

JAPAN TRAVEL BEYOND THE USUAL PATH

By Daniel de Bomford and Bernard Thompson

Japan's travel story is no longer confined to its best-known cities. Japanese companies show how the country is widening that story through regional access, slower journeys, distinctive cultural experiences and a more refined approach to hospitality.

KNT-CT is well-suited to travelers who want a more meaningful way to explore regional Japan. "Authenticity is essential," Yoshinobu Koyama, CEO, said. "As a historic travel company, we will not provide artificial experiences." The company builds travel around local traditions, cultural themes and community connections, helping visitors move beyond standard itineraries into experi-

ences that feel connected to the locale. For travelers who want a slower, more immersive way to see regional Japan, JR Shikoku delivers. As President and CEO Kazuyuki Shinomiya said, "the train journey itself becomes the purpose," with scenic routes, local culture and everyday life turning Shikoku into a destination best experienced at a gentler pace.

Hankyu Ferry suits travelers who want Japan's journey to matter as much as the destination. As President and CEO Yuichi Shimazu put it, the company is focused on "making the movement itself part of the experience," turning travel from Osaka to Kyushu into a more reflective, scenic and distinctly

regional way to explore Japan: Kawaguchiko Lago is ideal for travelers seeking a luxury private villa escape near Mount Fuji. "We specialize in regional luxury ... situated in areas rich with natural beauty and cultural heritage," said Shunpei Nishigaki, president. With generous living spaces, a private terrace, hot spring, sauna, pool and refined dining areas, it offers an elevated stay with scenic immersion in the natural beauty of the Kawaguchiko region.

Travelers seeking a refined, slow-paced way to experience Japan by sea will be drawn to NYK CRUISES. President and CEO Yuji Nishijima said Japan offers "both depth and freshness at the same time," and

ASUKA III reflects that balance through Japanese hospitality, regional culture and an onboard experience shaped as much by meaning and atmosphere as by luxury. Globridge turns cuisine into a cultural brand that travels far beyond the table. By linking food with atmosphere, presentation and storytelling, it reframes dining as a gateway to deeper engagement with Japan itself. As President and CEO Makoto Otsuka said, "Foreign visitors don't just want to eat sushi or ramen, they want to experience the atmosphere."

Together, they present a broader vision of Japan: one shaped by how travelers move, stay and connect with the country along the way.



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GLOBRIDGE: CUISINE TO BRAND

GLOBRIDGE PROMOTES JAPANESE CULTURE BY MAKING CUISINE A BRAND AND EXPORTING IT TO A GLOBAL AUDIENCE. By Daniel de Bomford, Bernard Thompson and Kyann Eduoard

From the crisp bite of a katsu to the hearty broth of ramen, the food is more than enough of a reason to visit Japan. Many visitors are drawn to Japan after trying washoku, Japanese cuisine, in their own countries and are looking for a deeper, authentic cultural experience. Globridge President and CEO Makoto Otsuka said that international consumers see Japanese cuisine as multifaceted and a window into Japanese culture. "Foreign visitors don't just want to eat sushi or ramen, they want to experience the atmosphere, the cultural setting, the way the food is presented, even down to the chopsticks and the table layout." The company's platform, Japanese Brand License Media,

aims to broadcast Japanese culture and content through a media-like framework.

Despite external interest, a pressing challenge for broadcasting washoku is information asymmetry; much of the communication is in Japanese. "Our goal is to close that gap by creating media that accurately conveys the appeal of Japanese brands and culture to the world." To deliver the maximum value of Japanese brands, Globridge licenses exclusive rights to its brands, such as Ken-chan Curry, in overseas markets.

The company is also bringing dishes and ingredients such as Wagyu beef to new markets, focusing on high-end Wagyu restaurants and halal-certified Wagyu ramen to meet diverse global demand.

Globridge is sharing the culture and artistry of Japanese cuisine, promoting both Japan's famous culture and underrepresented regions by elevating washoku into a globally recognized brand.



"The dining table should become a media platform."

Makoto Otsuka

President and CEO, GLOBRIDGE



CRUISE JAPAN WITH HANKYU FERRY

HANKYU FERRY TAKES TRAVELERS BEYOND THE GOLDEN ROUTE, MAKING THE JOURNEY AS ENJOYABLE AS THE DESTINATION. *By Daniel de Bomford and Cian O'Neill*

There are many reasons to visit Japan. Ancient sacred grounds inspire moments of awe for all who witness them. Crowded alleyways hide culinary masters and their tasty delights. Tea ceremonies and tranquil gardens offer a sense of connection and stillness. In the post-pandemic years, tourism in Japan has soared, and visitor numbers are noticeable along the crowded “Golden Route,” the classic Tokyo-Kyoto-Osaka tourist corridor.

To escape the crowds and find a new, authentic side of Japan, Hankyu Ferry offers the ideal option for those looking to discover Japan in comfort. Company President and CEO Yuichi Shimazu said Hankyu Ferry’s mission is to make that journey comfortable and memorable. “Not just getting people from one place to another, but making the movement itself part of the experience, something visitors will remember as a meaningful part of their trip in Japan,” he said.

West of Osaka, all the way down to Kyushu, there’s an entirely new world of cuisine, traditions and culture. Hankyu Ferry is the gateway and aims to

build a Western Japan Golden Route. “Regional areas have beautiful nature, historic townscapes, and distinctive local food cultures,” Shimazu said.

The ships themselves are more like floating hotels, with comfortable suites, viewing decks and observation lounges. The vessel also includes an indoor bath with panoramic views and an open-air bath, evoking the feeling of Japanese hot springs found throughout the country.

Japanese staples like sashimi are available, but each ship develops its own special, seasonal menu, allowing guests to enjoy authentic cuisine that evolves throughout the year. However, Shimazu avoids picking favorites, pointing to the healthy rivalry among the vessels to create the best menu, constantly improving to provide the best experience.

To ensure that travel is stress-free for everyone, Hankyu Ferry has invested considerable time and effort in removing language barriers. Ship displays are multilingual, and translation services are leveraged to help passengers understand guidance and information. “The goal is to remove language obstacles as much as possible and enable international visitors to feel comfortable and confident while using our services,” he said.

Accessibility and luxury reflect the company’s broader mission, which Shimazu said is to become “Queen of



the Ferry,” to be the best, while also being familiar and comfortable. “We want people to feel that Hankyu Ferry is closer to them, more familiar, more approachable, and easier to choose.”

“We also believe we can help convey Japan’s appeal by making the act of travel itself comfortable and memorable.”

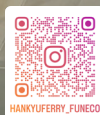
Yuichi Shimazu

President and CEO, Hankyu Ferry



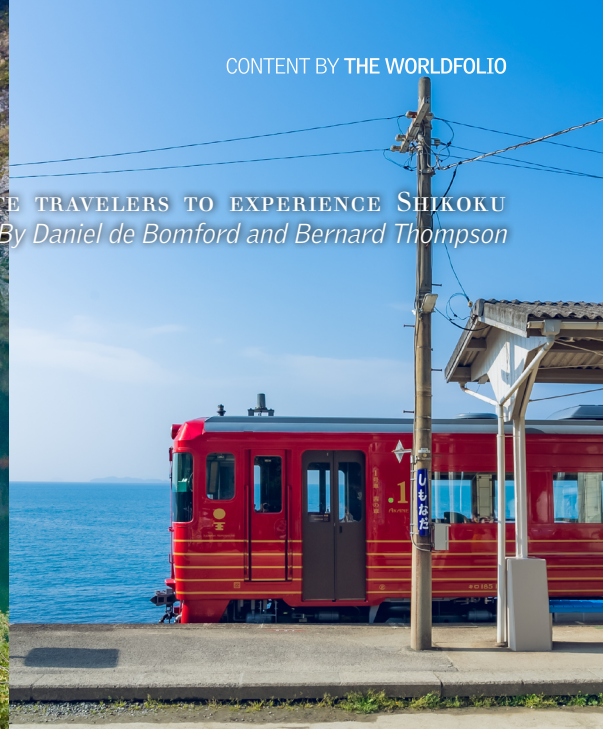
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SLOW TRAVEL ON JR SHIKOKU

JR SHIKOKU'S MONOGATARI TRAINS AND 4S STAY LODGINGS INVITE TRAVELERS TO EXPERIENCE SHIKOKU THROUGH SCENIC RAIL JOURNEYS, LOCAL STORIES AND SLOWER STAYS. *By Daniel de Bomford and Bernard Thompson*



Morning light slips across Shikoku's river valleys and forested ridges, catching on polished carriage windows as the train eases out of the station. For travelers who want Japan at a gentler pace, JR Shikoku's Monogatari sightseeing trains turn the journey itself into the destination. There are three in the family: Lyonada Monogatari, Shikoku Man-naka Sennen Monogatari and Shikoku Tosa Toki no Yoake no Monogatari. Each carries a story of place, with scenery, hospitality and regional flavors shaped by the island's seas, mountains and river towns. The line that best captures the inland heart of Shikoku is Shikoku Man-naka Sennen Monogatari, an authentic sightseeing train through fields and



mountains. Running between Tadotsu or Kotohira and Oboke, the train follows the Dosan Line into valleys where time seems to deepen. Its Japanese-inspired interior uses warm wood and calm textures, creating the feeling of a small inn on rails. The experience is leisurely by design: passengers look outward to gorges, villages and terraced slopes, then inward to meals prepared with local ingredients. Shikoku Tourism notes that guests can enjoy scenery along with "vibrant dishes" and products chosen by local people.

The wider Monogatari concept gives each route its own mood. Lyonada Monogatari celebrates the Seto Inland Sea, where sunsets and coastal stations bring a quiet nostalgia. Shikoku Tosa Toki no Yoake no Monogatari heads through Kochi Prefecture, pairing Tosa history with river and ocean views.

JR Shikoku further connects travelers with local culture through 4S STAY, its lodging project built around the phrase

"travel as you live." By renovating old homes, vacant houses and unused shops, 4S STAY turns local buildings into bases for slower exploration. President and CEO Kazuyuki Shinomiya said the company saw opportunities to address local challenges and revitalize the area. "If we can solve a regional problem while also creating a viable business, then the result is positive for the community and for us," he said.

A Monogatari train ride and a night at 4S STAY make a natural pairing. One carries guests through Shikoku's living landscape; the other invites them to stay within it. For travelers seeking beauty, food and connection, JR Shikoku offers an authentic Shikoku experience.

www.jr-shikoku.co.jp/global/en
<https://4s-stay.com/en>



"Shikoku is valuable precisely because both sea and mountain lifestyles remain visible."

Kazuyuki Shinomiya
 President and CEO, JR Shikoku

SAIL JAPAN ON ASUKAIII

FROM CHERRY BLOSSOMS TO CONTEMPORARY ART, JAPAN UNFOLDS IN LAYERS. ASUKA CRUISE CAPTURES THAT RICHNESS AT SEA, TURNING TRAVEL INTO A BLISSFUL VOYAGE OF ULTIMATE REFINEMENT THROUGH CULTURE, REGIONAL IDENTITY AND HOSPITALITY. *By Daniel de Bomford and Quentin Lange*



C Cherry blossoms drift above tiled roofs, festival lanterns glow against the dark and the sea beyond Yokohama glistens with the last vestiges of day. Layered beauty is central to NYK CRUISES' vision of the country: not a place of isolated landmarks, but what President Yuji Nishijima calls an ultimate destination that awakens the five senses, where visitors expect culture, nature, safety and authenticity. According to Nishijima, Japan's appeal begins with contrasts held in balance. Traditional craftsmanship, food culture and regional customs stand beside contemporary art, design and pop culture. Its long geography, stretching from Hokkaido to Okinawa, gives travelers four distinct seasons and a remarkable variety of local identities. Just as important is what he modestly describes as the national character: "comfort and trust" shaped by politeness, attentiveness and social decency. The result is a country that offers a place where timeless tradition resonates with fresh sensibilities, often within a single journey. ASUKA CRUISE turns that national richness into an onboard experience. NYK CRUISES' cruise business has operated the ASUKA brand since 1991, specializing in a distinctly Japanese style of hospitality, while ASUKAIII has been designed around Japanese culture, with 351 balcony staterooms for 680 guests. The ship's "Discover Japan's 47 prefectures with ASUKAIII" project assigns 47 suites to Japan's prefectures, inviting guests to encounter regional identity through design and local products. Nishijima is clear that ASUKAIII is more than an experience on the ocean embodying Japanese aesthetics.

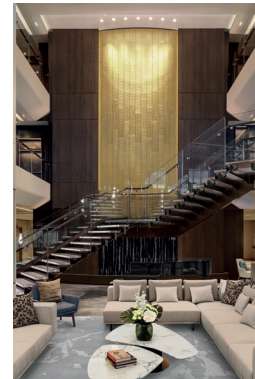
He describes it as "a platform for culture, art, hospitality and even social contribution." Within that ambition appear plans for art tours aboard the ship, in support of emerging artists and in a broader commitment to regional revitalization, promotion of Japanese culture and decarbonization. NYK CRUISES has



"Japan offers both depth and freshness at the same time."

Yuji Nishijima

President, NYK CRUISES.



also publicly tied ASUKA CRUISE to collaborations that expand the value of Japanese craft and cultural encounters, such as its collaboration with the Japan Kōgei Association, in which it used ASUKAII and ASUKAIII to exhibit and sell traditional kōgei (art crafts). Partnerships, too, sit at the heart of the strategy. More than half of bookings still come through major domestic agencies, Nishijima said, proof that trusted intermediaries remain essential. Overseas, where brand recognition is still low, specialized agents matter even more. He wants them to serve as the "local face" of the brand: representatives who can explain Japanese luxury in market-specific ways and give guests confidence before they ever board. In that sense, ASUKA CRUISE offers an undiscovered story of Japan, unfolding at sea. For travelers seeking the country's elegance without haste, and partners seeking a luxury product founded in meaning, ASUKAIII is the finest way to see Japan—to sail through it in refined comfort.



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Leisure Collective by DMC Japan

PROVIDES TRAVELERS TO JAPAN WITH AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES IN BEAUTIFUL LOCALES.

By Daniel de Bomford and Quentin Lange



Tateyama Kurobe Alpine Route (Toyama)

DISCOVER JAPAN'S REGIONAL CULTURE

Ancient pilgrims' paths are a side of Japan often overlooked in the glitz of Shinjuku's neon-lit alleys and Hakone's Mount Fuji views. But in Kumano Kodo, mountain paths wind through the thick cedar woods, carved by the footfalls of the reverent and devoted over millennia. The spiritual heart of Japan lives here, inviting those seeking reflection and meaningful experience in their travels. For many visitors, a journey off the well-worn Golden Route of Japan felt inaccessible without specialist support. Leisure Collective by DMC Japan provides that support, showing visitors an authentic, local side of Japan and once-in-a-lifetime experiences. As Japan welcomes increasing numbers of inbound tourists, guiding them beyond popular destinations such as Tokyo and Kyoto is essential for sustainability and regional revitalization. CEO Yoshinobu Koyama said leading visitors to regional areas is essential for sustainability, as this cannot be achieved by directing all visitors to urban centers. "Our company has contracts with more than 10,000 local partners nationwide, including hotels, transportation companies, restaurants, and retail businesses," he said. "Few organizations possess such deeply rooted regional networks." Koyama believes that the company must lead the way in sustainable tourism by showcasing Japan's regional destinations. This way, the company's authentic, less-crowded experiences support local communities and preserve cultural treasures in a virtuous cycle. This is a win-win situation for travelers and communities. Leisure Collective by DMC Japan takes a unique approach. Instead of focusing on where people depart from, the group looks at how regions can create compelling experiences. Then, by connecting with local stakeholders, the group tailors holistic experiences unique to each region. "We are exploring thematic regional routes connecting cities such as Matsumoto, Takayama, and Hokuriku," he said. Rather than simple transportation, the journey becomes part of the story. By focusing on themes such as festivals and cultural events, Leisure Collective by DMC Japan curates experiences that engage authentically with local communi-



Ise-shima (Mie)



Shibuya (Tokyo)



Sword Museum in Sekii (Gifu)



IKADA rafting (Wakayama)

ties. "By focusing on content themes, we can develop meaningful programs rooted in local traditions," he said. Themes can be based on special interests, such as Zen experiences, martial arts, tea ceremonies or art. "Japan may appear geographically small, but each region offers distinctive intellectual and cultural content," Koyama said. Koyama recognizes that the majority of inbound travelers are self-directed and book directly through online travel agencies (OTAs). But Japan is complex, and first-time visitors, especially, might not understand its intricacies. The group addresses this by offering self-guided packages, preparing accommodation, travel and tours in advance. "This approach differs from standard OTA bookings because it combines independence with professional structure and support," he said. With 24-hour support, luggage transfer and airport assistance, it offers peace of mind while remaining flexible. As Leisure Collective by DMC Japan expands overseas, its mission remains the same: to channel visitors to regional Japan and thereby contribute to regional revitalization. "Authenticity is essential. As a historic travel company, we will not provide artificial experiences," he said. For those looking to see the heart of Japan, whether in an artisan workshop or on the pilgrim's path, Leisure Collective by DMC Japan will support them.

"We promote Japan's regional destinations, supporting local communities and preserving cultural heritage through sustainable tourism."

Yoshinobu Koyama

CEO, KNT-CT Holdings Co., Ltd.

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