

Shimoda: Black Ship Port

Shimoda is a small town at the tip of the Izu Peninsula, a nice place to walk around. I first visited Shimoda in 1968 and, I'm glad to say, it hasn't changed much since then. All towns change to some degree, but we don't like to see our favorite places change too much.

Shimoda is a commercial and fishing port as well as tourist resort and has a population of 31,000. It is partly enclosed by a range of hills that overlook Shimoda Bay. At one time, from 1616 to 1720, Shimoda was a checkpoint for all ships bound for Edo (Tokyo) and during this period the town enjoyed its greatest prosperity. Shimoda was then considered a remote place, but now it is easily within reach of Tokyo by train or by car.

Shimoda happens to be the sister city of my hometown, Newport, Rhode Island, and indeed, the two cities have much in common: both are small seaside resorts and both have beautiful beaches—though I haven't seen any mansions in Shimoda. (About a hundred years ago many wealthy summer residents of Newport built chateau-like mansions which they called "cottages" whereas Japanese now build apartments which they call "mansions.") Both Newport and Shimoda hold "Black Ship Festivals" to honor Commodore Matthew C. Perry, who sailed into Shimoda in 1854 and persuaded Japanese rulers to open diplomatic and trade relations with the United States. Perry was a native of Newport, hence the Newport connection.

In 1968 the mayor of Newport asked me to represent him at the Black Ship Festival in Shimoda and so my wife and I took a trip from Beppu, where we were then living, and went to Shimoda for the first time. I was a little anxious before arriving, for I had received a telephone call from a town official asking me to come to the *yakuba* (town hall), which he said was near the station, but I confused the word with *yakiba* (crematorium) and was wondering why I had to visit *that* place. But the misunderstanding was cleared up and once we got there, my wife and I were both overwhelmed by the kindness and hospitality of the townspeople.

A town with everything

It's not just history that makes the town a nice place to visit, it's the combination of historical attractions, convenience and natural beauty. With the exception of Cape Iro and the beaches, most of the places to see are within walking distance. A visit to Shimoda makes a good weekend trip for people living in Tokyo, and there are many beautiful views along the way. Of course the town is crowded



during the summer, but I consider Shimoda a good place to visit at any time of the year—maybe it's the New Englander in me, but I like winter seascapes.

Recently there has been a lot of talk in Japan about becoming "international," but in a sense Shimoda has been international for a long time: After all, the Black Ship Festival was started back in 1934. And who could be more international than the genial, multilingual Shigeru Hirai, former deputy mayor of Shimoda, who has guided countless foreign visitors around his hometown. Mr. Hirai speaks several foreign languages including English, French and even Russian (he used to send me letters in Russian because he knew that I had studied the language). These days Mr. Hirai is busy minding his *sake* shop, but he still finds time to guide foreign visitors and he reads *Pravda* and *Izvestia* every day (to keep up his Russian, which he uses in speaking with Russian officials who come to visit the graves of Russian sailors at Gyokusenji Temple).

The big annual event in Shimoda is the

three-day Black Ship Festival in May. The festival begins with a special ceremony held on a hillside at Shiroyama Park, where a monument to commemorate the opening of Japan stands; this ceremony is attended by high-ranking military and government officials from Japan and the United States, including the American ambassador. Following the ceremony there is a parade through the streets of Shimoda; it is led by the mayor of Shimoda and the American ambassador, who ride together in an open car, and features various marching bands and military units, including contingents of sailors and marines from the U.S. Navy Base at Yokosuka. There are many other activities: baseball games between Japanese and American teams; concerts by brass bands and jazz groups; a re-enactment of the signing of the Shimoda Treaty; visits by U.S. Navy ships; a gigantic fireworks display; and parties of all kinds—garden parties, cocktail parties, geisha parties. Everyone, Japanese and foreigners alike, seems to have a good time.

Must-see sites

The most famous place in Shimoda is Gyokusenji Temple, which served as a residence for Townsend Harris, the first American diplomatic representative to Japan. Harris lived there with his Dutch interpreter, Henry Heusken, from August 1856 to March 1858. Fortunately the temple still stands much as it did when Harris was living there, and you can see the rooms that Harris and Heusken lived in as well as a few mementos of their residence. (I used to live in Ito, a town on the Izu Peninsula that holds a festival every summer in honor of William Adams, the Englishman who lived in Japan in the 1600s and became a friend of Tokugawa Ieyasu. Adams was the model for Blackthorne in the novel *Shogun*, but unfortunately he left nothing behind that you can see.)

Harris, like *gaijin* nowadays, could not live completely in Japanese style. He had to have his "Philadelphia stove" and Western furniture, he had to eat meat and drink milk, and he may even have worn shoes in the house—but in return for these privileges he did give English lessons to local officials and in so doing became the first in a long line of "English conversation teachers." It is interesting to see where this cantankerous but skillful diplomat lived; maybe he didn't look like John Wayne in *The Barbarian and the Geisha*, but he did a good job of representing his country and he even got along well with the Russians when they visited Shimoda. On a terrace to the left of the temple, you can see the gravestones of three Russian sailors who lost their lives in a tidal wave at Shimoda; and to the right, the gravestones of three members of Perry's fleet.

Another famous place is Ryosenji Temple, where Commodore Perry and representatives of the Tokugawa government arranged a supplementary treaty in 1854, after the conclusion of the Kanagawa Treaty. What the official *Japan Guide* does not mention is that Ryosenji is also famous, among the Japanese, for its collection of erotic statuary, phallic symbols and the like. My wife's father made sure to guide us there in 1968: I guess he considered it part of our education. Somehow this collection impressed me as a healthy and natural phenomenon, especially when compared with the stuff in the peep magazines prevalent nowadays.

There is also a series of pictures hung inside Ryosenji Temple depicting the story of Okichi, the so-called mistress of Townsend Harris. There was an Okichi and she did serve as a maid for Harris—for three days! Apparently the old bachelor, unlike his young Dutch assistant, did not crave female companionship at that time, and he barely tolerated the girl who had been sent to work for him (and spy on him). Okichi was 17 when she first went to Gyokusenji Temple; she later left Shimoda and worked in the entertainment quarters at a port for foreigners on Edo Bay. She returned to Shimoda when she was nearly 50 and ended up an alcoholic and a suicide. Thus a national legend was born: the Japanese girl who sacri-

ficed herself for her country by becoming the mistress of a foreigner. Heusken's girlfriend Ofuku, by contrast, later made a good marriage and spent a happy life in the village of Kakisaki, near Shimoda.

There are many other places to see and things to do in Shimoda. You can take an excursion boat out to the Seven Islands of Izu. In summer you can go swimming and surfing at one of the beautiful beaches such as Yumigahama or Shirahama (in Newport when we say "beach," that's what we mean, a place with nice white sand). What I like to do is walk and Shimoda is just the place for that: you can walk around the town or go down to the docks and walk along the shore on one of the special hiking paths. You might even see an old house with *namako-kabe*, the traditional black tile and white plaster walls that were used in Shimoda even in the days when Perry came to Japan.

And by all means, take a trip out to Cape Iro, by bus or by boat. Stand above the cliffs, stretch your arms and look out at the Pacific from the very end of the peninsula—it's a good antidote for that feeling of confinement that sometimes comes over us in this crowded land.

Some places in Japan are disappointing; I know of one famous resort that is considered the "favorite summer hideaway for foreign residents of Japan." Sounds like a kind of bucolic Roppongi, doesn't it? But when I went there, all I could see was miles and miles of "tennis assembly lines," some artsy-craftsy shops and high-priced boutiques and a church whose pastor offers to perform "weddings to order, in Japanese, English or Gregorian Latin."

With Shimoda, however, what you see is what you get: It's a small town at the tip of the Izu Peninsula, where the scenery is pretty and the people are friendly, and it's a nice place to walk around.

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Bookshelf

Kaizen—The Key to Japanese Competitive Success

By Masaaki Imai
Published by Random House, Inc.
1986, New York
259 pages; \$19.95

Kaizen is a combination of two *kanji*. *Kai* can mean "change," "innovate," "rectify," "re-cant," "reform" or "improve." *Zen* means "goodness." The Japanese/English dictionary gives the combination as "improvement" but

the reader is in for a surprise if he thinks that is all that it means.

The author states right at the beginning that "*Kaizen* strategy is the single most important concept in Japanese management." We've had Ouchi's *Theory Z* and Pascale/Athos' *Seven S's*, but their propositions were multifaceted. This immediately raised the question in me: "Surely, Japanese success is the result of a convergence of cultural, historic, economic and other forces and not of a single concept?" However, I soon realized that the author is not really referring to a "concept" in the Western sense, for his *kaizen* is procedural and relative to many factors. The suspicion that this is just another pat formula for success is not warranted.

Kaizen is process rather than result oriented and reminds me of Sophia University's Ballon's observation that when Japanese managers get together, there seem to be no decisions but only executions. I am of the generation that cut its teeth on Drucker's *Managing for Results* and to replace "result" with "process" is revolutionary. In my occupation, this is analogous to an American advertising executive being told by his Japanese counterpart that communication measurements don't mean very much.

The book is bound to raise defensive reactions in the West. Not only are we challenged on our results orientation but the author asserts that "innovation strategies of the past will not work." In other words, *kaizen* is not "innovation." The author is scornful of the various management jargon of the past but is in danger of creating one himself unless this distinction is clearly explained. Imai's enthusiasm is infectious and his excitement comes through the pages but some readers, more accustomed to the dispassionate styles of Drucker and even Peters/Waterman may be turned off. For example, he makes the sweeping claim that *kaizen* is not culturally based and that it is transferable to all, suggesting the discovery of the universal management value.

The author agrees with Peters and Waterman that excellent companies are not limited to any culture and certainly this is universality

