

Kunisaki: Technology Amid the Temples

Until recently, not many people outside of Kyushu had heard of the Kunisaki Peninsula. Located in a remote corner of Oita Prefecture, this mountainous area was visited mostly by Buddhist pilgrims making a round of the old temples there, or lovers of the outdoors with a fondness for uphill hikes.

Today, as a result of Oita's high-tech boom, the Kunisaki *hanto* (peninsula) is a stone's throw from an area that has given this part of Kyushu the nickname "Silicon Island." And to make matters even easier, a once-sleepy airport nearby has been expanded to handle the increasing number of flights, many of which bring in parts and carry out finished high-tech products.

Thus, this rugged but scenic peninsula is now accessible both to businesspeople and tourists without a lot of extra effort. If you're Kyushu bound, a swing around Kunisaki will give you a glimpse of a side of Japan that even most Japanese never see.

This peninsula was one of the earliest centers of Buddhist flowering in Japan. Its location right on the sea route between the Asian mainland and the Inland Sea leading up to the Yamato heartland meant it was a natural stopping off point for travelers. At one time it had 28 main temples and 37 branch temples—no small number for a peninsula that's only about 25 kilometers in both length and width.

Paintings of paradise

What is thought to be the oldest temple remaining on the peninsula today is Fukiji, the main hall of which dates back to at least 1167. This temple is not large, but what makes it impressive is the traces

of paintings that remain on the walls, the pillars and behind the altar. If you ask and a priest is available, he will guide you around the interior with a flashlight and illuminate the more interesting paintings for you to see.

This temple belongs to the "Pure Land," or Jodo, sect of Buddhism, and some of these paintings represent the paradise, or pure land, where believers in *Amida-nyorai* (Amitabha) expect to be reborn. Originally, dozens of small Buddhas and bodhisattvas were painted around the tops of the walls.

The Kunisaki Peninsula is also rich in Buddhist sculpture, some carved out of wood, and some carved into sheer stone cliffs, which is unusual for Japan.

Not far from Fukiji is the best collection of wood sculptures on the peninsula. They are housed in the Maki-odo (Maki Great Hall), a few kilometers south of Fukiji. The nine Buddhist images here date back to the early 12th century. This was when Pure Land Buddhism was spreading through Japan, and these sculptures reflect the gentleness and compassion of the new religion.

Mountain images

The scale of these figures would seem to indicate that the building originally housing them was of considerable size. The present building is a simple, fireproof hall. A garden outside contains some small stone sculptures that have been gathered from among the hundreds—perhaps thousands—that dot the peninsula.

The best place to see giant images carved directly into a rocky mountainside is the Kumano Magai-butsum, in the central part of the peninsula. These two Buddhas are halfway up a low mountain, and it takes 15–25 minutes to navigate the irregular stairs. The *Fudo-myoo* (Acala) and *Dainichi-nyorai* (Mahavairocana) that greet you after your climb are nothing on the scale of what can be seen in China or India, but for Japan they are quite remarkable.

Another place where large Buddhist images are carved directly into stone is at Tennenji Temple. Here, the Buddhas are carved into a rocky outcrop rising from

the riverbed, so you don't have to climb up a mountain to see them.

Other groups of stone images to be seen are the so-called 500 disciples of Buddha, or 500 *Rakan*. These figures are not carved into a cliffside, but are free-standing—literally hundreds of them. There are two groups of these, one at Tokoiji Temple, on the peninsula's west side, and another beyond the peninsula, going west, at a temple named Rakanji. This latter temple is located near the scenic Yabakei Gorge.

The mountains that cover this peninsula are themselves covered with stone figures, carved by the faithful over the centuries. Hiking maps are for sale that show what you will find where, and how to get there. For serious climbers, there are some spectacular views to be had from atop the peaks of Kunisaki. They are not so terribly high, but some are quite steep.

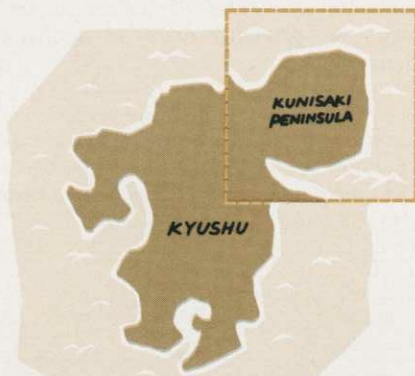
The peninsula's highest peak is the 721-meter Mt. Futago. This mountain has given its name to one of Kunisaki's most oft-photographed temples: Futagoji. The lovely mountainside setting contains several nicely weather-beaten buildings, as well as a hostel and two places where you can get a quick lunch. The woods here are full of seasonal shrubs and flowers, as well as maple and cherry trees.

Worth the effort

If you order in advance, and if there are enough people in your party, you can enjoy a meal of Buddhist vegetarian cooking (*shojin-ryori*) at this temple (not at the quick-lunch restaurants adjacent to the bus parking lot). But you must call ahead and reserve a *shojin-ryori* meal. The telephone number of Futagoji is 09786-5-0253.

The public buses that serve the peninsula are not all that frequent, so that stopping to see one place and then waiting until another bus comes can be time-consuming, or in some cases impossible. The best way to get around is by car, which you can reserve to be waiting for you at Oita Airport.

For those without their own transportation, the Oita Kotsu bus company offers an all-day tour of the Kunisaki area, with additional departures (and itineraries) on





Sundays and holidays. The price will be about ¥4,000, depending on where you board the bus.

However you get around this peninsula, you are sure to be glad that you made the effort to come here. Kunisaki can't be beaten, for travelers who like to get off the beaten track.

Anne G. Pepper
Tokyo-based Journalist

Cape Soya on Hokkaido to Cape Sata on the southernmost tip of Kyushu.

There are probably as many views of Japan as there are foreign visitors and residents. Some come to Japan hoping to pursue the "exotic." To these visitors, Japan might be haiku and pottery. To others who come as expatriate managers of foreign firms, Japan is a rung on the corporate ladder, to be negotiated on the way to bigger and better things. Regardless of motive, however, most Westerners use Tokyo as their interface with whatever drew them to Japan.

Booth's underlying supposition, however, is that Tokyo is not all of Japan and that somewhere out there another Japan waits to be discovered.

In the narrative of his quest for the real Japan, Booth manages to make statements about native Tokyoites that may sit well with neither natives nor long-term foreign residents. For example, he characterizes Tokyo office workers (male, of course) as being overly preoccupied with their daily routine of killing time, followed by hours of drinking surrounded by a bevy of fawning bar hostesses.

Having accepted both Booth's implied belief that there is more to Japan than all this time-killing and fawning, and his hope that somehow another Japan is waiting to be discovered outside of Tokyo, the reader is then treated to a never-ending situation comedy of clichés, albeit amusing clichés, that should surprise readers without experience of Japan. These stereotypes, however, will elicit groans and rolled eyes from foreign residents with even a few years of close-range Japan-watching behind them.

The reader is subjected to an endless series of encounters in which Booth is pointed at by local inhabitants and verbally accused of being a foreigner. The author pleads guilty to this charge, but the real offense is using this naive behavior to characterize the populace in rural Japan.

Non-Japanese readers who have lived in the big cities in Japan will be quick to point out that this type of reaction can be observed on virtually any street corner in any city, with the possible exception of the chic, foreigner-ridden district of Roppongi in Tokyo.

To be sure, there are some scenes which will make the reader envious of Booth for his solo trek through Japan. One of these is his initiation into the world of drumming at local festivals, with the author making a good argument for participating in, rather than gawking at, these events.

Booth also does a creditable job in getting most of the facts straight. One notable exception is the inclusion of what seems to be a Kyushu song in a description of a Bon festival in Hokkaido. Perhaps this was the author's way of saying that "internationalization" in Japan starts at home.

For the reader expecting the uncovering of new basic truths about Japan and the Japanese, this book will be somewhat disappointing. As a travel diary describing some of the seldom-seen aspects of the Japanese countryside, *The Roads to Sata* will appeal to the newcomer to Japan and things Japanese.

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Bookshelf

The Roads to Sata —A 2000-Mile Walk Through Japan

By Alan Booth
Published by John Weatherhill, Inc.
1985, Tokyo
281 pages; ¥2,500
(Penguin Books \$6.95)

In his almost step-by-step tour over the back roads in search of yet "another" Japan, Alan Booth takes the reader through parts of Japan unknown both to casual visitors and to long-time residents. The author's basic premise seems to be that there was little for him to learn from the big city. In view of the little that most non-Japanese ever learn about even big-city life in Japan, readers may wonder how the author managed to master the big city in the seven short years before starting out on his 2,000-mile (3,220 km) hike from

