renowned Niseko Ski Resort in

the region. With the implementation of multilingual information services and the establishment of accommodation facilities and restaurants catering to foreign visitors in collaboration with the community, the number of foreign tourists has been steadily increasing over the years.

*Michi-no-Eki* hold plenty of charms and expectations, and I believe that they have substantial potential, with continuous room for evolution. I am committed to raising awareness about these uniquely Japanese *Michi-no-Eki* that we can take pride in on the global stage. Our aim is to further develop and promote *Michi-no-Eki*, ensuring that they are utilized by a diverse range of individuals, including foreign visitors. ㊦





FEATURES



# Roadside Station “Meruhen no Oka Memanbetsu” Exploring Majestic Landscapes Unique to Hokkaido

Situated in Ozora Town, Hokkaido, this *Michi-no-Eki*, or roadside station, is conveniently located next to a famous scenic spot that’s a popular choice for photography. This *Michi-no-Eki* offers a variety of local agricultural and livestock products at affordable prices, and visitors can even participate in food production experiences. We had the opportunity to talk to the representative of the roadside station to discover more about what makes it so appealing.

(Text: Tanaka Nozomi)



About a 10-minute drive north from Memanbetsu Airport, the eastern gateway to Hokkaido's skies, lies one of the area's representative tourist attractions—Meruhen-no-Oka (Hill of Fairy).

This picturesque spot is known for its seven larch trees lining vast fields, creating a scene reminiscent of a storybook illustration, attracting countless photography enthusiasts. The landscape of the area gained nationwide fame after being featured in the 1990 film "Dreams," directed by Akira Kurosawa.


Situated not far from this tourist attraction is the Meruhen no oka Memanbetsu. We had the opportunity to speak with Nanbu Takeshi, who is responsible for managing and operating this *Michi-no-Eki*.

"Okhotsk is known for its thriving livestock and agriculture, offering a wide range of delicious products. Every morning, local farmers bring freshly harvested vegetables to the market. Also, processed foods such as soy sauce made from freshwater clams harvested from Lake Abashiri and freshwater clam miso soup, which only requires the addition of hot water, are particularly popular," he explains. "Cheeses and soft-serve ice cream made from locally produced milk are also a hit. I also recommend locally sourced meats such as Sakura pork, a local brand of pork. The town is rich in culinary ingredients."

Not just limited to shopping, this *Michi-no-Eki* also offers a variety of food workshops for visitors to enjoy. "The workshops include making items using wheat flour such as bread and udon noodles, as well as experiences like crafting bacon and sausages," says Mr. Nanbu.

If you travel north on Route 39 from the roadside station, you'll reach the Abashiri Prison Museum. As a result, the store in this station is able to consistently sell prison labor products<sup>1</sup>. Actually, original items like clothing and aprons printed with the Abashiri Prison

logo have gained firm popularity.

We also asked Mr. Nanbu about other recommended nearby tourist spots. "In August, the sunflower fields at Memanbetsu Airport are at their best. During spring, *Higashimokoto Shibazakura Park* in Higashimokoto is decorated in a stunning pink, with broad fields of blooming *shibazakura* flowers as far as the eye can see. There are numerous stunning vistas in Memanbetsu, so I highly recommend considering this *Michi-no-Eki* as your starting point for exploration," Nanbu suggested. 

1. Products manufactured by inmates within the prison system with the intention of being sold to the general public. These items encompass a variety of goods, including detergents, food, leather products, and furniture.



Photo: Meruhen no oka Memanbetsu



Above: A distinctive feature of the *Michi-no-Eki* is its castle-like appearance. Below: At the roadside market, local farmers personally supply their vegetables, highlighting the appeal of freshness and budget-friendly prices.

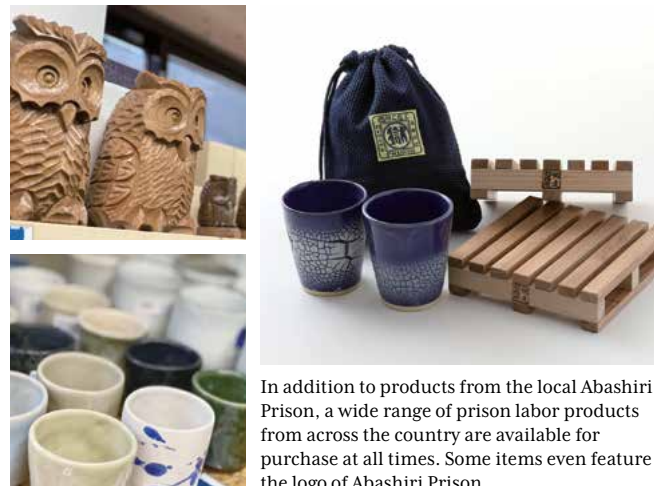


Photo: Meruhen no oka Memanbetsu

In addition to products from the local Abashiri Prison, a wide range of prison labor products from across the country are available for purchase at all times. Some items even feature the logo of Abashiri Prison.

Left page

Above left: The cylindrical formations scattered across the fields consist of rolled straw leftover from wheat harvesting. This spectacle is exclusive to the harvest season.

Above right: The spectacular sights of Meruhen-no-Oka (Hill of Fairy) change from season to season and even during a single day. The silhouette of the seven larch trees stands out against the backdrop of the setting sun.

Middle: Seven larch trees, the sky, and fields form the enchanting landscape of Meruhen-no-Oka (Hill of Fairy)

Below left: Higashimokoto Shibazakura Park, located about a 25-minute drive from the roadside station.

Below right: Many people visit to capture airplanes flying over the sunflower fields in photographs.

# Enjoying Japanese Tea Service at a Roadside Station at a Center of Green Tea Production

Kawane-honcho Town in Shizuoka Prefecture is well-known as the center of tea production for the acclaimed Kawane-cha variety of Japanese green tea. A popular roadside station within the town offers visitors the experience of Japanese tea service with locally made sweets.

(Text: Tanaka Nozomi)

In the central Shizuoka Prefecture town of Kawane-honcho, a roadside station called Forêt<sup>1</sup> Nakakawane Chameikan provides a community space where visitors can relax and enjoy themselves as they deepen their knowledge of tea and the history of the local Kawane-cha. Facility director Goto Yasuhisa shares his thoughts on what gives this representative local specialty, Kawane-cha, its appeal.

“Above all, it’s delicious. Our town is located in the upper basin of the Oi River, with its source north of here in the Southern Alps. We’re blessed with very favorable conditions for cultivating high-quality tea,

including drastically different daytime and nighttime temperatures, soft sunlight that shines in between the mountains, and mist that comes off the Oi River. Plus, with the efforts of the many dedicated tea producers here who have won multiple awards at national tea competitions, we can ensure the ongoing production of high-quality tea.”

The facilities attracted around 15,000 annual visitors on average, in pre-COVID figures from 2018 and earlier. Along with local area residents, sightseers come from other parts of the prefecture and country, followed by a growing number of visitors from around





Left: A view of the Japanese garden from the tearoom, a space fragrant with solid beams of locally grown *hinoki* cypress.

Above center: A lecture is given to visitors as part of their first-hand experience with Japanese tea in the tearoom.

Below center: A popular tea set allowing visitors to enjoy Japanese green tea Kawane-cha, with a choice of two varieties of tea leaves: Yabukita or Okuhikari.

Right: Kawane-cha tea leaves. Ordinary green tea is made by heating, rolling and drying harvested tea leaves.

the world. A particularly popular attraction is *tei-cha* service, a casual tea ceremony where Japanese green tea is served with special local confections in a tearoom with views of a Japanese garden. Many visitors appreciate the opportunity to enjoy Kawane-cha, a distinguished, premium brand of tea, affordably and casually.

Mr. Goto explains, “We try to teach visitors the basics of brewing Japanese green tea, so that they can experience the true, delicious flavor of Kawane-cha which they can enjoy it at home as well. We have them put tea leaves in a *kyusu* teapot and steep them in hot water, enjoying the different flavors of first, second, and third infusions as well. Gradually adjusting the method of brewing – the way of pouring the water, its temperature, the steeping time – yields variations in the tea’s umami, fragrance, and so on.” Refreshing flavor, fragrant tea aroma, then smooth, rich umami. This is a time to taste appreciatively the delicious complexity of Kawane-cha in the quiet tearoom, starting from adding the tea leaves to the pot – surely a special experience for visitors, to enjoy the flavor of tea right in the area where it’s produced.



Above left: Pouring the tea out to the very last drop: one key to attaining the best flavor.

Above right: The Midori no Tamatebako shop stocks Kawane-cha tea and other local specialties.

Below: Local tea producers provide explanations during a *tei-cha* tea service.

Local volunteers also hold an ongoing series of monthly events to promote Kawane-cha. Participants include distinguished tea-growing families, specialized tea merchants, and local confectioners. The all-day events held on the facilities’ grass lawn square are reportedly popular and lively, with attractions including handmade soba, freshly baked bread, and *bento* lunches, market stalls offering general goods, and more.

Mr. Goto says, “Here, you can meet energetic locals who are from the community who are committed to promoting Kawane-cha. Further north are a number of popular sightseeing destinations, including the Yume no Tsuribashi suspension bridge in the Sumatayko Gorge and the Oigawa Railway’s Okuoikojo Station. Be sure to stop in here on your way, though, to enjoy some delicious Kawane-cha tea. Energetic local homemakers who largely operate the Midori no Tamatebako shop are sure to engage you in lively conversation about the local specialties they stock!” <sup>1</sup>

Left page

Left: A view of the Forêt Nakakawane Chameikan. Characterized by its simple, rustic warmth, the structure blends in with its natural setting near the Oi River, surrounded by deep-green mountains

Above right: Tea fields, like these neighboring the Forêt Nakakawane Chameikan and located throughout the town, offer scenes of tranquil beauty.

Below right: New tea leaves start to grow at the outset of spring. Tea made from leaves harvested at this stage is called *shincha* (first-flush “new tea”).

1. The name *forêt* comes from the French for forest.



A model of the light sensors inside the Super-Kamiokande, which is located in an underground chamber 1,000 meters beneath the surface of the earth, on display at the science museum.

## Roadside Station with Facilities that Bring Space Science More Familiar with Us



The building with the round silver roof is the Hida Space Science Museum Kamioka Lab.

In Hida, a city located in the northernmost part of Gifu Prefecture, there is a roadside station with a science museum. The museum allows visitors to experience scientific experiments with matter that reveal the mechanisms of the universe. The location of the science museum at a roadside station used by many people has, in turn, contributed to spreading awareness of space science research itself.

(Text: Tanaka Nozomi)

The town of Kamioka in Hida City, Gifu Prefecture, is home to a cluster of leading Japanese research centers dedicated to exploring the mysteries of the universe and elementary particles. Kamiokande in particular, is a facility where the late Professor Koshiba Masatoshi, a winner of the Nobel Prize in Physics, and others conducted his groundbreaking research. Its successor, the Super-Kamiokande and KamLAND<sup>1</sup>, where another laureate of the Nobel Prize in Physics, Professor Kajita Takaaki, and others conduct his research, are famously now in operation. The gigantic state-of-the-art detectors

of cosmic elementary particles have been installed in an underground chamber 1,000 meters beneath Kamioka. Conducting nonstop observations mainly of a type of elementary particles called neutrino, it thereby brings scientists pursue unraveling the mysteries of matter and the evolution of the universe. The Hida Space Science Museum Kamioka Lab opened in the spring of 2019 at the Roadside Station Sky Dome Kamioka as a place where scientists can share the content of their research with a broader audience. According to Kawakami Tomoko of the roadside station administration office, in the past, the pub-



Left: The transformation of elementary particles and neutrinos is presented in a game format at the science museum.  
 Center: Visitors can enjoy video simulations of elementary particles and neutrinos projected on a large screen at the science museum.  
 Right: Original coffee with images of the Super-Kamiokande model featured in the package design at the roadside station store

lic could visit the cutting-edge research facilities in Kamioka only few times a year. But after the opening of the space science museum, anyone can know and learn about the contents of the research of these facilities at any time through the museum's exhibitions and videos. "The displays in the museum are created under the supervision of the Institute for Cosmic Ray Research, University of Tokyo, and Tohoku University. Images of the interior of Super-Kamiokande are projected onto a large seven-meter-high screen, creating the impression of being inside the actual facility. The expansive panoramic imagery gives visitors the opportunity to experience virtually the process of filling the huge water tank with pure water for experiments and the reaction of light sensors responding to brightness when neutrinos penetrate through the tank (see photo). Also, by playing games, they can immerse themselves in the microscopic world of invisible elementary particles. Science communicators are on hand at the museum to offer explanations and other information. Descriptions of the exhibits are provided in both Japanese and English, and English versions of the videos projected on the screen are also available. Super-Kamiokande souvenirs are the most popular at the roadside station store, with coffee mugs featuring the Super-Kamiokande logo and puzzles created under the supervision of the Institute for Cosmic Ray Research, University of Tokyo, selling particularly well," says Kawakami. At the roadside station there is also a restaurant where visitors can savor local delicacies. The restaurant serves dishes made with Hida beef<sup>2</sup>, a high-brand Japanese beef bred in Gifu Prefecture, and soft-serve ice cream made with locally-grown egoma<sup>3</sup>.

The area around the Roadside Station Sky Dome Kamioka also boasts some attractive sightseeing spots. Hida Furukawa, a small town about 30 minutes by

car from the roadside station, is known for Shirakabe Dozogai Street, a charming district which has preserved some fine examples of Japan's traditional architecture. The Seto River, which runs through the district, is home to as many as 1,000 colorful carp, and a 500-meter stretch of its banks lined with traditional white-walled Japanese storehouses and stone walls is a popular spot for enjoying the charming scenery. This is how Kawakami explains the appeal of the roadside station.


"The Hida region, which includes Kamioka, is a unique roadside area where visitors can experience all at once the traditional Japanese sights and the cutting-edge scientific research facilities that Japan can be proud of. We hope that they will stop by the Roadside Station Sky Dome Kamioka in the area, to savor its charm, and fall in love with the region." 



Photo: PIXTA



Above: Along the river, there is a traditional townscape of white-walled storehouses called *shirakabe dozo* with stucco finishing on the clay walls in Hida Furukawa.

Below: From spring to fall in Hida Furukawa, as many as 1,000 carp swim in the river, delighting tourists.

1. The world's largest underground neutrino detector operated by the Institute for Cosmic Ray Research, University of Tokyo. As implied by its name, which combines the words "neutral" and "ino" ("small" in Italian), neutrinos are tiny elementary particles. In addition to studying their properties, scientists use neutrinos to continue to elucidate the history of the universe. Since the facility had to be constructed underground to reduce the effects of cosmic rays, this site was chosen because of the solid ground of Kamioka, a former mine, the availability of excellent excavation techniques, and the abundant snowmelt. Kamiokande operated from 1983 to 1996, and KamLAND was established on its site and started operation in 2002. Super-Kamiokande has been in operation since 1996
2. A brand name awarded to Japanese Black Cattle of the highest quality bred in Gifu Prefecture for at least 14 months and evaluated as having meat with particularly fine and tender fiber and excellent flavor.
3. Egoma is an annual herb of the Perilla family, native to Southeast Asia. It is used as food and for oil (egoma oil). It is a different species from sesame.



**FEATURES**



# A Quick Stop in Paradise —Roadside Station Offers Plenty of Fruit, Vegetables, and Flowers

In the northern part of Kobe City, Hyogo Prefecture, there is a roadside station, which, with an area of 35 hectares (350,000 square meters), is among the largest in Western Japan. Here is just like a kind of paradise—visitors can purchase local agricultural products and enjoy some 70,000 flowers in all four seasons. We asked the public relations manager about the characteristics of this spacious roadside station, which also houses an amusement park and lodging facilities on its premises. (Text: Tanaka Nozomi)





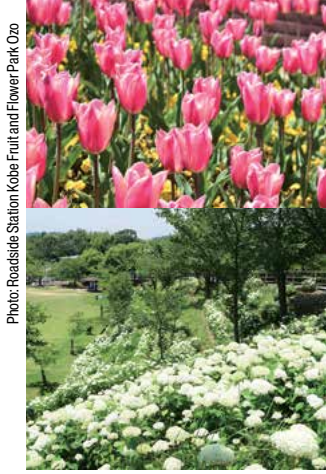


Photo: Roadside Station Kobe Fruit and Flower Park Ozo

Above: In spring, tulips in full bloom cover the grounds in vibrant colors.

Below: There are about 70,000 flowers planted in the park. The hydrangeas are in full bloom around June each year.

**M***ichi-no-Eki* Kobe Fruit and Flower Park Ozo is a roadside station located in the northern part of Kobe City, Hyogo Prefecture. Ezaki Soma, manager in charge of public relations at the park, described for us its characteristics: “This region has thriving agriculture, so our farmers’ market offers a rich variety of fruits and vegetables fresh from the field. It is famous for strawberries in the spring, sweet corn in the summer, new rice in the fall, and a local brand of green onions called ‘Hokushin’ and curly spinach in the winter. You-pick peaches, grapes, and other fruits from the park’s expansive orchards are another popular attraction. The park also proactively holds nutrition education events for children and thematic events dedicated to specific seasonal vegetables to promote local produce.” Visitors can savor freshly harvested produce at the park’s restaurant and barbecue site. In 2022, a whiskey and brandy distillery was built on the park premises and started producing single malt whiskey. “We are looking forward to the day when this authentic Kobe whiskey is ready. Visi-

tors of all ages, from children to adults, can enjoy the cuisine here,” adds Ezaki.

Another major characteristic of the roadside station is its amusement park, which features a Ferris wheel, a merry-go-round, and a roller coaster.

In addition to the amusement park, there is also a 1.2-km go-cart track, a miniature golf course, and a swimming pool for water fun in the summer. The vast grounds offer a wide range of activities for parents and children to enjoy together. During the winter months, the park is lit up by splendid illuminations. Staying at the hotel on the premises of the roadside station offers a relaxing way to enjoy the wide array of attractions (see photo). **■**



Photo: Roadside Station Kobe Fruit and Flower Park Ozo



Photo: PIXTA

Above: The Ferris wheel, which has fruit-shaped cabins, is the most remarkable attraction of the Kobe Otogi no Kuni Amusement Park.

Below: Kobe Illuminage, the light-up event held at the roadside station only during the winter months

Left page

Above

The roadside station park is full of seasonal flowers.

Below

Left: In the fall, many people visit the park to pick grapes.

Above right: Stylish buildings resembling circus tents form an area aptly named “Farm Circus” that features stands for fresh farm produce and a cafe. The amusement park’s Ferris wheel and the expansive view of the sky create a bright and uplifting atmosphere.

Below right: The Farm Circus Market offers a wide selection of locally grown vegetables and fruits, as well as alcoholic beverages and seasonings.



Photo: PIXTA

A beautiful roadside station where visitors can enjoy flowers, delicious food, and exciting amusement park attractions

# A Photogenic Roadside Station on Japan's Olive Island



A Greek windmill on a hill overlooking the sea, the symbol of Roadside Station.

Shodoshima Island in Kagawa Prefecture is the birthplace of olive cultivation in Japan. There is a roadside station on this island that attracts many visitors because of its wonderful photo opportunities. We interviewed a staff person there. (Text: Tanaka Nozomi)



This monument to a book on the history of olive cultivation is another popular photo spot.

Shodoshima, an island with an area of about 153km<sup>2</sup> located in the Seto Inland Sea in Kagawa Prefecture, is known as the birthplace of olive cultivation in Japan. The roadside station Shodoshima Olive Park is here, too. We asked staff person Yamamoto about the appeal of this roadside station. “The symbol of the roadside station is a Greek windmill on a hill overlooking the sea. It was built as a sign of friendship with the Greek island of Milos, which has a sister island relationship with Shodoshima. It’s a popular photo spot because the view resembles one of the Mediterranean Sea.” A lot of movie fans



Many people pose for photos of themselves dressed like the movie's main character.



Left: Several varieties of olives are grown at Shodoshima Olive Park. You can enjoy olive oil-infused dishes at the cafe in the roadside station.



Above right: This oil mill had been in use during the olive harvest season. The Mediterranean-style building is also photo-worthy.

Below right: This stone monument to the birthplace of olives in Japan stands on a small hill facing the Seto Inland Sea.



Above: Here, the scenery overlooking the sea is one of the attractions, along with the local Shodoshima cuisine that you can enjoy at the restaurant.

Below: Olive Ramen, with noodles kneaded in olive oil and topped with sliced lemon, is served at the Restaurant Sun Olive in the roadside station.



The set of the main character's shop from the movie *Majo no Takkyūbin* ("Kiki's Delivery Service") is in use as a variety shop.

also come here because the set from the live-action movie *Majo no Takkyūbin* ("Kiki's Delivery Service")<sup>1</sup> was placed here. "In line with the movie theme, we lend out brooms for free. If you mount a broom and jump while taking a picture, it'll look like you're flying on the magic broom. There is also a set of the shop where the main character of the movie worked, so it's a very photo-worthy roadside station."

Olive cultivation began in Japan in 1908 when the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce of the Japanese government at that time imported olive seedlings from the United States. Shodoshima Island was chosen as the site for cultivation because of its warm, and little amount of rainfall climate. Today, the olive is even designated as Kagawa's prefectural flower and tree, and has become a symbol of the prefecture. However, starting in 1965, olive groves began to decline due to various causes. "There were calls to revitalize the island and protect the olives, and the area as the center, which was originally a test olive grove, was developed into Shodoshima Olive Park. In 1996, it was registered as a roadside station, and it has become a tourist highlight that brings in visitors from off the island," says Yamamoto.

The roadside station also includes the Olive

Museum, where you can learn about the history of olive cultivation. It also has an herb garden and a lodging facility, so it has seen an increase in the number of visitors from outside Japan. Olive-related workshops are hosted during the Olive Harvest Festival held each year from October to December, including one where you can experience olive fruits picking and another making soap that uses olive oil. We asked Ms. Yamamoto about the souvenirs available at the local commodity store in the Olive Museum. "Of course, we have Shodoshima olive oil, as well as hand cream with olive oil and other beauty care products that use olives, which are especially popular with women. We also have things like olive soft ice cream and olive cider." She adds, "I also recommend products that you can only find on this island, such as Olive Ramen, as well as a new seasoning Olive Soy Sauce which blend Shodoshima special soy sauce and spices. We have English-speaking staff, so our overseas visitors can shop with ease. We also have Sun Olive, a facility that includes a hot-spring facility and restaurant that overlook the sea. We love welcoming all our visitors from around the world." 

1. A 1989 anime film by Miyazaki Hayao that became a worldwide hit. It's a coming of age story about a witch's apprentice named Kiki. The live-action adaptation was produced in 2014.

# Michi-no-Eki Where You Can Experience Panning for Gold Dust



Tramcar for transporting gold ore displayed in the underground museum

In Nakatsue Village\*<sup>1</sup> in Hita City, located in the western part of Oita Prefecture, there is a *Michi-no-Eki* where visitors can experience panning for gold dust. We hear from the manager of the *Michi-no-Eki*, situated in an area that was once Japan's leading gold mining site in terms of annual production, to learn about its distinctive features. (Text: Tanaka Nozomi)



Photo: PIXTA

In the 2002 Japan-Korea co-hosted FIFA World Cup, Nakatsue Village served as the training camp for the Cameroon national team. The village's connection to this international sporting event is evident even at the *Michi-no-Eki*, where the national flag of Cameroon is displayed at the front of the building as a commemoration of the event.

Taio Gold Mine (Taio Kinzan) started gold mining in the late 19th century and developed into one of Japan's leading gold mines. The total length of its tunnels extended to approximately 110 kilometers, and by 1938, it became the largest gold mine in Japan, producing around 2.3 tons of gold annually. Until its closure in 1972, the village experienced a sort of "gold rush," with movie theaters, restaurants, and other establishments bustling around the area.

After its closure, the mine tunnels were transformed into a museum, and the surrounding area was developed into a campground. In 2000, it reopened as "*Michi-no-Eki Taio Kinzan*."

As Yamaguchi Kosei, the Director of Taio Kinzan Tourism Management Office, says, "The most distinctive and appealing aspect of this *Michi-no-Eki* is its underground museum that recreates the former gold mine's tunnels, providing visitors with a chance to explore its history. Within the mining zone, visitors can witness the remnants of mining activities and learn about the techniques employed. A particular



Left: The Michi-no-Eki offers a wide range of processed products made from local specialties such as wasabi and yuzu.

Center: The barley shochu under the Taio Kinzan brand is infused with gold leaf.

Right: Bath powder is packaged in containers resembling old Japanese gold coins for souvenirs.



Left: Glistening at the bottom of the pan are tiny grains of gold, which can be placed in small bottles for visitors to take home as a souvenir.

Above right: Using a dedicated pan for gold panning, individuals scoop a blend of water and sand, employing a gentle swaying motion to gradually separate the two in order to find real gold.

Below: Visitors can observe a pile of real sand gold dust.



Above: A panoramic view of the Michi-no-Eki, nestled among the surrounding mountains.

Below: A sign displaying "Modern Industrial Heritage" is prominently displayed at the entrance of the underground museum.



standout is the 'tatekou'<sup>2</sup>, a vertical shaft that plunges to a depth of 510 meters, offering a truly impressive view when looking down from the top."

"Interestingly, the name 'Taio' in 'Taio Kinzan' actually translates to the idea of 'birthplace of sea bream' in Japanese, and we had an exhibit featuring symbolic solid gold sea bream figurines, which were very well received. Unfortunately, they were stolen, and although we now have replicas on display, we hope that visitors can still imagine the gleam of the original pure gold pieces. I also highly recommend trying the sand gold panning experience. Searching for authentic specks of gold hidden in the sand, though small, captivates both adults and children alike," Yamaguchi shares.



Sea bream replicas gleaming in gold

"In addition to the museum, the souvenir shop is also a must-visit. Here, you can find

products like mayonnaise infused with wasabi, one of Nakatsue Village's specialty items. Wasabi, a native Japanese plant grown in clean mountain streams in rural areas, is an essential spice in Japanese cuisine, often grated and served with sashimi<sup>3</sup>. We even have a unique soft-serve ice cream with the distinctive spiciness of wasabi. I encourage you to try it at least once," adds Yamaguchi.

Another specialty product is "yuzukosho" made with yuzu, a type of citrus commonly used in Japanese cuisine to add fragrance and color to various dishes by grating only the outer skin. Yuzukosho is created by grinding together green yuzu zest, green chili pepper, and salt, resulting in a refreshing and aromatic spiciness.

Visitors can reflect on the area's historical connection to gold while partaking in gold panning and indulging in these distinctive local products. **7**

1. In 2005, due to a wide-scale merger, Nakatsue Village in Hita District became a part of Hita City, yet the name of Nakatsue Village was retained.  
 2. A vertical tunnel structure established from the surface into underground mines or coal mines for the purpose of transporting minerals, materials, and personnel, as well as for ventilation.  
 3. Japan has a longstanding herb and spice culture, utilizing plants that have been indigenous or cultivated in Japan for various culinary purposes. Representative examples include perilla, Japanese pepper, ginger, as well as unique Japanese ingredients such as mitsuba and wasabi.

# Overseas Development of *Michi-no-Eki*: Spotlight on *Michi-no-Eki* Pakewa in Indonesia



Two *Michi-no-Eki* facilities have been opened in Indonesia thus far. This one shows *Michi-no-Eki* Pakewa.

Photo: Kato Fumio

Since its introduction in the 1990s, *Michi-no-Eki*, or roadside station, have grown extensively across Japan, currently encompassing around 1,200 sites nationwide. This concept has also transcended Japan's borders, especially in Asian nations, where its implementation has expanded through the international collaboration of Japan. In this article, we hear from Kato Fumio, recognized as one of the "100 Successful Tourism Experts" by the Japan Tourism Agency, who is leading the establishment of *Michi-no-Eki* in Asian countries.

(Text: Tanaka Nozomi)

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), involved in international development projects in developing nations, has been assisting the global expansion of *Michi-no-Eki*, especially in Asia, since the 1990s when the concept gained traction in Japan. This initiative was driven by the significant inequality in wealth and development between urban and rural areas in Asian countries, where there was a pressing need for functions and effects similar to those brought by Japan's *Michi-no-Eki*, such as creating local employment, promoting regional development, and serving as disaster prevention centers.

Addressing this demand, Fumio Kato, renowned for creating the well-received *Michi-no-Eki* Tomiura Biwa Club in Minamiboso City, Chiba Prefecture, played a central part in JICA's endeavors to extend *Michi-no-Eki* initiatives across Asia. Kato's achievements include transforming his facility into one of the most beloved *Michi-no-Eki* nationwide. Despite the challenges posed by varying languages and cultures, Kato has dedicated years to imparting his insights on establishing and managing *Michi-no-Eki* abroad.

*Michi-no-Eki* Pakewa is located in Tomohon City, North Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. Positioned in the northeastern part of Sulawesi Island, it takes approximately 4 hours by plane from the capital city Jakarta.

"The primary goal of expanding *Michi-no-Eki* overseas is to uplift the income of local farmers and others. Our approach goes beyond teaching cultivation techniques – we aim to equip them with skills in agricultural product processing, guide them in quality management, and even facilitate branding. This calls for the concept of the sixth industry in agriculture<sup>1</sup>," he explains. "To achieve this, we start by urging farmers to be conscious of how much consumers are paying for their vegetables. We want them to recognize that if they sell through intermediaries, there's a share taken by those middlemen, which affects the final price. On the other hand, at a *Michi-no-Eki*, it's a direct sale, meaning they can retain almost all their profits. This understanding marks the initial step. Through persistent efforts to change mindsets, we've seen real success."

"The newest facility is *Michi-no-Eki* Pakewa, established in 2023 in Tomohon City, northern Sulawesi Island, Indonesia. 'Pakewa' refers to a local indigenous fruit tree that bears fruits resembling Japan's plums during the autumn season. This unique name was chosen because the officials from the *Michi-no-Eki* I'm associated with in Japan came to inspect it, and they decided to use the name of a local specialty fruit, similar to how they did with 'Biwa Club.' This is the second *Michi-no-Eki* in Indonesia," explains Kato.

"Since it is located near an active volcano in close





The *Michi-no-Eki* in Sukhothai, central Thailand, created a space that includes a restaurant offering local cuisine and a gathering area for villagers to come together.

proximity to the urban area, there was a demand for it to also serve as an evacuation site for tourists and local residents in times of emergency. To mitigate risks identified on hazard maps, the decision was made to construct the facility outside of identified risky areas. Emergency water and power supplies were put in place, and evacuation facilities were also incorporated.”

“However, during the actual construction phase, the most challenging issues were the spread of COVID-19 and the impact of the wood shock, which delayed the progress of the project. Travel restrictions made us concerned, but fortunately, the facility opened in May and seems to be operating smoothly. Recently, I heard that the restaurant in the *Michi-no-Eki* started a delivery service. It appears to have become a place of leisure for local residents. Once the basic construction was complete, we’ve taken a step back – while we’re keeping an eye on it, we no longer actively involve ourselves,” he continues.

“Actually, we maintain contact with the local community, allowing us to stay informed about the ongoing situation and give them encouragements. The most heartwarming aspect of *Michi-no-Eki* Pakewa was when they chose to name it ‘Michinoeki’ in Japanese, which was a first.”

After years of working on projects in Asian countries, Kato enthusiastically explains that effective communication with local people can often be achieved through what he humorously calls “Hug-Hug Language.”

“Since I can’t speak foreign languages, I start negotiations with a firm hug as part of my unique ‘Hug-Hug Language’ greeting with the local people. After that, everything is communicated in Japanese. I believe in directly talking to the farmers and building



Photo: Fumio Kato

Left: The section of *Michi-no-Eki* Pakewa for selling organic, pesticide-free vegetables has a neat display for easy viewing and selection.

Right: The city of Tomohon, where *Michi-no-Eki* Pakewa is located, boasts a high altitude in a highland area known for its vibrant flower cultivation. The entrance hall has an array of various flowers.

mutual understanding about what needs to be done. I want to express our intentions through our attitude first. Of course, having excellent interpreters is also a must,” Kato says with a smile.

“When you go to Asia, you realize there’s a strong trust in Japan and in Japanese people, as well as in Japanese products. This trust translates into the receptive attitude we often encounter when telling our story. The concept of *Michi-no-Eki* was originally developed as a strategy to revitalize depopulated regions in Japan, and it’s proving effective for promoting advancement in developing countries while also garnering high interest there. The model is designed with a conscientious approach, ensuring benefits flow back to the local communities. If there were more initiatives like *Michi-no-Eki*, originating from Japan and spreading across the world, I believe we could make an even greater contribution globally,” says Kato passionately. **1**



Photo: Michi-no-Eki Tomiura Biwa Club

Left: “Biwa soft-serve ice-cream” emerged as a creative solution for using loquats that don’t meet delivery standards. It has now become synonymous with the Tomiura Biwa Club.

Right: Currently serving as an advisor, Kato was associated with the top-ranked “*Michi-no-Eki* Tomiura Biwa Club” (Minamiboso City, Chiba Prefecture) in the National *Michi-no-Eki* Grand Prix.

1. The term refers to the endeavors of agricultural, forestry, and fisheries workers to engage not only in the primary production of crops, livestock, and seafood, but also in food processing (secondary industry) and distribution/sales (tertiary industry). This comprehensive approach aims to invigorate the agriculture, forestry, and fisheries sectors, enriching the economies of rural areas, and involves integrating secondary (processing and manufacturing) and tertiary (retail and service) industries. The term “6th Industry” represents the multiplication of “Primary Industry 1” × “Secondary Industry 2” × “Tertiary Industry 3.”



# Why Arbitrate in Japan?

An exhibit communicating Japan's appeal as a venue for international arbitration

**You might have heard of the word “international arbitration”. International arbitration is a procedure for resolving disputes arising from international business transactions in which the parties to the dispute select a third-party arbitrator to reach a settlement, in lieu of pursuing litigation in a country’s domestic court system. As the following sections describe in more detail, international arbitration offers a variety of advantages. Accordingly, it has become a global standard for resolving international business disputes. Japan is a signatory to the major international conventions on arbitration, including the New York Convention. However, the number of arbitration cases in Japan is considerably lower than in other Asian countries.**

## Advantages of international arbitration

Two main approaches to resolving legal disputes occurring in international business transactions are available: litigation and arbitration. Trial-based litigation involves use of a specific country’s courts and carries a number of risks for the parties to the dispute. For example, parties are generally unable to select the procedures and language used at trial, judges may be unfamiliar with commercial practices in the field, and hearings, which are customarily open to the public, may threaten the confidentiality of trade secrets.

International arbitration has an extensive history of use around the world as a method of dispute resolution well-suited to international business. It offers more expeditious timelines and greater degrees of freedom, helping to avoid the disadvantages of litigation.

International arbitration offers a range of advantages to trial-based litigation. These include the facilitation of enforcement in foreign countries, the ability to preserve the confidentiality of trade secrets thanks to closed-door proceedings, the option for parties to select neutral arbitrators with specialized expertise, and more expeditious timelines for settlement of disputes due to the general absence of the appellate process.

## Efforts to promote international arbitration in Japan

In April 2018, the Japanese government outlined

measures to strengthen international arbitration in Japan in order to promote development of the country as the foremost base for dispute resolution in Asia. This led the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) to commission the Japan International Dispute Resolution Center (JIDRC) to initiate a survey project aimed at developing infrastructure for international arbitration in Japan. Working in cooperation with nongovernmental organizations engaged in arbitration promotion activities, including the Japan Commercial Arbitration Association (JCAA) and the Japan Association of Arbitrators (JAA), the Ministry has worked to advance human resources development, familiarization with the international arbitration system, and so on through public-private partnerships. Meanwhile, it has promoted legislative reforms as well, including a partial amendment of the Arbitration Act which passed in April 2023, to bring Japan’s laws on arbitration procedures in line with the latest international standards. Today, work still remains to promote higher degrees of familiarity. Accordingly, the MOJ is currently engaged in activities to raise awareness, including approaches such as conducting training, seminars, and social media-based PR activities, to encourage better understanding of the usefulness of international arbitration among Japanese companies, along with Japan’s appeal as a venue for arbitration among companies based outside Japan.

For example, at the “Justice Affairs Diplomacy”





The “Justice Affairs Diplomacy” Ministerial Forum hosted a special event titled “Future Prospects of International Arbitration and Mediation: How Does the Judiciary Assist?”

Ministerial Forum<sup>1</sup> held in July 2023, which included the G7 Justice Ministers’ Meeting, the MOJ held a commemorative special event with speeches and panel discussions by judges, arbitrators, and researchers on the theme “Future Prospects of International Arbitration and Mediation: How Does the Judiciary Assist?” The Ministry also presented exhibits to convey Japan’s appeal as a venue for international arbitration and worked to showcase the JCAA’s arbitration track record, efforts to develop relevant infrastructure engaging the public and private sectors, and more.

### New options for resolving international business disputes

How can businesses make use international arbitration? First of all, international arbitration requires an agreement between the parties to the dispute (an arbitration agreement) that must be prescribed as an arbitration clause in a contract between them. Arbitration clauses allow for specification of the arbitral institution to preside over arbitration, the venue or seat of arbitration, and other details. Many arbitral institutions are found around the world. The JCAA is a prime example of one such commercial arbitral institution based in Japan. The association, which has continuously handled international business disputes for over 70 years, allows the appointment of prominent arbitrators of diverse nationalities, even when selecting JCAA arbitration. The JCAA facilitates expeditious and flexible proceedings encompassing online options and reliably provides detailed support through its secretariat.

The International Court of Arbitration (ICC), a world-renowned arbitral institution based in Paris, also has an extensive record of international arbitration administered with Japan as the seat of arbitration. For more details on the actual process of arbitration, please refer to the arbitral institutions’ websites. (See “2. Concerning the flow of arbitration proceedings, etc.” below.)

Readers who have had their interest sparked by this article are encouraged to visit these external websites and consider international arbitration in Japan as an option for resolving international business disputes.

## 1. Diversity – Arbitrator Panel



\* Parties and JCAA **can** appoint arbitrators **not** listed in the JCAA’s panel.

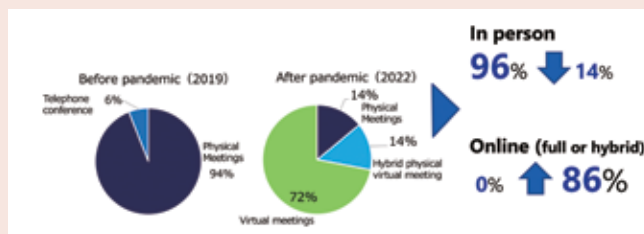
## 2. Agility – Expedited Procedures

Automatic application to disputes valued up to JPY 300 million (approximately, USD 2.1 million) (2021 Rule revision)



## 3. Flexibility – Online Hearings

Percentage of meeting formats in JCAA arbitrations (based on number of days held)



### URLs of government agencies and relevant institutions for reference

#### 1. Concerning government-implemented measures

- [https://www.moj.go.jp/EN/kokusai/kokusai03\\_00003.html](https://www.moj.go.jp/EN/kokusai/kokusai03_00003.html)
- [https://www.meti.go.jp/english/policy/trade\\_and\\_invest/inter\\_arb/index.html](https://www.meti.go.jp/english/policy/trade_and_invest/inter_arb/index.html)

#### 2. Concerning the flow of arbitration proceedings, etc.

- Arbitral institutions’ websites offer more information on the flow of arbitration proceedings.
- <https://www.jcaa.or.jp/en/arbitration/flow.html>
- <https://iccwbo.org/>

#### 3. Arbitration promotion activities and introduction of arbitration facilities

- The JAA conducts activities to foster human resources related to arbitration and mediation, etc. Also, the JIDRC works to introduce arbitration hearing facilities.
- <https://en.arbitrators.jp/>
- <https://idrc.jp/en/>

\* See “Japan to Host the ‘Justice Affairs Diplomacy’ Ministerial Forum” in the June 2023 issue of *Highlighting Japan*  
[https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202306/202306\\_09\\_en.html](https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202306/202306_09_en.html)

# Considerate Crayon for People and Nature — Delivering Ecology, Safety, Security, and Local Production for Local Consumption



Kids draw with crayons developed by mizuiro Inc.

Based on a concept that stresses safety and security, Oyasai Crayons (“Veggie Crayons”) are made mainly from rice oil, vegetables, and fruits, so the material is not harmful even if a child puts a crayon in their mouth. The crayons, with their uniquely mild colors, were awarded by the Japanese Government, and that was the “Commendation for Science and Technology by the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology” Science and Technology Award<sup>1</sup> for fiscal 2022.

## Fukuda Mitsuhiro

Oyasai Crayons are made from rice oil, vegetables, fruits, and other ingredients, and they help reduce food loss by making use whenever possible of out-of-spec products that do not make it to market and scraps that would otherwise be thrown away. For example, the “Cabbage” color is made from the outermost leaves of cabbage plants, which are usually either left in the soil for compost or discarded. Likewise, the “Apple” color is made from apple peels that are left over after dry apple chips are processed. Farmers gather each of these items so they can be reborn as raw materials. Oyasai Crayons are based on liquid rice oil and solid rice wax extracted from rice bran,<sup>2</sup> which until now has been

thrown away. Unlike conventional crayons, these crayons are made almost entirely from nature-derived raw materials.

Kimura Naoko, president of mizuiro Inc., headquartered in Aomori City, Aomori Prefecture, worked hard to develop this product. Oyasai Crayons were born from “a desire to make crayons for my only daughter from materials that are safe and secure even if a child puts them in their mouth,” and “to make them from nature-derived materials from my home prefecture of Aomori.”

Since its establishment in 2014, mizuiro Inc. has also been involved in the OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) business, manufacturing products for other manufacturers’ brands. When factoring in the national brands of each manufacturer and the store brands of major wholesale and

retail chains, the number of colors offered has expanded to about several dozen as of July 2023. Each color has a natural name such as “Cabbage,” “Carrot,” or “Green Onion.” When a crayon is used, it faintly releases the familiar aroma of its ingredients. Most of the vegetables and fruits used are grown in Aomori Prefecture. The prefecture accounts for a large share of apple and black currant production in Japan. These are used because they help with local production for local consumption, and also because they contribute to sustainability by reducing distribution costs and promote recycling within the local community.

Oyasai Crayons enjoyed a huge response immediately after they went on sale with the concept of crayons could be safe even if put in the mouth, but the development process was one of repeated trial and error.



Some vegetables that are used as material for crayons



Oyasai Crayons made from rice and vegetables



Bright-colored Okome no Crayons made primarily from rice oil



Vegetable-based Ohana no Crayons that contain the colors of actual flowers

When the company tried drying finely chopped vegetables and mixing them with commercially available wax, it did not produce sufficient coloring or hardness, and the mixture left the hands sticky. They then decided to request a collaboration with Toichi Bungu Kogyosho, a long-established crayon workshop in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture. Manually molding the crayons individually enabled them to use raw materials that are difficult to use in machines, and taking time to cool them enabled them to come up with crayons that are hard enough to keep from breaking even when force is applied, don't feel sticky, and have good color development.

In 2014, Oyasai Crayons cleared the European toy safety standard, which is said to have the world's strictest toy safety inspection,<sup>3</sup> and the sales

channels have expanded from Japan to the rest of the world. The company has also launched sister products that use pigments that are safe even if put in the mouth. One is Okome no Crayon ("Rice Crayons"), which use rice oil as the main ingredient to produce vivid colors that cannot quite be attained in Oyasai Crayons. Another is Ohana no Crayon ("Flower Crayons"), which are colored using real flowers. The company is constantly receiving requests for collaboration from other companies.

Kimura explains future business prospects in this way:

"As embodied by Oyasai Crayons, the products we create consider ways to utilize unused resources that lie dormant in local communities, while also taking reuse into consideration. We will continue to propose sustain-

able and rich lifestyles and designs by offering safe, secure products that are considerate of people and nature."

1. An award presented by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) to those who have achieved significant success in research, development, public understanding, and so on in science and technology.
2. Rice is made of four layers. Removing the hulls from harvested rice reveals brown rice. Milling the brown rice removes the bran layer and germ, leaving white rice. The bran layer and germ are called rice bran. It is estimated that about 10% of brown rice is rice bran.
3. The European standard for toy safety, EN71-3:2013 (Safety of Toys, Part 3, 2013). It took effect on July 20, 2013 with standards that were amended along with the revision of the European Standard for Safety of Toys EN71-3:2013 (Safety of Toys, Part 3, 2013).

# A Journalist Spreads Japan's *Sento* Culture to the World

Arai-yu is a *sento* (public bathhouse) in Tokyo that features a powerful mural of waves with Mt. Fuji in the background (interior).

Japan is home to bathhouses called *sento*, which provide bathing services at a fixed fee to a broad range of customers. They are also called public bathhouses or simply baths (*furoya*). Stephanie Crohin, a native of France, is fascinated by these bathhouses. She has visited more than 1,000 *sento* so far, and is using social media, books, events, and other channels to share the charm of *sento* and the Japanese culture associated with them to the world.

Murakami Kayo

Stephanie's first encounter with *sento* occurred in 2008, when she came to Japan as an exchange student. A friend invited her to visit a public bathhouse near her university.

"I was nervous at first because in France there is no custom of bathing in the same space with others, and at the time I could still speak only a little Japanese. But once I got into the big bath, I felt relaxed, and the owner and the regulars spoke with me in a friendly manner, which put me at ease. The warm atmosphere and the sense of local community fascinated me, and I started going every week."

Stephanie came back to Japan for work in 2012. When she began to feel burdened by her unfamiliar work in Japan, she remembered how she used to frequent the *sento*. "When I went back to the bathhouse I used to visit when I was a student, the owner remembered me, and I felt a sense of belonging. Going to the *sento* was a very healing experience for me," says Stephanie. Later, inspired by a wish to learn more about traditional public bathhouses, she visited *sento* all over Japan and began sharing her experience and knowledge on social media. In addition to her work as a company employee, she also worked as a *bandai* (reception-

ist at a *sento*) for six years.

"Many public bathhouses are run by individual families, and each one has a different appearance and atmosphere. The look of each *sento* reflects the unique historical imprint of the area and the family that runs it. Another charm of *sento* is that you can exchange greetings with visitors and enjoy casual conversation. A visit to the *sento* is a chance to learn about the everyday life of people who live in that area, which would otherwise remain unknown to ordinary travelers."

Another aspect of *sento* that Stephanie finds appealing is their art. Each bathhouse has its own distinct per-



Photo: Jordy Meow 1



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1. Stephanie Crohin 2. A Japanese *sento* (exterior) 3. Ichino-yu in Mie Prefecture displays a selection of retro *sento* goods and posters. 4. The Nishiki-yu in Kyoto (closed in 2022) featured *uchiwa* fans and baskets for clothes instead of lockers.

sonality, from the traditional Japanese architecture of the building itself, through the murals and mosaic tiles on the walls of the bathhouse—which may depict scenes like Mount Fuji and seasonal flowers—all the way to the *noren* curtains on the doors, the wooden pails, and other small items. “Old-fashioned *sento* have a retro atmosphere,” says Stephanie, “and their space is truly like an art gallery.”

In recent years, the number of public bathhouses in Japan has been declining due to the growing custom of bathing at home, among other reasons, but the information Stephanie has shared has led to an increase in the number of visits to *sento* by younger generations of Japanese, who previously were not very familiar with them. Moreover, it is said that many people from overseas also commented on the informa-

tion she sent, saying, “I want to travel around *sento* in Japan.”

“Japanese *onsen* (hot springs) are famous around the world, but many people are still not familiar with *sento*. I would like to continue to provide information and hold events that will awaken the interest of many travelers and make them want to visit *sento* during their stay in Japan. I would also like to eventually introduce all of the *sento* in Japan.”

Recently, in addition to her activities as a *sento* journalist, Stephanie has also started working as an interior designer, which has been her goal for many years. She wants to spread the appeal of public bathhouses to the world, and at the same time propose cozy interior design homes as an interior designer. With two irons in the fire, she will continue to pursue her passions.



*Sento* Shirahama Onsen in Hyogo Prefecture (above) and Tsuru-no-yu in Tokyo (below) feature bathing areas with colorful walls and floors that create gallery-like spaces.



Summer Robe (*Katabira*) with Plants, Courtly Carriages, and Brushwood Fences

Edo period, 19th century  
(Collection of the Tokyo National Museum)

A woman from a samurai family would have worn such a gorgeous, unlined *katabira* made of hemp-like fabric, adorned with an indigo-dyed design and embroidery, as summer apparel.

Photo: ColBase (<https://colbase.nich.go.jp/>)

### OYAMA YUZURUHA

Sewn with *jofu* (fine-quality, linen-like cloth) woven from fine ramie<sup>2</sup> thread, this *furi-sode* (long-sleeved kimono) was worn by a young, unmarried woman from a samurai family during the hottest days of summer. The unlined *katabira*, featuring a design of a landscape with trailing mist dyed in a monochromatic indigo tone, is plainly cool and refreshing to behold. Meanwhile, silk threads in colors such as *beni* (crimson) and *moegi* (light yellowish green),<sup>3</sup> gold threads, and other details add colorful accents. In the late Edo period, women from samurai families began to dress in garments featuring stylized designs differing from those worn by ordinary townswomen, and this idealized landscape pattern is a prime example.

The background on the back side of the *Katabira* shows a *hiogi* fans<sup>4</sup> set amid a landscape with a luxuriant growth of pines and blossoming cherry trees. The foreground on the hem side features a design with autumn-flowering plants such as chrysanthemums, bush clovers, and balloon flowers, as well as a motif of a straw hat and raincoat flung in front of the gate to a house and a *gisssha*<sup>5</sup> court-cow-carriage. One might wonder about the significance of representing two seasons, spring and autumn, in a single kimono, with symbols of courtly culture, including the *hiogi* fan and the court-cow-carriage, mixed in.

In fact, the garment features symbolic representations of a pair of different characters from two different stories. The spring landscape of the

## Summer Robe (*Katabira*) with Plants, Courtly Carriages, and Brushwood Fences

The kimono is much more than a garment; it is a symbol of traditional Japanese culture. The kimono of contemporary Japan originated with the short-sleeved *kosode* and the long-sleeved *furi-sode* robe, in the Edo period (early 17th century to mid-late 19th century). In the hottest days of summer, *katabira* (light, unlined kimono woven from hemp) were worn. From among the various forms of these *katabira* summer garments, this article spotlights a kimono featuring brilliant dyeing and embroidery that would have been worn by a woman from a samurai family in the *O-oku*<sup>1</sup> (inner chambers) of Edo Castle, the shogun's residence, in the late Edo period.



*Koshimaki* (Summer Garment), Plum, Camellia, Hexagon and Floral Lozenge Design on Red Black Plain Weave Ground with Glossed Weft (full piece and detail)

Edo period, 18th century  
(Collection of the Tokyo National Museum)

Said to have been worn by Tanehime, as with the *sage-obi*. The *koshimaki* is a garment worn as formal dress by women of samurai families starting in the 16th century. In the late Edo period, the garment design became increasingly formalized, featuring auspicious designs dyed and intricately embroidered, against backgrounds of red-tinged black.

Photo: ColBase (<https://colbase.nich.go.jp/>)



*Sage-Obi* Sash, Brocade with Carriage Wheel, Wisteria and Peony Design on Green and White Tiered Ground

Edo period, 18th century  
(Collection of the Tokyo National Museum)

A *sage-obi* sash said to have been worn by Tanehime, wife of the 10th head of the Kishu Tokugawa clan. The ends of the 370-cm sash, adorned with opulent brocade, feature cylindrical forms into which paper tubes can be inserted.

Photo: ColBase (<https://colbase.nich.go.jp/>)



Formal *koshimaki* attire of a woman from a samurai family in the late Edo period (shown as worn)

A *katabira* tied with a *sage-obi* sash, with the sleeves of a *koshimaki* threaded over both sticking out ends of it. The formal attire of a woman from a samurai family, thus stylized in the late Edo period.

backdrop seems to depict a scene from a chapter entitled *Hana no En* (“The Cherry Blossom Banquet”) from *Genji Monogatari* (“The Tale of Genji”),<sup>6</sup> a work of dynastic literature from the Heian period. This would represent Lady Oborozukiyo, who exchanged fans with protagonist Hikaru Genji as a proof of their night together. The autumnal foreground scene, on the other hand, appears to depict a scene from *Kayoi Komachi* (“The Wooing of Komachi”), a work of Noh, a traditional Japanese performing art form favored by samurai families since the Middle Ages. This represents the character Fukakusa no Shosho, who paid 100 nightly visits in a row to Ono no Koma-

chi,<sup>7</sup> a woman of unparalleled beauty, to win her love, whether in rain or in snow, wearing a straw hat and raincoat and spending the nights on a platform for court-cow-carriage. What must a young woman from a samurai family have felt adorning herself with such a garment depicting these two characters who lived on the path of love?

This may not necessarily have corresponded, however, to a dreamy state of elegance. As a matter of fact, this costume was the most prestigious formal summer dress worn by women of samurai families in the *O-oku* during the late Edo period. There were also customs concerning how it was to be worn. For this *katabira*, a thin *obi*

sash called a *sage-obi* is to be wrapped around the waist, tied in back, and paper tubes inserted at both sides, extending to the left and right like arms. The sleeves of a garment called a *koshimaki* are threaded over both sides of these prominences and its main *migoro*<sup>8</sup> portion wrapped around the waist and tucked into the front of the sash. (Refer to the photo). The *koshimaki* is adorned with gorgeous, finely detailed embroidery featuring an auspicious design, giving the plainly evident impression of prestigious, dignified apparel. It must not have been so easy to walk in the *O-oku*, inner chambers of Edo Castle, looking like a bird with its wings spread.

1. A space within Edo Castle known as the living space for the shogun’s wives and concubines.
2. Thread spun from finely fragmented stem cortex fibers of *Boehmeria nivea* var. *nipponnivea*, a perennial plant in the nettle family (*Urticaceae*), known in Japanese as *choma* or *karamushi*. A raw material used to make hemp-like fabrics.
3. Both traditional Japanese hues. *Beni* is a yellow-tinged shade of red. *Moegi* is a shade of green evoking the look of fresh verdure at the outset of spring.
4. Folding hand fans made of 20 to 30 slats of *hinoki* cypress wood.
5. Known as a *Gosho-guruma* as well, a type of carriage used to transport members of the noble class from the Heian period (c. 794 to the late 12th century), originally drawn by oxen.
6. A long-form tale set in the mid-Heian period and consisting of 54 chapters. Written by Murasaki Shikibu, a lady of the court. Details various love stories involving Hikaru Genji, who was born as the son of the emperor of the time. The 8th chapter, *Hana no En*, describes a springtime romantic episode in the protagonist’s 20th year.
7. A female *waka* poet of the Heian period, thought to have been active in the mid-9th century. Later made into a figure considered to be a woman of unmatched beauty.
8. A term encompassing the front and back panels of a kimono, not including the collar, sleeves, etc.

# Kibitaki

Narcissus flycatcher



Kibitaki (male)

The *kibitaki* (narcissus flycatcher) is about 13–14 cm long. It migrates from southern regions outside Japan in the spring and can be seen all over the country in the summer. Even in Tokyo and other large cities, *kibitaki* inhabit parks with plenty of trees. When autumn comes, they go back south to spend the winter. The name "narcissus" comes from the bright yellow the male has above the eyes, on the belly and on the rump, reminiscent of the flower of the same name. The female has a dark green head and upper body. During the breeding season (May–July), males sing beautiful songs to declare their territory and attract a mate. The *kibitaki* has a non-migrating subspecies called the Ryukyu flycatcher, which inhabits the Nansei Islands in the southwestern part of the Japanese archipelago.



Narcissus flowers



Kibitaki (female)

All photos: PIXTA

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