

## Matsuyama: Ancient Spa Keeps Warm Welcome

One hour and 20 minutes after departure from Haneda Airport in Tokyo, the Boeing 767 skims over the Seto Inland Sea and touches down at Matsuyama Airport. From Osaka the journey to Matsuyama takes just 45 minutes.

Matsuyama is the main city of Ehime Prefecture, located in the northwest of Japan's fourth-largest island of Shikoku. Except for air services, access to Matsuyama from the major cities of Honshu was relatively difficult until the spring of 1988, when the 9.4-kilometer Seto Ohashi bridge opened to link Honshu and Shikoku over the Inland Sea.

In Natsume Soseki's *Botchan*, written at the beginning of the 20th century and still one of the Japanese people's favorite novels, the young hero quits his teaching job at a secondary school in Matsuyama and returns to Tokyo. After taking a boat from Matsuyama to Kobe, he switches to a train. At that time, the whole journey probably took a day and a half.

Because of its remote location, Matsuyama for a long time remained off the beaten tourist track, despite its abundance of tourist resources. Air travel and



Dogo Onsen Honkan, a common bathhouse operated by the city of Matsuyama, has been the symbol of Dogo Spa for almost a century.

the Seto Ohashi road-and-rail bridge have changed the picture, however, and Matsuyama now is in the process of becoming a thriving tourist city.

The most prominent of Matsuyama's tourist resources are its hot springs. The Japanese archipelago is dotted with spas, but Matsuyama stands out as probably the only city with a population of as many as 300,000 that has earned a reputation as a hot spring resort. Moreover, Dogo Spa in Matsuyama is Japan's oldest hot spring. The *Iyonokuni Fudoki*, compiled in the 8th century, includes a legend about Dogo Spa and also mentions that Prince Shotoku, who helped Buddhism to prosper in Japan in its formative years, visited there in the year 596.

In addition, the *Manyoshu* anthology of poems, also compiled in the 8th century, and other chronicles reveal that the emperors of ancient Japan visited the spa. These references indicate that the Matsuyama district served as a stopover on the way from Yamato, the center of ancient Japan, and northern Kyushu and that Dogo Spa was popular very early on.

Dogo Spa has changed with the times. It now boasts some modern hot-spring hotels and an auditorium, run by the local government, which is equipped with facilities for simultaneous interpretation in four languages. But Dogo Spa also has a common bathhouse called the Dogo Onsen Honkan, which has been unchanged for almost a century and remains the symbol of the resort.

Located in the center of the spa district, the Dogo Onsen Honkan is a grand three-story building constructed in 1894 in a traditional Japanese style. On the top of the building stands a tower, the roof

of which is decorated with herons. From this tower, a drum sounds at 6:30 every morning to let people know that the bathhouse has opened.

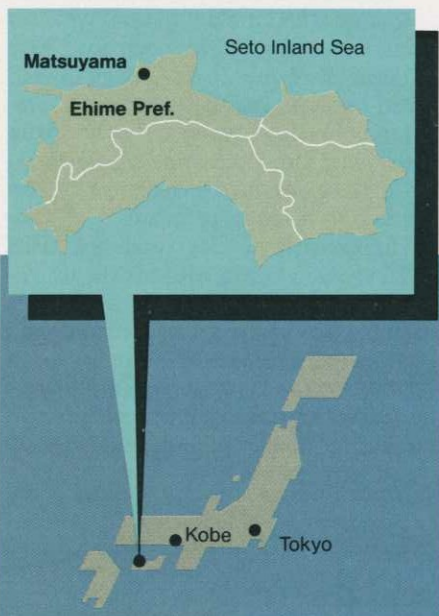
### Lured by drum

When the sound of the drum echoes through the area, scores of people wearing *yukata* summer cotton kimono emerge from nearby hotels and head for the bathhouse. Of course these hotels are equipped with hot-spring baths themselves, but tradition has it that a visit to Dogo Spa is not complete without a morning dip in the common bathhouse. Quite a few local people also make sure they never miss their morning bath there.

Operated by the city of Matsuyama, the Dogo Onsen Honkan has a public bath called the Kaminoyu on the first floor, which you can enter for ¥300 just for a soak. If you want a rest after your bath, go up to the second floor, where for a small additional payment you can change into a *yukata*, have some tea, and take a leisurely nap. If you want to be a little extravagant, you can try the Reinoyu bath on the second floor, which is a class—as well as a floor—above the Kaminoyu. The Reinoyu has special individual rest rooms on the third floor.

One of the pleasures of visiting Matsuyama is that after soaking in a hot spring, you can enjoy some wonderful seafood taken from the Seto Inland Sea. Many tourists from overseas now visit Matsuyama to get a taste of these pleasures, but they are by no means the first foreigners to do so.

Eighty or so years ago, at about the time when the hero of *Botchan* was living



in Matsuyama, there were many foreigners staying in the city and enjoying its delights. These people were not tourists, however. They were Russian officers and soldiers who were captured when Japan fought Russia in Manchuria during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905. One of the prisoner-of-war camps at that time was set up in Matsuyama, and at the peak as many as 6,000 Russians were imprisoned there.

Many of the Russian prisoners were officers, who had the right to go outside the camp freely. A large number of them even borrowed houses and lived in Matsuyama until being repatriated at the end of the war. These officers frequently visited Dogo Spa, rented the entire Reinoyu, and enjoyed the hot-spring bath and a beer in the lounge afterward. Sometimes the ordinary soldiers also visited from their camp accompanied by guards, so that on some days as many as 400 prisoners of war bathed there, making Dogo Spa a very lively place. The officers also often took strolls on the beach near Matsuyama, enjoying the luscious seafood and the views of the Seto Inland Sea.

At that time no more than 30,000 people lived in Matsuyama, so one in six of the population was a Russian prisoner of war. In stark contrast to the gloomy stories about the treatment of prisoners of war during World War II, a peaceful rapport developed spontaneously between the citizens of Matsuyama and the Russian prisoners. Since the prisoners possessed quite a lot of money, it is even said that their spending on food and drink and other items produced a kind of prisoners-inspired economic boom in Matsuyama,

which at that time had no special industries to boast of.

Not that everything was paradise for the prisoners. Those who were injured in the war or who became ill while interned were sent to the hospital, and 98 of them died there, a long way from home. The graves of these Russian prisoners are in a temple in Matsuyama and to this day are kept clean and decorated with flowers by local high-school students and old people's groups. When four representatives of the Soviet Red Cross and Science Academy visited the cemetery in June 1990, they expressed their gratitude to the local people for taking so much care of the graves.

Through this goodwill, the people of Matsuyama have made their contribution to the development of relations between Japan and the post-*perestroika* Soviet Union. (The four Soviet representatives visited Japan to discuss the problem of Japanese prisoners of war, 10% of whom died when they were made to do forced labor in Siberia after World War II.)

### **Mikan oranges and pilgrims**

Ten years after the Russian prisoners returned home, Matsuyama received another batch of prisoners of war—this time Germans who the Japanese captured when they occupied Qingdao in China during World War I. Though there were only 400 or so prisoners, the Japanese authorities realized that they included many technicians. Reflecting Japan's eagerness at the time to master Western technology, people who wanted to learn from the technicians were encouraged to apply to the local chamber of commerce.

It is fascinating that Matsuyama, which because of its geographical position has had little contact with other countries through history, had this experience of receiving Western prisoners of war at the beginning of this century.

What is the main problem facing the city today? The answer, according to a resident of Matsuyama, is the liberalization of orange imports. Since Ehime Prefecture ranks as the largest *mikan* (Japanese mandarin orange) producing prefecture in Japan, it will feel the effects of liberalization more than others. Under an agreement reached between Japan and the United States in 1988, Japan will liberalize its imports of oranges in 1991 and of orange juice in 1992.

To strengthen the management of its *mikan* producers, Ehime Prefecture has been reducing the acreage of land for growing *mikan* and other citrus fruits since 1988 with the aim of cutting back a total of 3,000 hectares by the time of full liberalization. This time, the contact with foreigners is proving more painful than before.

Though it has had little exchange with foreign countries, Matsuyama has maintained strong links with the rest of Japan since ancient times. Every year in early spring, when *natsu-mikan* oranges are just beginning to get their color, people appear in Matsuyama wearing white robes and sedge hats, carrying staffs, and ringing bells as they walk. These are the so-called Shikoku pilgrims, who flock to the island from all over Japan to visit the 88 sacred places connected with the high priest Kukai, who hailed from Shikoku and exerted an enormous influence on Buddhism in Japan in the 8th and 9th centuries. No one knows when the custom began, but the pilgrimage has been a popular event since Japan's Middle Ages.

Pilgrims can be seen in all of Shikoku's four prefectures. The course they follow is fixed. Starting in Tokushima Prefecture in eastern Shikoku, they travel in a clockwise direction, stopping off at each of the 88 sacred places. Matsuyama has eight of them, from No. 46 to No. 53, so many pilgrims can be seen around the city.

Matsuyama also is the birthplace of the



Representatives of the Soviet Red Cross visited the cemetery for Russian prisoners of war which has been taken care of by local people.

outstanding *haiku* poet Masaoka Shiki, who developed the modern style of writing *haiku* on subjects as they are seen. Apparently the pilgrimage provided an excellent subject for verses. Natsume Soseki, who was a friend of Shiki's and also lived at one time in Matsuyama, penned the following *haiku*: *Kasumu hi ya / Junrei oyako / Futari nari* (On a hazy day / Father and child together / On a pilgrimage).

Soseki's verse brings to mind the sad

figures of a father and his child making the pilgrimage through the spring haze.

Though pilgrims dressed in the traditional costume can still be seen, many people these days make the trek wearing suits or jeans, topped by a token sedge hat. Few people now spend several months visiting all 88 sacred places on the 1,450-kilometer course. Instead they travel by hired bus, taxi or private car, and they do so not so much for religious reasons as for sight-seeing and exercise.

Now that access to Shikoku has improved, many tourists combine a few of the sacred places with the other sight-seeing spots they want to see. Even to these people, the natives of Shikoku still show their traditional warmth by providing rest places and serving tea.

Toshio Iwasaki  
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## Table Talk

### Ristorante Basta Pasta

Japanese gourmets, who have long adored French cuisine as the ultimate Western food, have begun defecting to Italian food. The result has been a surge in the number of Italian restaurants in Tokyo. This naturally raises the question of what the most current trends in Italian cuisine might be back in the home country of this gastronomic tradition.

On a recent business trip to Europe, I took it upon myself to reconnoiter. I chose Venice for my mission, since I have long yearned for a chance to please my palate at Harry's Bar, a mecca for Italian food which, it is said, no gourmet can afford to miss.

It was the first time in five years that I had visited the centuries-old city facing the Adriatic Sea. Harry's Bar, directly in front of the San Marco water bus station, has the bar of its name on the first floor, and a restaurant on the second. It was far less spacious than I had imagined, but my table commanded a splendid view beyond the Grand Canal. Both food and service were impressive. Cooled white wine, Soave, perfectly matched the evening's menu: *Cannelloni alla piemontese* (macaroni gratin), *Tagliolini bianchi*

*o verdi gratinati* (gratin of tagliolini noodles) and *Gamberetti all'olio e limone* (boiled shrimp). Both the service and the price, a robust \$130, matched the three-star restaurants of Paris. For your information, Bellini by Cipriani of New York is a Harry's Bar affiliate.

Apart from Harry's Bar, I of course called at my favorite restaurant beside the Rialto, Trattoria alla Madonna, which I rarely miss when I am in the canal town. And as usual, it did not disappoint my expectations. A square meal plus drinks, for a mere \$30. I found the image of the Madonna gracing the entrance of the restaurant as charming as Gioconda's.

So much for my journey. And now I am pleased to reveal that, even if you have no opportunity to visit Venice, you can still enjoy excellent Italian dishes, well matching Madonna's, right here in Tokyo.

Basta Pasta, a 10 minute walk from JR Harajuku Station, serves authentic Italian dishes in a pleasant atmosphere. Its spacious and high-ceilinged dining room with well over 100 seats, not to mention its liquor and oyster bars, bustle with customers, well over half of them women. And its unique open kitchen is located right in the center of the dining room, allowing customers to see firsthand how Italian cooking is done.

For the convenience of customers, the wine list is printed on each paper place mat over a map of Italy. It includes a white Soave Classico (¥3,300) and red Chianti Rubizzo (¥3,500).

Popular items on the menu include

*Carpaccio* (sliced raw beef fillet and salad with parmesan cheese, ¥2,200); *Spaghetti e verdura* (spaghetti with aromatic green vegetables, garlic and pepper, ¥1,200); *Spaghetti ai scampi o granchio dello chef* (the chef's special spaghetti with shrimp or crab, ¥2,200); *Ossobuco* (stewed ox knuckle, ¥3,000); and *Carcaccio di pesce* (fish baked in foil for two, ¥5,000). Basta Pasta's *Tiramisu*, a pastry dessert, has been a hit since the restaurant opened five years ago.

The successful establishment is planning to open a branch on New York's 17th Street, with good reason.

(Yoshimichi Hori, editor-in-chief)

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Open all year round. Reservations necessary for dinner.

