

Hakone: A Volcanic Gift

Mt. Unzen, a volcano on the Shimabara Peninsula in Nagasaki Prefecture in southern Japan, recently awoke with a start from a 200-year slumber and began to rumble and erupt again. The scorching pyroclastic flow that occurred on June 3 claimed a total of 39 lives, making it Japan's worst volcanic disaster in 65 years. When Mt. Unzen last erupted back in 1792, about 15,000 people perished.

This year's explosion has provoked a special controversy, because the victims included not only local residents, fire fighters and police officers but also representatives of the media who were trying to get as close a look at the volcano as possible and the taxi drivers who accompanied them. The volcano also took the lives of three non-Japanese: the French volcanologists Maurice and Katia Krafft and the American volcano expert Harry Glicken, who had been carrying out research at Tokyo Metropolitan University since 1989 and was accompanying the Kraffts. Maurice Krafft had always said, "If one day I have to die, I want it to be at the edge of a volcano."

The fact that even experts could not anticipate the sudden pyroclastic flow served to remind people of the enormous power of nature. And the eruption of Mt. Unzen was only a minor one compared with the later eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in the Philippines, which turned out to be the largest volcanic explosion the world has seen this century.

Japan has its fair share of active volcanoes—83 out of about 1,000 existing in the world. Ironically, volcanoes have given the Japanese people not only a lot of scares but also one of their most treasured sources of pleasure and relaxation—hot springs. More than 30 of Japan's active volcanoes, including Mt. Unzen, have spawned nearby tourist resorts or indeed become tourist spots themselves.

Even Mt. Fuji, which is considered to be the symbol of Japan, is a volcano that is under constant observation. Popular weekly magazines, always on the lookout for a little sensation, sometimes carry ar-

ticles about the possibility of Mt. Fuji blowing its top in the near future. Someday an eruption could well alter the mountain's graceful shape.

Situated near Mt. Fuji is a district called Hakone, a popular and convenient tourist destination for residents of metropolitan Tokyo. More than 20 million tourists visit Hakone every year. Only two hours from Tokyo, the district is a paradise of everything that the tourist might want—mountains, rivers, lakes, highland areas, hot springs, historical sites and other tourist facilities. Moreover, Hakone has the natural resources to offer visitors different attractions during each of the four seasons. The many hot springs in the district, called "the 16 spas in Hakone," have different minerals in the water effective for different ailments.

Hakone's attractions are the outcome of volcanic activity that began about 400,000 years ago. The 1,000–1,200 meter high mountains of Hakone surround a caldera, 8 kilometers in diameter, that was formed about 150,000 years ago. Lake Ashinoko, which sits 723 meters above sea level and is one of the district's central attractions, is a crater lake that was formed about 4,000 years ago by a gas explosion in Owakudani. The sulfur-laden clouds of smoke in Owakudani are enough to remind anyone that Hakone is on the active volcanoes.

Natural fortress

In the past, the journey across Hakone presented the most difficult hurdle for people traveling between east and west Japan. Hakone also provided an outstanding natural fortress for military purposes. From the 13th century, military leaders of the east defined Hakone as their line of defense against the west, and the district was often turned into a bloody battleground.

The Tokugawa shogunate, which ruled Japan from 1603 to 1868, used Hakone's position as a vital point on the east-west route to strengthen its control of the country. In 1619 the shogunate set up the Hakone Checkpoint by Lake Ashinoko as part of its strategy of regulating traffic to and from Edo (the present-day Tokyo).



In bygone days, rows of cedar trees alongside the narrow passages of Hakone protected weary travelers from the heat of the sun and from rain. Today, remaining rows of cedar trees are preserved as a historical relic.

Then in 1635 the shogunate introduced a system by which feudal lords in the provinces were forced to spend regular periods of time in Edo. The objective of this system was to gain the loyalty of the lords and prevent rebellions by keeping their wives and children in Edo as virtual hostages.

The authorities at Hakone therefore checked women leaving Edo very carefully to make sure that the wives and children of provincial lords did not try to escape in disguise. This strict control of



women continued until the power of the shogunate began to wane toward the end of the Edo period.

To safeguard law and order in Edo, the authorities at the Hakone Checkpoint also prevented people from bringing guns and other armaments into the capital, though apparently the restrictions on weapons going into the capital were not as strictly enforced as those on women leaving it.

Travelers passing through the checkpoint had to have some identification and a certificate of permission to pass. For men, this was usually no problem. Samurai and merchants could easily get the necessary documents from clan officials and landlords, respectively. For women, however, it was much more difficult. Regardless of their status, women could not receive a certificate of permission to pass the checkpoint without also obtaining the signature of an official of the shogunate, and they had to undergo a thorough examination at the checkpoint. (The passage was not so strict for women entering Edo; they needed no certificate, just a verbal explanation by the man they were accompanying.)

Near the Hakone Checkpoint there still stands a large cedar tree on which people who were forbidden to pass the checkpoint are said to have wailed and clawed their fingernails in anguish.

Until its closure in 1869, one year after the Meiji Restoration, the Hakone Checkpoint was passed not only by processions of feudal lords and merchants hoping to find relief in hot springs but also on one occasion by an elephant. Presented to the shogun in 1729, the elephant, from northern Vietnam, crossed Hakone on its way to Edo. Though the season of the journey is not sure, it is amusing to think of an elephant plodding its way through the green hills of Hakone.

No other elephants have made the



The Porsche Museum, with some 40 vintage Porsche cars, several of which are priceless, boasts a mouth-watering collection for sports car lovers.

journey, but an imitation of the processions of feudal lords still takes place every year on November 3 in Yumoto Spa, attracting many sightseers as one of the highlights of the autumn tourist season.

According to the records, the first foreigners to pass the Hakone Checkpoint were probably the head of the Dutch factory in Nagasaki and his assistants, who passed through in 1633 on their way to pay their respects to the shogun in Edo. At that time the Dutch were the only Westerners given special permission to trade with Japan, and they were required to make a pilgrimage every four years from their base in Nagasaki to Edo for an audience with the shogun.

Popular hot springs

The effectiveness of Hakone's hot springs in curing ailments led to them becoming popular among the residents of Edo in the second half of the 17th century. It was at about this time that foreign scholars also began to visit the district, accompanying the Dutch traders from Nagasaki. In 1691 the German naturalist Engelbert Kämpfer became the first person to collect plants in the district and attempt to classify them. In 1776 came the Swedish botanist Carl Thunberg, who later wrote a book introducing 64 types of plants in Hakone. And in 1826 the German bota-

nist Philipp von Siebold collected plants in the district and later introduced them into Europe.

Since the closure of the Hakone Checkpoint in 1869, Hakone has prospered as an international tourist resort thanks to the development of transportation facilities by the private sector. The first roads were built, though at a snail's pace, during the Meiji period (1868–1912) thanks to the efforts of local spa and hotel owners.

The internationalization of Hakone was encouraged by the intense rivalry between two hotels trying to lure foreign guests—Fujiya Hotel and Naraya Ryokan. The competition continued for more than a decade up to 1893, when the two hotels finally agreed that Fujiya should cater especially to foreigners and Naraya to Japanese, with newcomer Fujiya paying Naraya a fixed amount every year as compensation.

After World War II, two private railway companies, Seibu and Tokyu, competed with each other to bring about the further development of Hakone by providing two ropeways, splendid recreation boats on Lake Ashinoko, a better road network and various other tourist facilities.

Hakone has many more attractions besides just a glimpse of history and nature. In the Sengokuhara highland area there is the Porsche Museum, which displays 40 or so Porsche vintage cars from the collection of classic and sports cars belonging to Yoshiho Matsuda, president of Matsuda Collection. The museum, opened in 1981, includes a car that belonged to James Dean and is regarded as the second most impressive and valuable collection in the world behind that of



The Hakone Open-air Museum, featuring an open-air exhibition of contemporary sculpture masterpieces and the Picasso collection, is a leading attraction for art lovers.

the Porsche headquarters in Germany. Matsuda's cars are also on display at the Sports Car Museum and the Ferrari Museum of Art in nearby Gotemba and the Rolls Royce Museum in Karuizawa, Nagano Prefecture.

If you are interested in plants, I recommend a visit to the Hakone Botanical Garden of Wetlands, opened in 1976 as

the first of its kind in Japan. Located not far from the Porsche Museum, the garden contains about 1,500 types of plant from lowland and highland areas; it is a colorful spectacle at any time during the opening period (from April 1 to November 10).

Many tourist resorts and historical sites are worth visiting once but do not stand up to a second visit. With its rich and di-

verse tourist resources, however, Hakone provides new attractions and discoveries every time you visit. This is why it provides such a good escape for people caught in the hustle and bustle of everyday life in Tokyo.

Ritsuko Misu
Editorial Manager

Journal of Japanese Trade & Industry

Table Talk

Restaurant Yuzen

An eating establishment that dares call itself a restaurant should have both elegance and dignity. No matter how gorgeous and imposing a restaurant may appear from outside, no matter how expensive its decor or how distinguished its tradition, no matter how expensive the dishes and tableware on which its food is served, no matter the skill of its chef or the training and courteous manners of its waiters and waitresses, and indeed, no matter how expensive the food it may serve, a restaurant which lacks refinement and dignity will unknowingly reveal its true nature. Visitors will never wish to come back if they have somehow sensed an underlying lack of elegance and refinement, no matter how delicious the meals served there.

A guest can sense from the way a waiter takes away the dishes the proprietor's desire to get in one more round of customers before the restaurant closes. We can understand how eager an owner must be to attract as many customers as possible. But the moment the visitor becomes aware of the proprietor's desire to drive him away to make room for new diners, he becomes restless, his dining pleasure spoiled.

There is one restaurant in Tokyo which provides a refreshing antidote to the plethora of vulgar establishments concealing poor grace behind expensive facades. The name of this oasis is Yuzen,

in Minami-aoyama, which serves French cuisine in the Japanese *kaiseki* fashion using Japanese tableware, magically producing a small, exquisite portion of each dish on elegant tableware one at a time.

Yuzen opened in 1983 on "Antique Row," one side-step away from fashionable Aoyama-dori Avenue. Antique Row earns its name from the many antique shops lining its sidewalks.

The interior of Yuzen is tastefully decorated in coral pink and moss green. The panels of specially ordered tiles which adorn the walls, the picture frames and furniture are all of the highest order. Because of their refined taste and sophisticated moderation, they do not impose themselves on the diner.

Yuzen's owner, Eiko Seki, loves the warmth of Japanese dishes and woodenware. She herself visited famous kilns to handpick the dishes and ware for her restaurant. Yuzen chef Osamu Kitano studied French cooking at the Tokyo branch of Maxim de Paris in the Ginza for 13 years.

A la carte foods are on the menu, but most popular of all are prearranged courses. Every month, a seasonal theme ("Tanabata Festival" for July, for instance) inspires a set of 12 exquisite dishes. Placed on black-lacquered trays, they are

served three at a time. The first and second trays bring three varieties each of hors d'oeuvre and appetizers. The third tray brings fish dishes, the fourth meat dishes, and the last either Japanese-style *ochazuke* (a bowl of rice on which tea is poured eaten with pickles) or a dish of curry on rice. These five trays are served in a casual manner one after another, one at a time, and taken away equally unobtrusively by a well-mannered waiter.

For people entertaining guests, business or private, the refined manner in which the food is served and the dishes removed is gratifying. One of my American friends loves Yuzen's refined atmosphere, and very often takes company there. Indeed, many of the patrons are foreign.

Yuzen offers three set courses, each consisting of 12 dishes, at ¥7,500, ¥10,000 and ¥12,000. It also serves lunches priced ¥1,500, ¥3,500 and ¥5,000.

(Yoshimichi Hori, editor-in-chief)

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Hours 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. for lunch and 5:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. for dinner. Closed on Sundays and national holidays.

