

WELLNESS, CULTURE AND JOURNEYS SHAPE JAPAN



The Okura Prestige Lobby



Relabo Wellness Program



Nishitetsu Hotel's Matsukaze



Night view from a Meimon Ferry



Jinryu hotel series: Izumo Hotel interior



Guest Room at Kanden Amenix's Hotel Elcient Osaka Umeda



The Kitano Hotel Tokyo: Bamboo Atrium

JAPAN'S NEW TOURISM LEADERS CRAFT SLOWER, DEEPER JOURNEYS THAT BLEND CULTURE, WELLNESS AND REGIONAL DISCOVERY. By Daniel de Bomford and Bernard Thompson

Japan's post-pandemic tourism boom is rewriting the idea of a great trip. Beyond packed photo spots, a revolution is unfolding in hotels, ferries and mountain retreats that invite travelers to slow down, breathe and connect. From Tokyo's art-filled landmarks to wellness sanctuaries in Aomori and scenic sea routes to Kyushu, a new kind of journey is taking shape. These journeys are defined by comfort, craft and genuine encounters with "Deep Japan," where the journeys are as enjoyable and relaxing as the destinations themselves.

Flagships of "Deep Japan" Hospitality

At The Okura Tokyo, luxury is defined by cultural depth as much as by scale. Social media has turned guests into ambassadors, spreading images of cherry blossoms, art and calm across the world. President Shinji Umehara notes that visitors now "see these first-hand stories and photographs, and naturally, they develop a desire to come and experience Japan." Inside, service is guarded carefully; automation stays in the background so that "guests who stay at luxury hotels like The Okura Tokyo are not just looking for convenience; they are looking for connection, emotion, and warmth."

The Kitano Hotel Tokyo offers a serene retreat in the heart of the capital, where global standards meet the quiet elegance of Japanese aesthetics. As Tokyo's only Relais & Châteaux hotel—with more than 50 years of hospitality heritage in both New York and Tokyo—the property distills its philosophy into one guiding idea: comfort. From its calm location near the former Imperial Palace grounds to its thoughtful wellness offerings and refined design, every element reflects an 'as you like' approach that lets guests genuinely feel Japan in their own way.

Wellness as a Travel Purpose

ReLabo turns Tohoku into a wellness destination, showing how Japan's ancient habits match today's health-focused travelers. Founder Tomohiro Tanno explains, "Japan has a long-standing cultural foundation rooted in wellness, including shrines, rich natural environments, hot springs, and unique traditions," and global awareness is finally catching up. The hotel welcomes guests who are tired of crowds and "discover the concept of 'wellness' and our brand, 'ReLabo.'" Wellness shapes everything from ozone-cleansed air to long-stay programs and local hiring. For Tanno, "wellness tourism begins with food," linking organic Aomori produce to both recovery and regional revitalization.

Regional Luxury and Everyday Deep Japan

Nishigaki builds regional luxury for "upper-mass" travelers who want privacy and authenticity rather than formality. "We specialize in regional luxury—small-scale, high-quality villas and resorts situated in areas rich with natural beauty and cultural heritage," says President Shunpei Nishigaki, from Amanohashidate to Kawaguchiko. Villas are only one dimension. The company's DMC division bundles stays, temple collaborations, guiding and transport so that guests experience what they can "see, do, eat, and feel" as

a seamless journey. By rescuing ryokans, partnering with artisans and promoting seasonal cuisine, Nishigaki turns regional stays into living gateways to Deep Japan.

With properties near Ise Jingu, Izumo Taisha and other sacred landscapes, Lead Real Estate's Jinryu Hotel Series invites travelers into the living soul of Deep Japan. CEO Eiji Nagahara says Jinryu was created because "Japan lacked hotels that truly reflect its spiritual and cultural identity, especially near important religious landmarks." Designed in the spirit of Wa, with spacious, cedar-scented rooms and natural materials, each hotel feels like a contemporary sanctuary rather than a museum. "We want guests to feel the essence of Japanese culture, not just see it," he adds, turning pilgrimage routes into immersive, overnight journeys.

Nishitetsu Hotels turns Kyushu and other regional cities into convenient gateways for deeper exploration. President Tatsuya Toyofuku believes "Kyushu has enormous potential," with Fukuoka as a close hub for Asia and a launchpad for the island's onsen towns, cycling routes and coastal cities. Multiple brands, the Grand Hotel, Solaria Hotel, Hotel Croom and the Nishitetsu Inn, allow guests to choose their level of space and style while staying close to rail and airport links. Through it all, "*Omotenashi* is a uniquely Japanese approach to hospitality that we take very seriously," expressed in local experiences and warm, approachable service.

Slow Journeys and Connected Landscapes

Meimontaiyo Ferry links Kansai and Kyushu with an experience that is both ship and hotel. President Yasuhiro Noguchi sees ferries easing capacity pressure on land while enriching the trip itself. Overnight sailings offer cabins, buffets and quiet lounges facing the Seto Inland Sea, turning movement into rest. "Rather than simply moving from one point to another, ferry travel allows people to savor the journey itself," he says. Edge-propulsion systems and growing inbound marketing position the line as a sustainable corridor that invites travelers to extend itineraries into Western Japan.

Kanden Amenix uses hotels and regional infrastructure to gently pull visitors beyond the Golden Route. Originating from the Kurobe Dam project, the group now frames Omachi and the Northern Alps as a natural extension of Kansai city stays. President Aiko Ikeda warns of concentrated crowds yet focuses on opportunity: "We want inbound travelers to extend their journeys to regional destinations, experiencing the grandeur of nature and the slower pace of life." Through partnerships with IHG and curated experiences such as dam tours and stargazing, the company turns engineering heritage into a gateway to Deep Japan.

Japan's tourism future lies not in more visitors, but in richer journeys. From shrine-side sanctuaries to wellness retreats, ferries and alpine gateways, these leaders show how comfort, culture and community can align. Deep Japan emerges where travelers slow down, connect and leave both restored and more curious about Japan itself.



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TOKYO



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THE OKURA TOKYO: TIMELESS LUXURY

BLENDING JAPANESE TRADITION WITH MODERN LUXURY, THE OKURA TOKYO OFFERS AN ELEGANT EXPERIENCE WHERE TIMELESS HOSPITALITY MEETS CONTEMPORARY DESIGN AND CULTURAL GRACE. *By Daniel de Bomford*

The Okura Tokyo is where tradition meets modernity and culture meets luxury. It's a hotel that embraces *omotenashi*, the Japanese spirit of hospitality not just in service, but in the architecture of the buildings. President Shinji Umehara describes The Okura as not just a building or business, but a "living embodiment of Japan's hospitality heritage," where Japan's architectural, accommodation and service legacies coalesce.

Umehara says the guiding principle of The Okura is simple: to maintain the highest quality of service. "We believe that every guest, whether staying for one night or a week, should experience the same level of excellence that defines the Okura brand," he says.

This principle is evident in both The Okura's concepts, Prestige and Heritage. The Prestige Tower represents a modern experience, a tower that offers views of Tokyo, luxury modern amenities and a cosmopolitan lifestyle. "Think of the Prestige Tower as a celebration of modern Tokyo," Umehara says. "It's a place where tradition meets the dynamic energy of the present."

"One principle guides us firmly: under no circumstances can we allow the quality of our service to decline."

Shinji Umehara
President, The Okura



sphere of Japan while maintaining luxury standards," Umehara says. Guests enjoy traditional hospitality and architecture: low beds, deep bathtubs and *engawa*-style bench.

"We believe that a stay at The Okura Tokyo should be more than just accommodation—it should be an enriching cultural experience," Umehara says. The Okura maintains a museum within the hotel, that holds an extensive collection of Japanese art from ancient to contemporary.

The lobby was designed by renowned architect Yoshio Taniguchi, known for his work on the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The space is a reflection of Japanese artistic and architectural principles, handcrafted for the space. The hotel also offers tea ceremonies and *ikebana* (Japanese flower arrangement) demonstrations to allow guests to engage with local culture and traditions.

The Okura is both an accommodation and an experience, the architecture built by culture and tradition as much as wood and steel. Umehara says it's his dream to carry this spirit forward, so that no matter how much time passes, it remains intact for generations to come.



The Heritage Wing is a standalone low-rise hotel that embodies cultural authenticity and sense of place. "Every detail is intentionally designed to immerse guests in the cultural atmo-

RELABO: JAPAN'S WELLNESS PIONEER

JAPAN'S FIRST WELLNESS HOTEL BLENDS ANCIENT WISDOM, MEDICAL INNOVATION AND COMMUNITY-DRIVEN HOSPITALITY TO CREATE A TRANSFORMATIVE RETREAT RESHAPING AOMORI'S REGIONAL FUTURE. *By Daniel de Bomford*

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Japan is a land where ancient customs, from temple rituals to hot springs, are being rediscovered as powerful pathways to modern well-being. As the world searches for balance, these timeless practices offer travelers a blend of spiritual grounding and physical renewal. At the center of this revival stands ReLabo, Japan's first wellness hotel, guiding guests toward a more holistic rejuvenation.

"Japan has a longstanding cultural foundation rooted in wellness, including shrines, rich natural environments, hot springs and unique traditions," says Tomohiro Tanno, president of ReLabo. "These have persisted for over 2,000 years." What has changed is not Japan itself, but the recognition of wellness. This shift inspired Tanno's concept of the "Re-Edit of Wellness," a philosophy that reconnects ancient Japanese wisdom with modern science, hospitality and tourism.

Located in Aomori, which is emerging as an escape for travelers seeking tranquility over crowds, ReLabo has quickly become a magnet for global wellness seekers. Despite charging a modest premium over its regional competitors, the hotel boasts an occupancy rate of over 85 percent and holds a 9.7/10 rating on Trip.com. As Tanno says, "For these travelers, 'wellness' is a powerful keyword."

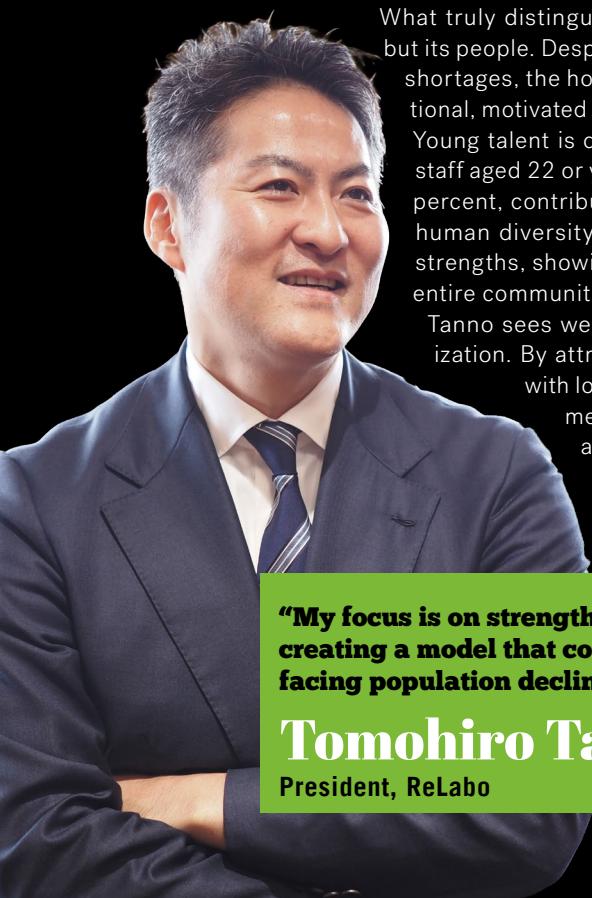
Its leadership position was confirmed when ReLabo became the first hotel in Japan—and the world—to receive the Wellness Platinum Award. This achievement, Tanno says, was a major boost in raising awareness. But behind the acclaim is a methodically designed experience shaped by post-pandemic traveler values.

ReLabo also integrates medical wellness, offering one-week and multiweek programs that combine rehabilitation, spa therapy, yoga and nutrition. In one case, a Tokyo guest recovering from knee issues improved his walking speed fivefold after three weeks. "This case demonstrates the significant potential of combining medical rehabilitation with wellness tourism," he says.

ReLabo's partnership with JR East is transforming wellness tourism by linking Tokyo and Aomori through an integrated travel-and-health system. JR East President Kise sees railways as a "platform for wellbeing," envisioning guests getting checkups in Tokyo, traveling north for wellness programs and returning for follow-up care.

What truly distinguishes ReLabo is not only its programs, but its people. Despite regional population decline and labor shortages, the hotel has built a fully staffed, multigenerational, motivated team of 90 employees—all directly hired. Young talent is drawn to its mission, with 25 percent of staff aged 22 or younger, while seniors, accounting for 20 percent, contribute exceptional care and precision. This human diversity has become one of ReLabo's greatest strengths, showing how wellness can help rejuvenate an entire community.

Tanno sees wellness as a catalyst for regional revitalization. By attracting long-stay visitors and partnering with local farmers and businesses, and creating meaningful employment for locals, ReLabo is a blueprint for how wellness can transform a region. "My focus isn't on expanding to Tokyo or overseas," he says. "My top priority is my people and my region."



"My focus is on strengthening Aomori as our base and creating a model that contributes to revitalizing areas facing population decline."

Tomohiro Tanno
President, ReLabo



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THE JINRYU HOTEL SERIES: WHERE THE SOUL OF JAPAN LIVES

WITH HOTELS OPENING NEAR IKEGAMI HONMONJI TEMPLE, ISE JINGU AND IZUMO TAISHA SHRINE, THE JINRYU HOTEL SERIES OFFERS PREMIUM TRAVELERS THE OPPORTUNITY TO DISCOVER THE LIVING SOUL OF JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY, HISTORY AND CULTURE. *By Daniel de Bomford, Bernard Thompson and Cian O'Neill*

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At dawn, the mist rises over Ise Jingu, and the scent of cedar drifts through the air, offering passersby a moment to reflect on a culture that has stood for millennia. A few hundred miles away, waves brush the shores near Izumo Taisha, the ancient meeting place of the gods.

Between these sacred landscapes, the Jinryu Hotel Series welcomes travelers to slow down and take time to experience the rich history of these sacred sites. Each property is a sanctuary shaped by centuries of tradition, with tatami floors, warm, woody interiors and *omotenashi*, Japanese hospitality. It's a different kind of luxury that invites guests to find the harmony that Japan is so well known for.

Eiji Nagahara, CEO of Lead Real Estate, operator of Jinryu Hotel, says that the series is rooted in Japanese culture and spirituality, focusing on harmony and traditional aesthetics.

A philosophy of authentic design guides the hotels. "We want guests to feel the essence of Japanese culture, not just see it," Nagahara says, adding that he'd like to see one on the Seto Inland Sea islands or Miyajima, locations that embody the concept.

Jinryu emphasizes Japan's cultural and religious heritage. "We realized that Japan lacked hotels that truly reflect its spiritual and cultural identity, especially near important religious landmarks," Nagahara says. "We want to change that by creating properties worthy of these sacred sites."

Rooms reflect the spirit of *Wa*, the Japanese sense of harmony and are inspired by Japan's cultural and sacred sites. This inspiration doesn't mean that the rooms are meant for the ascetic, quite the opposite. Each room is spacious, around 50-60 square meters, and makes full use of natural materials to create a calm, reflective environment.

Nagahara says he wants Lead Real Estate to continue growing, leveraging the company's property development expertise to quickly address market gaps. The company's strength as a developer lies in speed, decisiveness and creativity, alongside a close connection to the market. "That deep market insight, combined with creative design and execution, allows us to build hotels that are both commercially viable and aesthetically exceptional," Nagahara says.

He envisages a portfolio with an array of concepts that represent the best of Japanese hospitality. He says, "I hope to look back, perhaps from a place like Miyajima, and feel proud of how far we've come."



LEAD REAL ESTATE
www.lead-real.co.jp/en



Ise Hotel Interior



Ise Hotel Exterior



Izumo Hotel Exterior



Izumo Hotel Interior

KANDEN AMENIX CONNECTS TRAVELERS TO AUTHENTIC JAPANESE ADVENTURES



"The proximity of contrasting cultural experiences is one of Japan's greatest attractions."

Aiko Ikeda

President,
Kanden Amenix

www.k-amenix.co.jp/en



KANDEN AMENIX INVITES GLOBAL TRAVELERS TO EXPLORE JAPAN'S CULTURAL CONTRASTS, NATURAL BEAUTY AND UNFORGETTABLE REGIONAL EXPERIENCES. *By Daniel de Bomford and Cian O'Neill*

mid Japan's remarkable tourism resurgence, Kanden Amenix is emerging as the premier hospitality group dedicated to connecting travelers with both the nation's vibrant cities and its breathtaking natural landscapes. With roots in the Kansai Electric Power Group and a growing portfolio of hotels, transportation services and tourism facilities, the company positions itself as a gateway to experiences that go far beyond the traditional Golden Route.

"Within a single trip, visitors can experience the dramatic contrast between ultra-modern urban centers and the quiet charm of historic towns—almost like 'time travel,'" says Aiko Ikeda, president of Kanden Amenix.

Across Kyoto, Osaka and Nagano, Kanden Amenix's hotels form a seamless chain of comfort and discovery. Hotel Elcient Kyoto Hachijoguchi offers unmatched access to the heart of Kyoto and will unveil a renovation in 2026. In Osaka, Hotel Elcient Osaka Umeda blends smart functionality with elegant design, featuring a premium lounge and a serene bathhouse. For travelers seeking the beauty of Japan's highlands, the ANA Holiday Inn Resort Shinano-Omachi Kuroyon, located near the iconic Kurobe Dam, provides panoramic alpine views, natural hot spring baths and a new wing that opened in September 2025.

Supporting these destinations are Kita Alps Kotsu's scenic bus routes, Kuroyon Tourism's curated visitor facilities and the Hinatayama Kogen Golf Course, a highland retreat offering family activities throughout the seasons.

These experiences shape Kanden Amenix's growing role as a bridge between Japan's cultural richness and the global traveler's search for authentic, unforgettable journeys.





Solaria Nishitetsu Hotel Ginza, Tokyo

INBOUND DEMAND SHAPES NISHITETSU STRATEGY

JAPAN'S TOURISM REVIVAL IS BOOSTING REGIONAL HUBS LIKE KYUSHU, AND NISHITETSU HOTELS IS EXPANDING WITH NEW URBAN AND AIRPORT PROPERTIES TAILORED FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAVELERS. *By Paul Mannion and Bernard Thompson*

Japan's hotel sector has moved firmly into a new phase of growth, powered by surging inbound travel. "The pandemic brought about a massive transformation in how we operate. Those three years were not a setback, but a crucial part of our evolution," says Tatsuya Toyofuku, president of Nishitetsu Hotels.

Japan's tourism appeal is built on four key strengths: stunning natural landscapes from Hokkaido to Okinawa, a mild climate, deep cultural traditions and world-renowned cuisine. Government and local efforts, including international conferences and events, are further boosting Japan's global tourism presence.

Kyushu sits at the forefront of this momentum. Fukuoka Airport's runway expansion and privatization under the Nishitetsu Group are turning the region into a convenient gateway from Asia, while collaborative events such as the Tour de Kyushu encourage visitors to explore islandwide.

To meet rising demand, Nishitetsu Hotels will open a new Solaria Nishitetsu Hotel in Osaka Honmachi in 2026, followed in 2027 by a hotel directly connected to Fukuoka Airport, designed for international travelers with family rooms, large baths, fitness facilities and airplane-themed concept rooms.

Nishitetsu Hotel group now operates four distinct brands, Nishitetsu Grand Hotel, Solaria Nishitetsu Hotel, Nishitetsu Hotel Croom and Nishitetsu Inn, with 18 proper-



"We target the inbound market and aim to provide high quality services."

Tatsuya Toyofuku
President, Nishitetsu Hotels



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ties in Japan and five overseas, including South Korea, Thailand and Taiwan, all in central urban locations with easy access to transport and major attractions, all in central urban locations with easy access to transport and major attractions. It is also investigating expansion into new formats, from luxury to apartment-style stays.

Nishitetsu Hotels also emphasizes both sustainability and community col-



Nishitetsu Grand Hotel, Fukuoka



Asagi Teppanyaki at Solaria Fukuoka



Nishitetsu Hotel Croom Nagoya



Solaria Nishitetsu Hotel Bangkok

laboration, through initiatives such as obtaining environmental certifications and introducing carbon-free electricity, as well as offering programs that allow guests to explore the city wearing traditional kimonos.



OVERNIGHT OSAKA TO KITAKYUSHU FERRY TRANSFORMS TRAVEL ACROSS WESTERN JAPAN

SAIL OVERNIGHT BETWEEN OSAKA AND KITAKYUSHU, COMBINING TRANSPORT, LODGING AND THE BEAUTIFUL SETO INLAND SEA SCENERY WHILE EASING JAPAN'S HOTEL CRUNCH AND OPENING ROUTES FOR CURIOUS TRAVELERS.

By Daniel de Bomford, Kyann Edouard and Bernard Thompson

Night settles over Osaka Bay as trucks roll up the ramp and foot passengers file aboard, trading the glare of the city for the soft light of a ship preparing to sail. Inside, the scent of dinner drifts from the buffet, children wave farewell to onlookers on the quay and the water outside turns from steel to ink.

For travelers who want more of Japan than a blur of stations and hotel lobbies, Meimontaiyo Ferry's City Line offers an unhurried overnight passage between Osaka and Kitakyushu. The Seto Inland Sea crossing doubles as journey and lodging, carrying guests between regions as they sleep, dine and watch the islands slip by.

"Japan has a deep history, fascinating cultural heritage, and magnificent nature that has remained since ancient times, and continues to attract foreign travelers today," says Yasuhiro Noguchi, representative director and president of Meimontaiyo Ferry.

"In Japan, one of the challenges we face is a shortage of hotel rooms, especially in popular tourist areas and large cities. Accommodation costs can also be quite high," he says. City Line ferries sail between Osaka and Kitakyushu in about 12 hours, departing at night and arriving the next morning so passengers wake rested and ready for the day.

Noguchi contrasts the Shinkansen's speed and efficiency with the ferry's slower, more relaxed and comfortable way to travel. "Onboard, guests can enjoy a buffet-style restaurant offering a range of cuisines, as well as an observation lounge with panoramic views of the Seto Inland Sea," he says. In addition to traditional Japanese tatami rooms and large shared baths, there are also private rooms with private showers for foreign travelers.

Along the route, guests can see the Akashi Kaikyo Bridge, the Seto Ohashi

Bridge and the Kurushima Kaikyo Bridge, known as The Three Major bridges with spectacular views. "Passengers can see the Seto Inland Sea at night, where these bridges are beautifully illuminated, and the picturesque islands at dawn," Noguchi says. "From the night deck, countless stars twinkle in the pitch-black night, the beauty of which will bring you a mystical experience that will make you forget the everyday."



City Line makes the Kansai-Kyushu crossing part of the vacation, not travel time in between. Travelers eat well, sleep soundly and arrive ready to explore by car or on foot. As Japan welcomes more visitors, Meimontaiyo Ferry offers a calm overnight journey, attentive service and breathtaking Seto Inland Sea views that leave travelers rested and deeply refreshed.



CITY LINE
MeimontaiyoFerry



www.cityline.co.jp/english

"Recently, there's been a growing interest in more mindful, memorable, sustainable, comfortable and time-efficient journeys."

Yasuhiro Noguchi

Representative Director & President,
Meimontaiyo Ferry Co., Ltd.



INTERNATIONAL COMFORT SHAPED BY GENTLE *OMOTENASHI* SPIRIT

AT THE KITANO HOTEL TOKYO, GUEST-CENTERED SERVICE REPLACES SCRIPTED RITUALS, BRINGING JAPAN'S *OMOTENASHI* SPIRIT INTO A REFINED INTERNATIONAL HOTEL SETTING. *By Arthur Menkes and Paul Mannion*

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mid Tokyo's constant energy, The Kitano Hotel Tokyo opens like a quiet garden, inviting travelers into the stillness at the heart of Japan. It is the city's only Relais & Châteaux hotel—a modern international hotel that maintains Japan's respected tradition of thoughtful hospitality. The brand brings more than 50 years of experience operating the first Japanese-owned hotel in New York, and its Tokyo property underwent a complete renewal in 2019.

Set on former Imperial Palace grounds, The Kitano Hotel Tokyo offers quick access to Haneda Airport, Tokyo Station and the city's major shopping areas. Despite its central location in one of Tokyo's political and cultural districts, the property sits in a rare pocket of calm that gives guests an authentic first sense of Japan.

The hotel's distinct single-building architecture, a feature that has become rare among modern hotels, blends classic elegance with traditional Japanese aesthetics subtly woven throughout its contemporary design.

Guided by the concept of "For Comfort," the hotel offers full wellness facilities, including renowned acupuncture and shiatsu practitioners. Guestrooms feature athlete-approved mattresses, medical-grade bedding materials and hypoallergenic building finishes—every detail designed to support physical and mental well-being.

"No matter the era, the human sense of comfort remains constant," President Yoshiko Koike says. Suites are also equipped for extended stays, offering conveniences such as IH stoves and washing machines to create a true home away from home.

In its dining program, the hotel focuses on gentle, restorative gastronomy for travelers. Flexible à la carte options, ingredient integrity and beautifully executed dishes reflect the property's commitment to sincerity and sustainability. Through its "Kitano Finds Japan" initiative, the hotel further highlights exceptional ingredients sourced from across the country.

For Koike, the essence of service lies in a spirit of thoughtful flexibility rather than prescriptive formality.

"Luxury is not about imposing a predetermined experience," she explains. "It is about responding with sensitivity to each guest's preferences—an uncompromising 'as you like' approach. True hospitality begins by standing entirely in the guest's perspective."

The Kitano Hotel Tokyo: Signature Suite 'Spring'



The Kitano Hotel Tokyo: Bamboo Atrium



"The best hospitality is not a service we impose, but one that responds to the guest's needs."

Yoshiko Koike

President,
The Kitano Hotel Tokyo and New York



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