



A Delightful Trip Aboard the Fujisan View Express

by : Andre Amorim (former Trainee from Minas Gerais, Brazil)

Usually we use trains to move from place to place – from Point A to Point B. But some trains can be more than just a transportation method. During the cold month of December, several of my coworkers and I took our first steps aboard the Fujisan View Express, a train that gives one the pleasure of enjoying views of Mount Fuji as well as access to the many attractions in areas nearby. Continue reading to find out more . . .



History and Features of the Train

The Fujikyu Railway was founded in 1926 as Fuji Electric Railway. Before then, the same route was used as a horsecar road to connect the Fujiyoshida textile industry in Yamanashi to Tokyo. In 1929, trains started to run from within Yamanashi, connecting Otsuki to Fujiyoshida, and then the line was extended to Kawaguchiko. This helped boost tourism in the Fuji Five Lakes area.

The railway company runs two additional types of express trains that take passengers from Kawaguchiko to Otsuki. The first, a blue and white train covered with drawings of Mt. Fuji, the Fujisan Express, started running in 2014. The second, a red train, the Fujisan View Express, started running in 2016. Each trip lasts about forty five minutes. And, since this is Japan, the trains depart from and arrive at each station neither a second too late nor a second too early.

The blue and white Fujisan Express is painted with fifty different Mt. Fuji characters that were selected from over a hundred designs in a contest. The most voted on characters can also be seen embroidered on headrest covers on the train seats. This train is very popular among children, and all sorts of keychains, magnets, binders, and even socks with the characters featured on them are sold onboard.

But our goal for this issue of The Grapevine was to ride the red Fujisan View Express train. Designed by the famous Mitooka Eiji, this train is retro in style, resembling an antique hotel or



a countryside house. With an interior made out of wood, it emulates a cozy livingroom atmosphere while also blending in with the landscape.

Both trains, the Fujisan Express and the Fujisan View Express, are designed to give passengers a great view of Mt. Fuji. They travel at an average speed of fifty kmh (31 mph), slightly slower in comparison to typical express trains because their route is full of slopes and curves. The speed decreases in the more sinuous stretches and slopes and also in places from where it is possible to see breathtaking views of Mt. Fuji – to passengers' delight. There is a difference of five hundred meters (1640 feet) in elevation between the start- and the



end-point; in under an hour, passengers can feel the climate differences between Kawaguchiko and Otsuki.

Local Attractions and Specialty Products

The trains make brief stops at several other stations during the trip, and nearby each of these are beautiful locations from which to enjoy views of Mt. Fuji and its surrounding scenery. For example, the cable car on Mt. Tenjo in Kawaguchiko Town is widely known for being a great way to take up-high photographs of Mt. Fuji. Another scenic spot is the Arakura Mountain in Fujiyoshida City, and its Chureito Pagoda is known for being one of the most famous places in Japan for taking a photograph of Mt. Fuji with cherry blossoms in the foreground.

But Mt. Fuji is not the only place of interest. Although the number of passengers taking this train line has increased significantly since Japan's most famous mountain became a World Heritage Site, there is much more to be enjoyed.

A pamphlet with information about nearby attractions is distributed to all passengers riding either of the express trains and staff onboard are prepared to answer any questions to help tourists make the best of their trip.

As for local attractions, for example, at the end of the line in Otsuki City is the Yamanashi Prefectural Maglev Exhibition Center, where it is possible to see tests of, and learn about, this high speed train. It is also a good place to go to see beautiful landscapes and unique spots such as Saruhashi, or the "Monkey Bridge" in English, which is known for its one-of-a-kind structural design.

As for specialty products, you may enjoy local food and drink aboard the Fujisan View Express train when taking first class. For example, available for these passengers is rice beer made in Kiyosato; roasted green tea, or hojicha in Japanese, which is very popular among foreigners; a seasonal sweets box; bento lunch boxes; and so on. The sweets box is prepared by the chef pâtissier from Fujikyu Highland Resort Hotel, and it always features local ingredients such as Yamanashi's famous grapes, blueberries, or peaches – the roll cake filled with the seasonal fruits being the most popular.

Curiosities about Tourists and their Preferences

Passenger demand is greatest during the summer, when the Mt. Fuji climbing season is at its peak and thousands of climbers from all over the world head to Kawaguchiko. Others board to visit the famous FujiQ Highland amusement park or the Fuji Five Lakes. Winter attracts fewer visitors than in summer, especially during January and February, but on the other hand this is the best time to see Mt. Fuji covered with snow. The extra space on and around the train during the winter also makes it a prime time for taking photographs. But no matter the season, for me it was stepping aboard and riding the Fujisan View Express itself that made this trip so enjoyable.

We interviewed Mr. Katsumata, assistant manager of Fujikyu Railway, who emphasized the importance of language training for onboard staff. It is estimated that forty percent of passengers are non-Japanese. Among them, the most frequent are Chinese, followed by Filipinos and others from Southeast Asia. Given the influx of foreign tourists, it is essential that staff undergo specific language training in both English and Mandarin in order to be able to communicate with and answer questions from foreign passengers as well as handle emergency situations should any arise.

Mr. Katsumata explained that language training especially comes in handy when foreign hikers going to Mt. Fuji board the train. Foreigners oftentimes confuse "Mt. Fuji Station"

to mean that they are much closer to Mt. Fuji than they are in reality. Consequently, they plan their trips with it in mind that reaching the mountain is an easy walk from the station by foot. Yet, this is not the case; Mt. Fuji is about twenty kilometers (12.4 miles) from the station. The train's staff encounter this misunderstanding frequently, and so it is necessary for them to be able to explain in other languages the location of, and methods by which, to reach Mt. Fuji.

Mr. Katsumata wishes that tourists coming to Yamanashi Prefecture have the chance to enjoy as many of its local specialties such as fruits, wine, and crafts as possible. He believes that all of these are both cultural and valuable assets of this land and he would be happy if the express trains operated by Fujikyu Railway help passengers get to know more about the prefecture beyond just Mt. Fuji.

In this way, Fujisan View Express offers much more to the tourist than just a method of transportation. With its cozy interior, beautiful landscapes, and unique products that can be enjoyed from the comfort of your seat, 45 minutes seemed to pass by amazingly fast. The service and attention we received onboard made our ride even better, and we were all grateful for the kind staff onboard, all of whom do an outstanding job when it comes to answering the questions of passengers, even those of foreigner passengers such as myself, in languages besides Japanese.

To you, dear reader, remember this: Come and be enchanted by this experience. Come ride aboard the Fujisan View Express!

