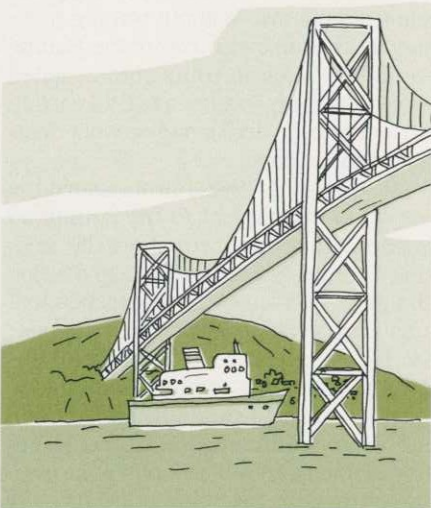


Onomichi: Vestiges of a Golden Age

Let's say that what you really want to do is try windsurfing on crystal-clear water off a white sand beach and you don't want to spend much money, but instead of going to the Virgin Islands you accidentally came to Japan and you want to make the best of the situation. Then let's say that, for the windsurfing and the beach, you are going, as you definitely should, to the island of Shikoku, but you think that as long as you are in Japan you really ought to take in a temple or two. And finally, you want to distribute your tourist money in a place where it will do the most good. Well then, Onomichi is the place for you. Onomichi is, along with neighboring Mihara, a prime point of departure for Shikoku, and it may very well be the place in Japan where you can see the greatest number of top quality shrines and temples in the shortest amount of time.

If you are the kind of person who doesn't insist on seeing the same temples everyone else has seen and you like to relax and get away from the crowds, Onomichi has another truly endearing trait. Onomichi doesn't much care if you're there or not. Unlike the great temples of certain locales that will go unnamed and that are surrounded by intense efforts to sell gift items of limited practical value, most of Onomichi's temples are surrounded by houses with people living in them. And yet, these temples (24 major league temples and numerous shrines) are beautiful, architecturally impressive and fully pedigreed.

So why does this skinny seaport town of something over 100,000 people have so many more than its fair share of national treasures and important cultural assets? And given that it does, why doesn't it look and act more like a tourist trap?



Onomichi is a thin piece of land that runs between a strip of beautiful, blue-green water to the south and a wall of trees formed by three small mountains to the north. There is only one major road through town, Route 2. The strip of water, the Onomichi Suido, is actually the Inland Sea disguised as a river by a large island called Mukaishima, or "facing island," that looms up a mere 300 meters off shore and runs the entire 10-kilometer length of the city. A tall, graceful, white bridge spans the east end of the waterway over to the island. The bridge needs to be tall to accommodate the large ships plowing in and out with their loads of wholesale products for northern Hiroshima Prefecture and western Japan.

Intellectual working town

The temples are a result of and testament to an illustrious history. In fact, Onomichi was enormously rich and influential for centuries beginning in the Heian period (794–1185). During the Muromachi period (1392–1573), Onomichi was the one and only port trading with China's Ming dynasty. This was the golden age of the Murakami Suigun, whose headquarters were on nearby Innoshima Island and who, for a price, guided the many ships traveling through the Inland Sea with mandatory rice tributes from western Japan, as well as goods and new ideas from China and Korea, up to Kyoto and Nara. This expert guidance was necessary to help in navigating the tricky Inland Sea and also for protection from pirates. When they weren't guiding, the Murakami Suigun doubled as pirates.

As a part of his campaign to unify Japan, Toyotomi Hideyoshi forced the Suigun to disband in the 16th century, but Onomichi remained an important center of trade and commerce. Rich people lived there. Artists and writers lived there. And spiritual leaders stopped by at least long enough to establish a presence.

During the Meiji era (1868–1912), Onomichi was the second city in Hiroshima Prefecture (after Hiroshima) to be designated an official city. But then it fell victim to progress. About that time, the ships being used for international trade grew too large to slip easily through the Onomichi Suido, and Onomichi was relegated to its present status as a domestic wholesale port. But this is not the whole story.

Besides trade, the primary industry in Onomichi is, and has long been, shipbuilding. Three huge shipbuilding factories can be seen from the observation tower, but only one huge ship. It has occurred to some observers that the state of the shipbuilding industry could conceivably account for the baseball and bat found floating in the algae-dominated carp pond at Hachimangu, but maybe not.

A tourist's haven, not trap

In fact, it is not quite accurate to say that Onomichi has not made an effort to attract tourists. On Mt. Senkoji, named for a beautiful

temple established in 806, there is all the standard tourist-attraction equipment. A ropeway takes you up to the observation tower from which you can walk down to several temples, a bell tower, a famous, huge, round rock and a smaller, very round rock that, legend has it, once glowed in the dark to protect the ships. To accompany these wonders of nature and history, there is an impressive flower garden, an exhibition hall (open only 50 days each year for the chrysanthemum doll show in October and November), gift shops and a small amusement park.

But there are two other attractions on Mt. Senkoji that offer a clue to Onomichi's air of cool indifference. One is the art museum. The other is the Trail of Literature (*bungaku-no-komichi*). Among other historical and artistic exhibits, the art museum proudly and prominently displays works by artists who lived or worked in Onomichi. The Trail of Literature is a red clay path that winds through a pine forest past 25 boulders on which are carved poems or excerpts from the writings of famous authors (most from the Edo and Meiji periods) who lived or worked in Onomichi.

For the average Japanese, authors and artists often seem a bit odd. Their hair is a little longer, their clothes just a bit shabbier and their manners somewhat less oily than those of the average car salesman. So, like the authors and artists of whom the city is so proud, Onomichi is cool, somewhat aloof, not wholeheartedly given to selling its birthright to make a buck. It's basically an intellectual working town, a center of trade, commerce and creativity, with the deep confidence that comes from 800 years of success. True, the past 100 years have been a bit slow, but people with the right stuff are not given to panic. This town has pride. That's why most of the temples are living, working, worshipping temples, not merely show pieces. That's why some of them are not as well maintained as they were a couple centuries ago. That's why there are hardly any gift shops except up on the mountain. That's why, when my friends and I were walking around looking at these treasures on a Saturday in July, we were the only ones. And that's why we had such a good time.

To get to Onomichi, take the Shinkansen from Tokyo to Fukuyama (4 hrs. 23 mins.). Onomichi is 18 minutes from Fukuyama, the third stop on the Sanyo Line (Sanyo Honsen), and a train leaves every 15 minutes during most of the day. If you come by car, it's about three and a half hours from the Suita Interchange in Osaka to the Miyoshi Interchange on the Chugoku Expressway. From Miyoshi, it's another hour and a half on Route 184. Turn left when you get to Route 2 and there you are.

A shopping arcade begins just east of the train station. Coming out on the far end of the arcade, you will pass on your right two small streets with the best restaurants in town. These are good, modest restaurants in keeping with Onomichi's general demeanor. If you want something fancy hanging out over the water, you will have to go a few kilometers west on Route 2 to Mihara. But that's another story.



There are a number of best times to come to Onomichi. April 20 and 21 are Hana-kuyo, a festival of flowers at Saikokuji Temple begun by a rich merchant's daughter who offered flowers in commemoration of the death of Kobo-daishi. Onomichi is as proud of its flowers as it is of its writers and artists; so, according to reliable sources, all of April and May are breathtakingly beautiful.

Several festivals take place in the fall too, including Onomichi's unique Beccha festival on November 3 that features the local children running for their lives from three terrifying demons. And it is said that Mt. Senkoji becomes almost crowded on Sundays in October and November because of the spectacular chrysanthemum display.

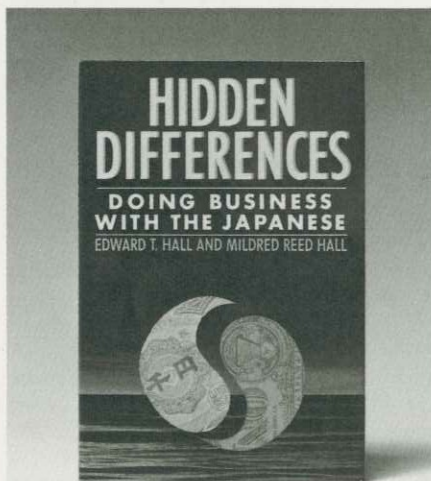
However, since you are on your way to windsurfing off Shikoku, you will probably want to drop by during the summer. At the end of July, you can attend the Gion festival, a treasured remnant of the days when Onomichi and Kyoto were the pinnacles of Japanese civilization. And every other year—this is an off year—you can attend the Yoshiwa Taiko-odori, a 600 year-old festival featuring 170 men and women dancing to the beat of drums tied around their waists. Besides, summer is the best time for a port town. It's the best time for envying the crew on tall ships in green water, and it's the best time for standing in the cool breeze on the tops of mountains. It must be noted that there is almost no level ground in Onomichi. This is no place for weak hearts or bad backs, especially in summer. But since you're going windsurfing, it'll be good for you.

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Bookshelf

Hidden Differences: Doing Business with the Japanese

By Edward T. Hall & Mildred Reed Hall
 Published by Anchor Press/Doubleday
 1987, New York
 172 pages; \$16.95



Believing in the need to maintain free trade, I would like to see U.S. manufacturers making a greater effort to export. Yet with a land area 25 times as large as Japan's and with double Japan's population, the United States is itself a

major market, and it is understandable that manufacturers should be content to sell in the 50 states. However, the deluge of foreign products flooding the American market has made it imperative that American companies stop being satisfied with just the home market and open their eyes and broaden their horizons to include the world export market.

This is especially true of the need to look at the Japanese market—the second largest national market in the free world—and to make a greater effort here. The possibilities in Japan are infinite, but they are largely unexploited. Thus the main cause of the trade friction between Japan and the United States lies not in the Japanese surplus but in the American deficit, and I very much hope that U.S. exporters will be more aggressive in selling in Japan. Unfortunately, too many American businessmen who come to Japan believing in the potential for growth here find it difficult to adapt to Japanese social customs and commercial practices and, failing to make a profit as quickly as they had hoped, leave Japan bitter or disheartened. This will never do.

If you are a businessman hoping to do business in Japan, *Hidden Differences* is one of the books that you should read before you get on the plane—and even before you get very far along in your thinking. The authors are the world-famous cultural anthropologist Edward T. Hall and his wife Mildred Reed Hall, who specializes in the application of anthropology to intercultural problems. For the past 30 years, the Halls have worked in the field of intercultural communication, designing programs for the selection and training of foreign service personnel assigned to work in foreign cultures, consulting for international business and writing extensively on this subject. They are, very