

the Yamanashi Grapevine

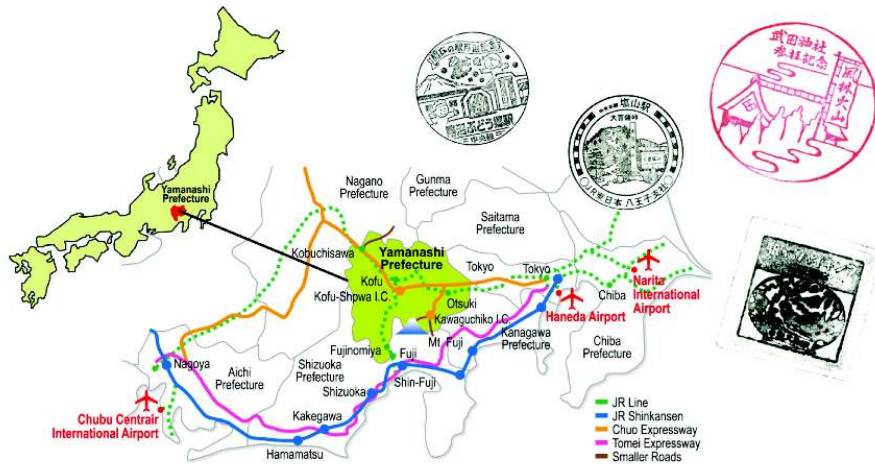
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Comments or questions about the articles?
Impressions of this season's edition?
Suggestions for future articles?

Send your thoughts our way by dropping us an email at
osanomemorial@mx5.nns.ne.jp

*The first 20 people to send in comments will receive a
free, Yamanashi local specialty!*



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Railroad Journeys

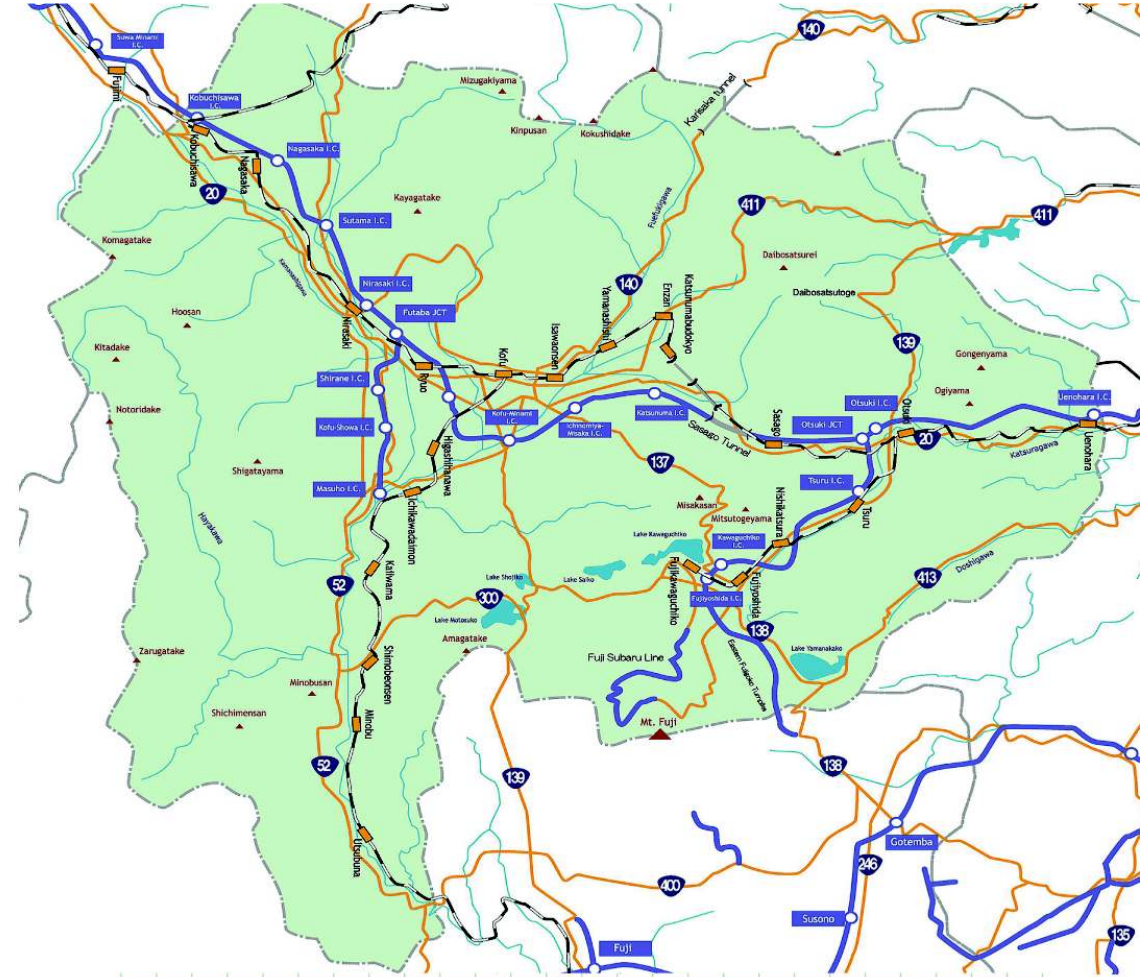


From the editor's notebook:

Many friends of mine who have visited Yamanashi complained to me about the inconvenience of the public transportation system here. Being in a landlocked prefecture, the railway infrastructure here is naturally less developed compared to the other regions of Japan. As a result, local people usually rely on private automobiles for daily life activities. It is therefore not hard to understand the frustration my friends felt when they travelled here without a car.

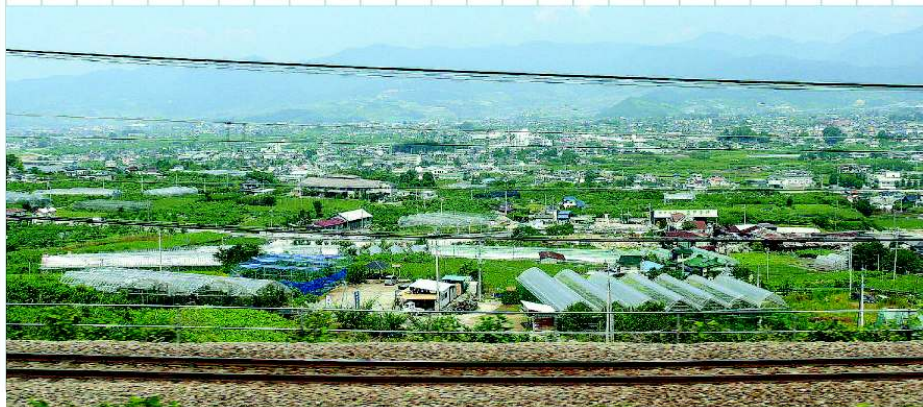
Living and working in Yamanashi, the GV staff believes in other ways to enjoy the beautiful prefecture without feeling restrained. In fact, there are lots of interesting spots hidden throughout the prefecture. Surprisingly enough, they are all easily accessible by train and are within walking distance from the stations. In this edition of the *Grapevine* magazine, we will take you with us on Part I of our railroad journeys from Uenohara Station to Kobuchisawa Station along the JR Chuo Line.

Mandy J.M. Lin



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paths and crossroads...



UENOHARA STATION
TO
SASAGO STATION



TRAVELER PROFILE

NAME: JENKA EUSEBIO
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NATIONALITY: AMERICAN
HOBBIES: BALLET AND WRITING STORIES
ALWAYS TRAVELS WITH: A NOTEBOOK

Location: Otsuki City

7 Around Otsuki Station

A main stop for the Limited Express which goes to and from Tokyo, Otsuki Station is a convenient location to begin exploring the mountainous terrains of Yamanashi. I recommend hiking around the area during spring or autumn, when the beauty of Yamanashi's seasons paints the scenery with flowers and changing leaves.

Otsuki City Website:
<http://www.city.otsuki.yamanashi.jp/data/15/index.html>



Location: Otsuki City

4 Saruhashi Bridge

Saruhashi Bridge is one of Japan's "three odd bridges" whose architecture calls to mind the image of monkeys clustered together as they cross the river.

5 Saruhashi Park

Otsuki's Hydrangea Festival takes place in Saruhashi Park when the multi-colored hydrangeas reach full blossom during early summertime.

6 Otsuki Local History

Information Hall

Right next to Saruhashi Park, the Otsuki Local History Information Hall displays various historical photographs and collections about Otsuki City.



Location: Uenohara City

1 Uenohara Shopping Street

2 Katsura River

Here, you can buy the area's local specialty, *saka-manjū*. Come with a friend, purchase for yourself a baker's dozen, and picnic next to the Katsura River where you can have a peaceful afternoon surrounded by mountains.



TO AGU

SASAGO
笹子

Around Otsuki
Station

HATSUGARI
初狩

OTSUKI
大月

TO FUJI
MANNINGSHINO

SARUHASHI
猿橋

4 5 6

20 minute walk

TORISAWA
鳥沢

YANAGAWA
梁川

SHIOTSU
四方津

3 Commore Bridge
3 minute walk

2 Katsura River
5 minute walk

1 Uenohara Shopping Street
20 minute walk

UENOHARA
上野原

TO TOKYO



COMMORE BRIDGE



Cultural Note!

まんじゅう
「饅頭」
manjū, steamed bun



Considered to be a close relative of mochi, manjū are typically made from flour, rice powder, and buckwheat. The fillings range from various meats to sweet bean paste, miso and black sesame. The manjū is a cultural import from ancient China which took on many forms and flavors once it reached Japanese shores in the fourteenth century. In one popular variation, the manjū dough is flavored with green tea powder and is often taken as a snack. But if you are traveling through Yamanashi, stop by Uenohara for a taste of saka-manjū and its hint of sweet rice wine.

MOUNTAIN EXCURSIONS

BY JENKA EUSEBIO



Coming in from Tokyo on the local train, Uenohara is the first stop once you cross the Yamanashi border. Being denizens of the Prefectural capital, the GV staff took the opposite route, jumping on an early morning train which would take us from the Yamanashi basin towards the mountain outskirts. Rainy season had just started, but the weather forecast predicted fair skies for the better part of the day.

The train rambled along from Kofu, filled with the usual morning traffic of uniformed students and businessmen. By the time we reached Uenohara Station, the train had emptied out and the scenery had changed drastically. The rolling expanse of the basin, quilted with grape trellises and peach orchards, was a world that existed on the other side of the Sasago Tunnel. But we were now in

steep, mountainous terrain thick with green foliage, rocky crags, and clouds clinging to the treetops.

Uenohara was a quiet town built against the mountainside. We strolled along the Katsura River before hiking up to the Uenohara Shopping Street for a taste of the local specialty, *saka-manjū*. A simple but filling snack, *saka-manjū* is a steamed bun made of sweet rice wine and flour, offered with a selection of fillings such as sweet red bean paste and miso.

The next stop after Uenohara was Shiotsu and its eye-catching, glass-encased escalator stretching along the length of a mountain. This was more of an Alice-in-Wonderland-whim for us, but instead of going down the rabbit hole we were transported up the

mountain in a diagonal elevator since- alas – the escalator had been shut down. What we discovered was the Commore Shiotsu Tricoparc, a subdivision developed in 1991 as a testament to eco-friendly, sustainable housing and its increasing importance in the modern world. The landscape architecture was designed to subtly incorporate the natural environment of the local area, in addition to displaying foreign cultural artifacts (please note the totem poles), labyrinthine garden pathways, and spacious parks.

After a bento lunch with a side of fresh peaches in Clock Park, we descended the mountain and jumped on the next train to Saruhashi. By this point, a light rain had started to fall. Using a pair of cheap umbrellas we bought at a convenience store, we trekked along the road towards


Saruhashi (literally translated as “Monkey Bridge”). We then walked a little past the bridge and found ourselves in a riverside park awash with flowers, their colors muted by the rain. This was the site of the Saruhashi Ajisai Festival which, similar to the cherry blossom viewing festivals of early spring, celebrates the spectacular blooming of the hydrangeas and the arrival of a new and warmer season.

The last stop on this trip was Otsuki, where we looked over the day’s notes in a small café near the station. Our umbrellas and shoes wet with rain, we munched on blueberry cream pie, drank coffee, and listened to the low tones of a Showa-era ballad playing over the stereo.

**KAI-YAMATO STATION
TO
KOFU STATION**



TRAVELER PROFILE

NAME: MANDY J.M. LIN
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NATIONALITY: CANADIAN 
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ALWAYS TRAVELS WITH: A CAMERA

Location: Kofu City

14 Around Kofu Station

Kofu City is the largest town in Yamanashi and its economic heart. Kofu Station has a cluster of shops, cafes and a castle park, and is a short bus ride to Takeda Shrine.

15 Shingen-ko Festival

In early spring, crowds of people flock into Kofu City to celebrate the legacy of the famous Sengoku Period warlord, Takeda Shingen. A re-enactment of the Koshu Battalion Deployment - the highlight of the festival - is a must-see for all samurai fans.

16 Shosenkyo Gorge

Need some fresh air? Come hike along the picturesque Arakawa River to one of Japan's most beautiful gorges. Souvenir shops, cafes and a shrine are also within walking distance.



Cultural Note!

「ほうとう」
hōtō noodles



Although generally categorized as a type of udon, local people in Yamanashi see hōtō as a distinctive noodle. Compared to regular noodles, they are wider, and are served in miso based soup with lots of pumpkin, mushrooms and seasonal vegetables. This well-balanced country food has its origin in a Chinese food called hakutaku, introduced into Japan in the Heian period by a Chinese Zen priest. It was later modified by Lord Shingen as a nutritional provision for battle. It is easy to prepare and incredibly delicious!



Location: Koshu City

9 Ohikage Tunnel Walking Trail

First built in 1896, Ohikage Tunnel connected Tokyo and Yamanashi. It was one of the most important infrastructures which supported the booming wine industry in Koshu City during the Meiji Period. After the New Ohikage Tunnel was built next to it, this old tunnel was turned into a historical walking trail.

Location: Enzan City

10 Old Takano House

Formerly owned by a licorice cultivator in the middle of the Edo Period, Takano's 230-year-old house is a representative old town house typical of the local area. If you are interested in traditional Japanese architecture or regional histories, this is a good place to start.

Location: Fukefuki City

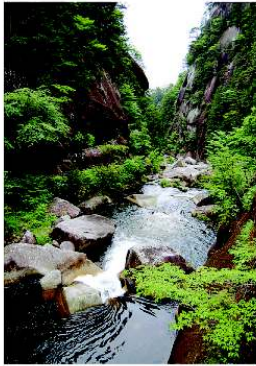
12 Foot Spa

If you are planning a long day trip along the JR Chuo Line, stop by Kasugaicho Station 甲斐春日居町 for the city-run foot spa free of charge.

9:22 - ENTERING SASAGO TUNNEL

I started my timer when the train took us into the Sasago Tunnel.

Both physically and psychologically, the Sasago Mountain Pass is seen as a formidable barrier between the Yamanashi central highlands and the Kanto region, the economic and political centre of Japan. It is probably due to this reason that the town of Yamato still retains much of the traditional country lifestyle.



9:25 - AT THE PLATFORM OF KAI-YAMATO STATION

Three minutes through the tunnel, the train finally reached Kai-Yamato Station.

The few people on the street were those who just got off the train. After a short walk along the national route outside the station, we found ourselves in the Hikawa Ravine. Spring water flew down along the river, splashing on the rocks beside the bank. When we stopped by the river, we spotted an old farmer quietly working on

his rice field. It was a peaceful and refreshing morning for the GV staff.

10:47 - RECORDING A VIDEO OF THE SCENIC LANDSCAPE OF KATSUNUMA

Shortly after leaving Kai-Yamato Station, the train suddenly entered a pretty, almost Tuscan landscape of steep, densely forested hills towering above small villages connected by winding roads. It is Katsunuma, the town of grapes and wines.

The GV staff did not follow the normal routine of winery tours. Instead we wanted to discover the rich history of this famous wine production region. A short walk from the station, we found two historical tunnels, one of which is the Ohikage Tunnel. Once serving as a major connection between Yamanashi and Tokyo, the tunnel had greatly contributed to the economic growth of the region during the Meiji Period. Ever since the new tunnel - which carries the same name - was constructed, Ohikage Tunnel has been enjoyed as a walking trail and



heritage site for tourists and locals alike.

13:20 - GETTING LOST IN CHERRY FIELDS

After having some soba in a small restaurant outside Enzan Station, we decided to continue our journey. The entire 60 minutes of walk around the station confirmed that Enzan is indeed very well known for cherry picking because the entire area is dotted with cherry trees.

14:39 - PASSING BY MANRIKU PARK IN YAMANASHI

Manriku Park is about a 10-minute walk from Yamanashi Station. The GV staff remembered visiting the park in June for a festival of old poem readings. Children and adults alike dressed in traditional costumes during their poem reading

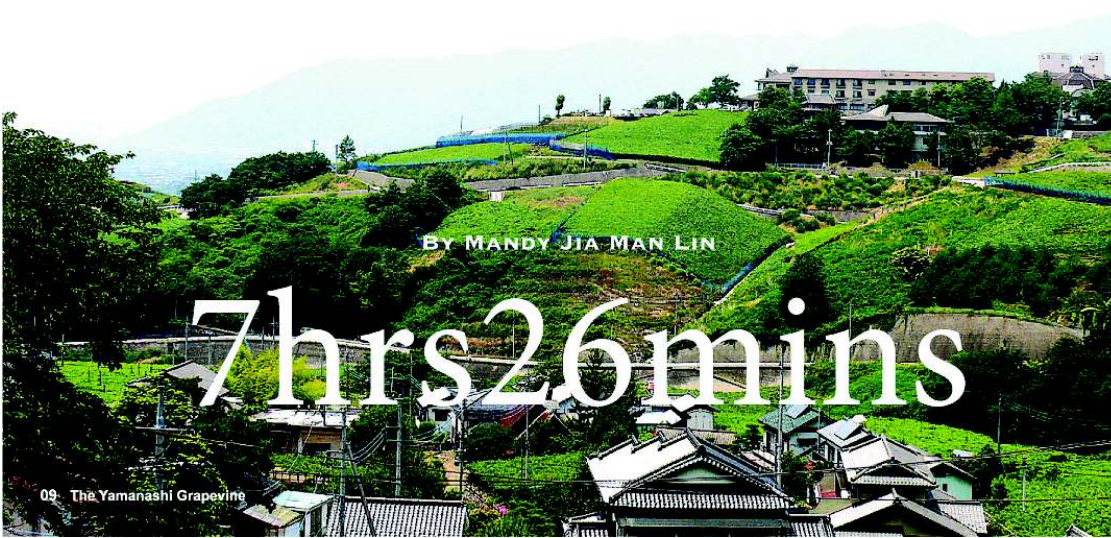
performance. It was quite a unique experience!

16:16 - STEPPING INTO THE KASUGAICHO FOOT SPA

When the train slowly moved into the platform of Kasugai Station, we spotted a foot spa just outside the ticket area. Jumping off the train we rushed to the spa, and found out that it was free of charge! This is a perfect spot for a short break.

16:48 - BACK TO CITY LIFE

We finally arrived in Kofu Station. Kofu is the economic centre and the most populated city of Yamanashi Prefecture. After trekking on regular trains for the entire day, it was really pleasant to re-experience some semblance of urban life again.



BY MANDY JIA MAN LIN

7hrs 26mins

TO MATSUMOTO
 Around Kobuchisawa Station
 0~20 minute walk

KOBUCHISAWA
 小淵沢

NAGASAKA
 長坂

Oomurasaki Center &
 Nature Park
 10 minute walk

Location: Nirasaki City

18 Ruins of Takeda Katsuyori's
 Shimpu Castle

Shimpu Station is composed of two lonely platforms situated on a hill and surrounded by houses. Follow the path towards the peach orchard, cross the road and find yourself transported back in time.



Location: Hokuto City

19 Oomurasaki Center
 & Nature Park

From Hinoharu Station, walk for a few minutes and you will arrive at the Oomurasaki Center & Nature Park where you can learn about the local flora and fauna.

Website: <http://www.city.hokuto.yamanashi.jp/~oomurasaki/>



Location: Hokuto City

20 Around Kobuchisawa Station

The last stop on Yamanashi's JR Chuo line is Kobuchisawa. The area around the station is very picturesque and cool during the summer which makes trekking, hiking or even simple sightseeing a pleasant experience. Whether it is for shopping, visiting shrines, or getting close to nature, this is the ideal place to refresh your mind and body. Local gift shops dot the neighborhood, so drop in and enjoy some sweets and seasonal fruits.

HINO HARU
 日野春

ANAYAMA
 穴山

SHIMPU
 新府

18 Ruins of Shimpu Castle
 20 minute walk

Heiwa Kannon
 25 minute walk

NIRASAKI
 韮崎

Location: Nirasaki City

17 Heiwa Kannon (Goddess of Mercy)

Get off at Nirasaki Station and experience the imposing view of the Heiwa Kannon statue whose grandeur can easily be seen from the station platform. The statue is deceptively far, but it is certainly worthwhile to explore the different paths which lead to its base.

SHIOZAKI
 塩崎

TO KOFU

RYUO
 竜王



Cultural Note!

文馬
 「絵馬」
 ema, votive plaque



In any Shinto Shrine you can find ema, pieces of wood sold in order to contribute to the maintenance of the shrine. On its surface is usually a drawing of the yearly Chinese zodiac or some other designs. If you buy one, you can write your wish (in any language) and hang it among the other ema with hopes that it might come true. I am particularly an ema lover and I feel comfortable writing on them in Portuguese.



RYUO STATION
 TO
 KOBUCHISAWA STATION



TRAVELER PROFILE

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My journey started at 8:53 a.m. on a JR Chuo Line train departing from Kofu for Kobuchisawa Station located in the northernmost part of Yamanashi Prefecture. The landscape I saw outside the train window gradually changed from the cement and brick of city buildings to the greenery of mountains and forests.

Stop 1: Kobuchisawa

Our first stop was at Kobuchisawa Station after 46 minutes of riding on the train. A kind gift shop owner in front of the station pointed us in the direction of a famous Shinto shrine – Misogi Jinja. Despite the rain, the Grapevine staff faced a wet walk on the road.

Training to the Northwest

BY ÉRICA TANAKA

After a 40-minute walk from the station we reached Misogi Shrine, which is nationally renowned for its staging of Japanese Noh – a traditional Japanese live performance. The August performance of Yatsugatake Takigi-Noh attracts over 1,500 people every summer. Surrounded by nature, the atmosphere instills in you an almost indescribable calmness and tranquility.

It is also possible to experience Shinto traditions, such as the food and customs of Shinto priests, by prior arrangement. Make sure to see the Silky roosters, which are considered to be holy birds since they announce the break of dawn – and symbolize the coming of the sun, the icon of Shinto beliefs. If you wish to rest a bit, go to the shrine restaurant to drink some herbal tea.

Back at Kobuchisawa Station, if you happen to have some spare time until your train departure, go for a walk around the station to observe the centennial architecture of the surrounding area.

Stop 2: Hinoharu Station

After hearing about the butterflies in Hinoharu, we did not hesitate in going there. The 12-minute train ride took us to Hinoharu Station and after a 5-minute walk we found a large monument indicating we were on the right track.

During the latter end of June, great purple butterflies called *oomurasaki* can be seen in the area. The Oomurasaki Center and Nature Park is a 10-minute walk away and can be visited all year round. Animals and plants of the Yatsugatake forests are also on exhibition.

Stop 3: Shimpu Station

After a 12-minute train ride from Hinoharu Station, get off at Shimpu Station. From here you can journey towards the ruins of a castle built by Takeda Katsuyori after being defeated in the Battle of Nagashino.

The area is a popular destination in April, as the blossoming peach flowers attract photographers, painters, and nature enthusiasts alike. After walking through a maze of peach orchards you will find a path that takes you to the main road. There, signs will guide you towards the castle ruins. Once you arrive at the site entrance, get ready to climb about 200 stairs to the grassy remains of Shinpu Castle which, despite the era of wars that produced it, has become a peaceful haven for contemplation.

Stop 5: Nirasaki Station

Nirasaki is famous for soccer and one of its high schools is the alma mater of the acclaimed soccer player, Nakata Hidetoshi. Walk for about 15 minutes from the station and you will come upon a towering statue of Heiwa Kannon, which scales about 18.3 meters. In 1961, with the purpose of protecting the citizens and mountain climbers, Heiwa Kannon was built atop the southern edge of the Shichiri-iwa Plateau and is known for its sculptural beauty.

For trekking lovers, it is highly recommended that you explore the natural beauty of Yamanashi's northern regions. Enjoy the calming environment of a shrine, experience the art of Noh while surrounded by nature, climb a flight of stairs to some castle ruins, and contemplate the landscape of Nirasaki. You are sure to have a unique journey.

