

山梨グレープヴァイン The Yamanashi Grapevine

Winter 2006

大月市 / 作文 / 温泉巡り / インタビュー / 信玄餅

Editor's Note:

The sound of the *Grapevine* editor's keyboard echoes with the impermanence of all things. As long-time *Grapevine* readers may have noticed, the editorial staff here is about as fickle as the autumn sky. Taking the editorial helm from Sébastien Noël, I hope to continue to bring you the unknown and unexpected about Yamanashi's people, festivals, mountains, valleys, nooks and crannies. At the very least, I'd like to impart the sense of welcome and wonder I felt myself when first arriving here last summer. And don't forget to contribute your own thoughts about Yamanashi to our reader's corner, as well!

As you read this issue, Japan will hopefully be ending up one of its harshest winters in recent memory, and bitter memories of bitter cold will be like mere dreams on a spring night. Here's hoping!

—Jonathan Smith

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Otsuki 大月

The town of Otsuki, located in the eastern part of Yamanashi, is about an hour train ride from Tokyo. With 87% of its land covered by mountains and forests, Otsuki is a green heaven which is becoming popular among Tokyoites as a day trip destination.

Hiking and Mount Fuji

Otsuki is a paradise for hikers and nature lovers. Mountains, valleys, rivers... the variety of the courses are infinite and suit all levels. Nineteen of Otsuki's mountains have been selected for their exceptional views of Mt. Fuji from their respective peaks, which make the town one of the best places in Japan to observe the famous volcano. If you aren't a regular hiker, the *Grapevine* recommends the *Takagawasan* course (*Takagawa* Mountain), which starts from *Hatsukari* Train Station. Even if you aren't a regular hiker, you can reach

the top of *Takagawasan* in a little less than two hours. The 360-degree panorama on top and the beautiful Mt. Fuji view are worth the climb. Other courses, like the *Kuratakesan/Takahatasan* course and the *Ogiyama/Momokurasan* course (starting respectively from *Torisawa* Train Station and *Saruhashi* Train Station) are also popular among hikers but a little longer and harder.

Iwadonosan (*Iwadono* Mountain) is just a 25 minute walk from Otsuki station. Known as the symbol of Otsuki, *Iwadono* Mountain is also called "the castle" by local residents. Indeed, the

mountain was fortified during the *sengoku* era (17th century) by a member of the Takeda Clan, the main family of warriors in Yamanashi, to protect Otsuki residents against attacks from the outside. Also famous for its Mt. Fuji view, *Iwadonosan* is worth a visit in spring when the famous Japanese cherry blossoms tint the mountain in pink. In April, Otsuki residents celebrate the cherry blossoms festival on the mountain. *Yatai* (small outdoor stores), traditional costumes, Japanese drums and Japanese dance performances are displayed during the 2 day festival. If you are looking for a real taste

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

of traditional Japan, the *Grapevine* recommends a visit to Otsuki during the festival.

Saruhashi and the Great World Peace Drum

Even if you aren't keen on trekking, Otsuki has many curious attractions that are worth seeing. *Saruhashi* is a wooden bridge built over a 31 meter ravine and is Otsuki's second most famous symbol after *Iwadono* Mountain. Known in Japan as one of the three "most curious bridges"* in the country due to its unique structure, the bridge has no pillars and is only supported from each side of the ravine by four large pieces of wood. In Japanese, *saru* means "monkey" and *hashi* means "bridge". According to an old legend, a man named Shirako decided to build the bridge around 600 AD, after he saw monkeys crossing the ravine by holding each others' hands

to form a chain. Although monkeys really live in the surroundings, no one knows whether the story is true. *Saruhashi* is probably best to

traditional shops next to the drum and visit the Otsuki sake brewery. The drum and the sake brewery are about a ten minute walk from the *Sasago*



The cherry blossoms festival on Iwadonosan

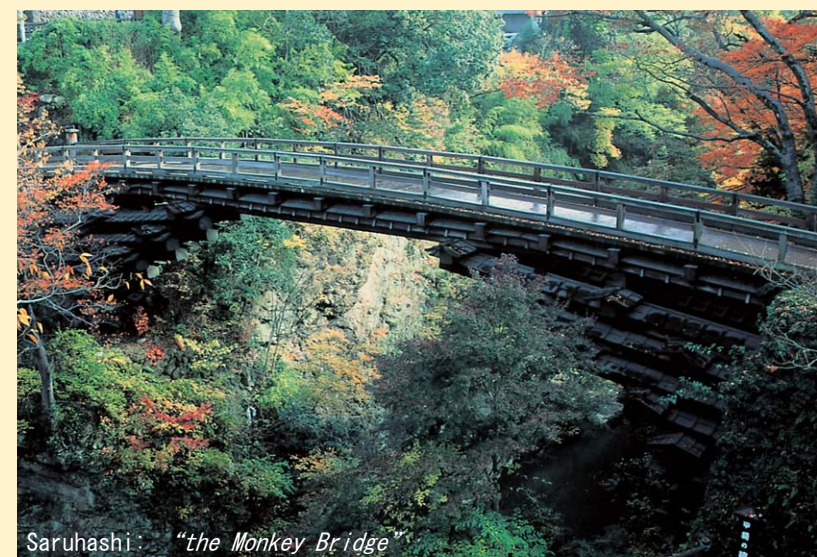
see in autumn when the tree leaves turn red and yellow.

Train Station.

The Great World Peace Drum, recorded in the Guinness Book of World Records as the biggest drum in the world, stands nearby route 20 in the *Sasago* area. The drum has a 4.8 meter diameter and is 4.95 meters long. After beating the drum, you can also have a look at the

Whether you live in Tokyo or are just a visitor in the Japanese capital, don't hesitate to go to Otsuki to breath some fresh air and admire beautiful Japanese mountains. The Otsuki website is only in Japanese, but beautiful pictures of Mt. Fuji and *saruhashi* are available in the tourism section.

-Sebastien Noel-



*The two other curious bridges are Kintaibashi in Yamaguchi Prefecture and Kisonokakehashi in Toyama Prefecture



Essay Contest

On Saturday, December 10th, 2005, the winners of the 18th Annual Osano Memorial Foundation International Understanding and Cooperation Essay Contest were announced at the Yamanashi International Center in the prefectural capital of Kofu. The contest itself began in 1988 in the hopes to make the schoolchildren of Yamanashi ponder the new face of cultural interaction and exchange in this age of information technology and international travel. 263 elementary and junior high school students from Yamanashi submitted essays this year, a number that has been steadily increasing since the contest's inception. Yuna Fukasawa of Yawata Elementary School, whose essay is reprinted here in English translation, was awarded the Most Outstanding Essay Prize, which includes a fully funded overseas study trip. Five elementary and seven junior high school works, as outlined below, were awarded honorable mention prizes.



The elementary school works showcased their authors' precocious grasp of cross-cultural issues. One student's essay focused on how he learned about French culture from his Japanese friend from Paris, while another related personal experiences living in Holland. Other essays took on issues of a more global scale: discussing the importance of disaster relief efforts or global health care. Still another student analyzed issues facing the global environment, which she learned about while visiting the 2005 World Expo in Aichi, Japan.

Many of the junior high school works concerned students' direct involvement in study abroad or home-stay programs. Two students related their experiences studying and living in Canada and France, respectively, while another wrote about the joys of having penpals all across the globe. Yet another wrote about his desire to share Japanese culture with the world after hosting an American student in his home. Other essays discussed personal inspiration to work towards ameliorating Japanese-Korean relations or promoting Japanese-Chinese student exchange. Additionally, one student pointed out the stylistic differences between Japanese and English politeness—a fine subtlety she came to realize with the help of her English teacher from the United States.

This year's works showcased the international and cross-cultural experiences and opinions of a vibrant, new generation of Yamanashi citizens. Here's hoping for even more equally-insightful essays in the years to come.

Eyes Both Blue and Brown

Yuna Fukasawa
Sixth Grader, Yawata Elementary School

I have a little brother. He asked me something a while ago—
"Aren't blue eyes scary?"

I still remember his question, even today. It shocked me that much. By "blue eyes," my brother was talking about our English conversation teacher, who I really like. What he said made me very sad. Why should different color eyes be scary, anyway? What an awful thing to say! It's racial discrimination, and I couldn't excuse it then, not even now.

"They're not scary at all!" I burst out at him, glaring.

As if realizing that he had just done a major no-no, my little brother looked like he was about to start crying. But I wouldn't buy it. I asked him why he said such a remark: apparently the eyes of the monster in the movie *Alien* were blue. That was it, nothing more. So after he saw that movie he started to be scared of our teacher's eyes, even though his eyes obviously look nothing like the alien's. But those two pairs of eyes must have seemed exactly the same for my brother, who's still just as afraid of scary stories now as he was back then. But now, though, he enjoys going to his English classes so much, he barely believes that he could have ever said such a thing.

"You can say as much with your eyes as with your mouth." In other words, eyes can express emotions just like words can. My little brother was so afraid of our teacher's eyes that he couldn't even see *into* those eyes. His mind was set and his mind was shut—even though our teacher's eyes have always been so tender and friendly. What exactly made my little brother later open his heart, he told me, was when our teacher praised him in Japanese. It was then that he first realized that our teacher could understand his own Japanese, and so he finally was able to really see the teacher's eyes for what they were. It was right after that that the two began to open their hearts to each other.

Actually, the reason I started to go to those English classes myself also has to do with eyes. Exactly opposite my brother, I was afraid of "brown eyes" back then. I never really could ask if I could join in with the other kids, because whenever I invited them to play, they would always tell me, "No way!" So I started to be scared of their brown eyes. But the first time I met my blue-eyed teacher, we joined hands and sang songs together, just like friends. I didn't understand the words, but just looking at my teacher's blue eyes I was able to be at ease. The kids in my English conversation class all come from different schools and have different ages. But I was still able to make lots of friends there. Eye color had nothing to do with anything. Sometimes we couldn't understand each other's languages, but that's okay, too. What I'm able to do now if I meet other kids that think that blue eyes or black eyes are scary—just like my brother and I used to think—is teach them that that's not the way it is—just like our teacher taught us. I want to be able to help other children who have trouble understanding different languages. And so I want to learn a whole lot more about English conversation from my teacher, because I know that one day it'll surely come in handy.





Even a cursory delve into Japanese culture will almost certainly touch upon the traditional role of bathing. Whereas many Westerners (myself included) would rarely go near the bath back at home (opting for a shower instead), a soak in the *o-furo* at home is a daily ritual for many Japanese and, in the days before homes and apartments came with bathrooms attached, the local *senjo* (bathhouse) was both a necessity and also a major hub of social activity. Of course, the water used in bathhouses and private baths alike is just normal water. There is, however, another sphere to this world of bathing where the body is immersed in natural spring water and the elements and minerals contained in the water

work to relieve stress and, it is claimed, can also treat a whole range of other ailments. This is the world of *onsen*.

History

It is impossible to pinpoint exactly when *onsen* first made their debut into Japanese culture. Given the topography of the country, natural hot springs must have always been a feature of the landscape, but some accounts credit their actual discovery to religious ascetic monks such as Gyōki (668 – 749) and Kōbō Daishi (774 – 835), the latter also the founder of the Shingon sect of Buddhism. Hot spring bathing became popular with aristocrats during the Heian period (794 – 1185) and this popularity spread during the Warring States period (1467 – 1568) when warriors found the springs to be effective in healing their wounds and restoring energy. Indeed, the medicinal properties of *onsen* have been well documented and many display a list of the ailments they are supposed to cure on the wall of the bathing room. Following the establishment of peace and stability during the Edo period (1600 – 1867) the custom of bathing spread to everyday people, many of whom were farmers, as a way to relax and relive the stresses of the day. This tradition has continued until the present and hot spring bathing remains an extremely popular custom for people from all walks of life as a way to cleanse the body and revive one's spirits.

As anyone who has visited Yamanashi prefecture can testify, one of the most dominant features of the landscape is the mountains which provide the region with its dramatic scenery.

As one would expect from such a mountainous region, Yamanashi is literally awash with *onsen*, boasting over 100 at the last count. The *Grapevine* paid a visit to two *onsen* in Yamanashi to find out more.

Nagomi-no-Yu (Isawa-cho, Fuefuki-shi)

The area of Isawa is famous in Yamanashi for its *onsen* and attracts visitors from far and wide. However, to avoid excessive competition, the roles of each tourist facility in the area (hotel, restaurant, *onsen*, etc) are clearly defined and separate. Consequently, *Nagomi-no-yu* is an *onsen* without any trappings, and indeed is as much used by local people as by visitors. To enhance its benefit to the local community the *onsen* is attached to a daycare centre for the elderly and also offers a discount for customers over 65 years of age. It was opened in April, 2005 and the building and facilities are all brand new, with heated floors throughout, and a simple but very functional bathing area.

The spring water used in *Nagomi-no-yu* first gushed forth in Showa 36 (1961) when the surrounding area was all fields, and for a time there was a *rotenburo* (an outdoor *onsen*). Today, the water is 39 degrees centigrade at the source (630 metres underground) and it is brought up at a rate of 170 litres every minute. The water is unrefined and rusty-brown in colour and it is passed through a filtration tank containing four levels of progressively larger stones before being heated to 60 degrees, at which point it is transferred to the pool. The temperature in the main pool is a constant 41.5 degrees, with a second pool at 29 degrees intended to be used for regular cooling breaks (ideally in a 5-minute/2-minute pattern). The water at *Nagomi-no-yu* is mildly alkaline and can help to combat a wide range of health problems, including: muscular problems, arthritis, indigestion, chills, bruises and also general relaxation and recovery from tiredness or illness.

Mitama-no-Yu (Ichikawamisato-cho)

Mitama-no-yu was opened in July of 2005 and is situated on the southeast slopes of the Kofu basin, one of a number of *onsen* which trace a line northeast to southwest through Yamanashi. At an elevation of 370 metres it provides a commanding view of the basin floor with Mt. Yatsugatake and the Minami-Alps range in the distance during the day. By night the multitude of stars in the sky are balanced by the thousands of homes twinkling below, and bathers can even follow the trains as they snake their way through the villages and towns. The scenery is even better after snowfall in winter, when a layer of pristine whiteness extends as far as the eye can see.

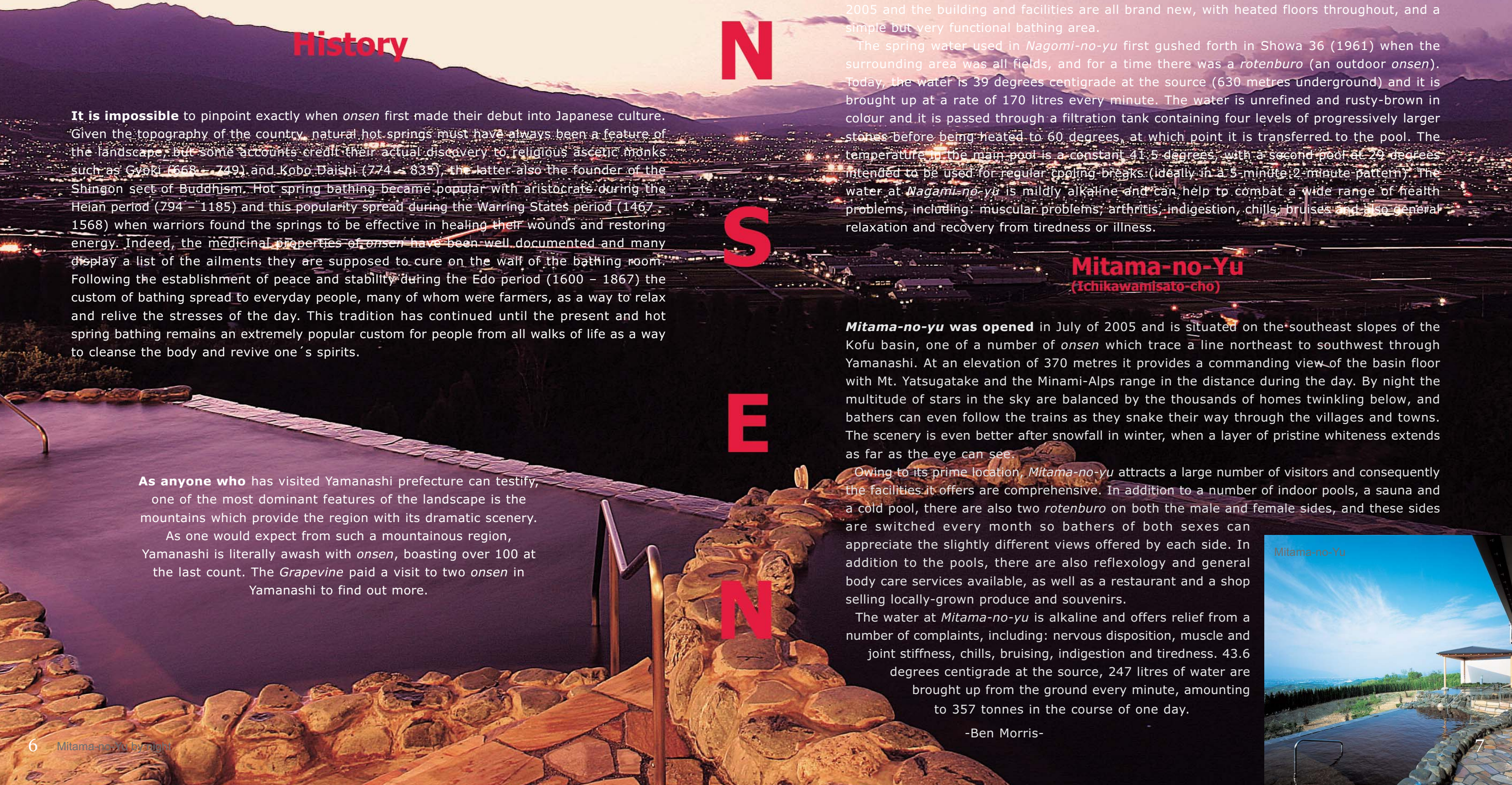
Owing to its prime location, *Mitama-no-yu* attracts a large number of visitors and consequently the facilities it offers are comprehensive. In addition to a number of indoor pools, a sauna and a cold pool, there are also two *rotenburo* on both the male and female sides, and these sides are switched every month so bathers of both sexes can appreciate the slightly different views offered by each side. In addition to the pools, there are also reflexology and general body care services available, as well as a restaurant and a shop selling locally-grown produce and souvenirs.

The water at *Mitama-no-yu* is alkaline and offers relief from a number of complaints, including: nervous disposition, muscle and joint stiffness, chills, bruising, indigestion and tiredness. 43.6 degrees centigrade at the source, 247 litres of water are brought up from the ground every minute, amounting to 357 tonnes in the course of one day.

-Ben Morris-



Nagomi-no-Yu



Mitama-no-Yu

An Interview with Dominique Chagnon

With multiple CD releases and four years of appearances on NHK's "*Furansu-go Kaiwa*" French language-learning program, Dominique Chagnon has been forging a name for himself as one of Japan's premier French-language musicians. Active throughout Japan but based in the Yamanashi town of Kawaguchi-ko, the *chansonnier* has been amassing a fan base as wide as his three-and-a-half octave vocal range. *The Grapevine* sat down with Dominique to talk about life and work in Japan and Yamanashi.



Can you tell us about your musical background?

I was a musician in France, working on arrangements for different bands. I'm a bassist and so I did a lot of jazz fusion and other groovy styles of music. But I wasn't involved in chanson at all until I came to Japan. Here, Chanson oldies are much more popular than French Pop or other current styles of French music.

Why did you decide to move to Japan?

Originally I had wanted to go to L.A. to study and perform. But after visiting a friend in Japan six or seven years ago, I fell in love with the country. After returning to France, I came back to Japan just a month later with all of my bags, ready to stay. Then I passed the NHK audition, made an album, and it all went from there.

How did you end up at NHK?

The Producers wanted to add a Chanson/French Pop segment to the show, which was a great idea: introducing the language and culture of France through its music. I was on the show for four years, while most performers only stay for one or two. The team was very good, and it was a nice atmosphere. They even let me act in some of the skits. I made some contacts through the show, too, and that's how I made my first solo album.

Do you find that Japanese audiences are familiar with chanson?

Oh yes, definitely. Japanese TV commercials use lots of chanson from the 60's that you don't hear very often in France anymore, so I'd say that they know more chansons here in Japan than most French people do. I think it also might have something to do with the typical chanson theme of romantic love, which is a concept you really didn't have in Japan until after the Meiji Restoration. [The Japanese oldies style of] Enka is always about sadness and loneliness, but with chanson you have themes that are more romantic, more passionate.

So that might be why in Japan there's so much more interest in chanson than in French Pop.

But I'd still like to generate more interest in chanson in the younger generations. Chanson has beautiful lyrics and melodies, and if you get rid of some of the boring and overly melodramatic parts, you can rearrange and refresh the music for a younger audience. I'm even teaching chanson to 20, 30-year-olds who specifically ask to learn chanson instead of French Pop. Maybe it's just that romantic image of the France of fifty years ago that attracts them.

You lived in Tokyo for quite some time, but why did you decide to move to Yamanashi?

Four years ago I visited Kawaguchi-ko as a tourist, and I was struck by the great view of Mt. Fuji and by how close it was to Tokyo.



Then, two years ago I went again with a friend who was showing the town to her mother, and I found a great apartment for sale. I had been living in a small apartment in Tokyo that was unbelievably expensive and really stress-inducing. So when I found the place in Kawaguchi-ko, I didn't even think about, I just packed up and moved.

It's so easy to make friends here, everyone is so happy and we're always getting food and presents from the neighbors, whereas in Tokyo it felt like people had an ulterior motive when they were being friendly with you. It's much easier to compose and work here too, where it's clear and calm, surrounded by mountains instead of buildings.

Can you tell us about your upcoming projects?

There's a new album coming out of covers of classic chansons, and we're halfway through the arrangements for it. The challenge is finding out how to do old chansons and keep their original feel, but still make them sound fresh through new arrangements. Everybody's doing the big band sound now, so we thought we'd go the opposite way, the less-is-more approach. For concerts we'll just have a vocal trio with guitar and bass, adding just a few more instruments for the album. You can do as much with three people as you can with a big orchestra. But if you can do it well with three people, getting that intimate style so necessary for chanson, then you've really got it.



Okashi

One of the unique things about traveling around Japan is definitely the various shapes, colors and tastes of traditional *okashi* (sweets or biscuits) which are sold at every train station kiosk or candy store all over the country. Some *okashi* have historical roots and are unique to a particular region, while others have typical fruits or vegetables of the area as their main ingredients. They are usually bought and given to workmates and family when people are traveling either for business or sightseeing. It is a great way to sample the taste and essence of each part of Japan.

Shingen mochi

One of the most renowned *okashi* in Yamanashi prefecture is *Shingen-mochi*, named after the famous warlord Takeda Shingen, ruler of Yamanashi

and contemporary of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first *shogun* in Japan. It is a kind of rice cake, covered with ground soybean powder and *kuromitsu* (“black honey”), which is similar to molasses. It has its roots in another *mochi*, *Abekawa mochi*, which used to be offered to the spirits enshrined in altars since ancient times during *Obon* festivals in Shizuoka and Yamanashi prefectures.

Before the sixties, Yamanashi’s main local souvenirs were grapes and peaches covered with sugar, given Yamanashi’s renown as a paradise of fruits. However, producers had to deal with the major problem of sustaining production throughout the year, as fruits are seasonal.

Meanwhile, a company in Yamanashi perfected the miniaturization of *Abekawa mochi* so that they could be produced and consumed at any time of year (or, in any

Shingen Mochi

season). In order to make a more appealing product, they took to wrapping them individually in small pieces of plastic, imitating the traditional *furoshiki* wrapping style, and also including a stick of wood to facilitate consumption.

Eating Shingen mochi

When you eat in Japan, you must first savor with your eyes both the display of the food and its appearance. Unwrapping and laying the *Shingen mochi* on a tray, sprinkling on the ground soybean powder and covering it all with *kuromitsu* is a unique rite. With the small stick of wood which accompanies each individual package, you can delight in the genuine taste of Yamanashi *Shingen mochi*.

The joy of trying *Shingen mochi* led to its selection as the second most popular souvenir with international travelers as part of the Japanese government’s “Visit Japan” Campaign; not to mention its place among the 30 most popular gifts sold in Japan.

On your next trip to Japan, make sure you enjoy this traditional Yamanashi *okashi*.

Itadakimasu!

- Érica Tanaka -

しん げん もち 信 玄 餅

お菓子

日本を旅行するときのユニークな楽しみといえば、何より駅えきのキヨスクやお菓子屋さんかしやさんで販売している様々な形、色、味をした地元のお菓子を味わう事でしょう。お菓子は地域の歴史に繋がりがあまたり、又は名産物の果物や野菜などを利用して創作そうさくされます。お菓子は出張や観光などで旅行した時の土産みやげの第一位ですが、お菓子の試食ししょくをしながら地元の味を楽しみ事で日本の各地域の事を知る事ができます。



しん げん もち 信 玄 餅

山梨県を代表するお菓子は色々ありますが、何より有名なのは武将武田信玄の名を付けられた「信玄餅」でしょう。古来より静岡県と山梨県には「安倍川餅」をお盆のお供えとする風習がありました。餅にきな粉と黒蜜をかけて食べますが、これが現代の「信玄餅」のヒントとなったそうです。

60年代までは山梨県のお土産と言えぶどうの実に砂糖をつけた菓子や果物の桃やぶどうでした。果樹の大国である山梨県ですが、果物の時期は限られるため時期外れに販売はできません。そこで、「安倍川餅」をお土産としてもっとアピールする為ために小袋の風呂敷に一個ずつ丁寧に包むことを発想したのが山梨に

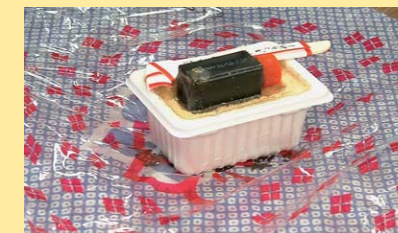
ある菓子会社で、それはお客様に大好評でした。

め 上 が り 方

日本の食事はまず「目」で食べ物の飾りを見つめるのが大切です。皿に信玄餅を出し、黒蜜をたっぷりつけてきな粉をまぶして味わう儀式により山梨の味を知る事ができます。

「信玄餅」は多くの人たちに愛され、ビジットジャパンキャンペーンにおける「外国人にとって魅力あるおみやげ」として銀賞を受賞しています。また、全国のお土産売り上げ30位以内にランクインしています。

来日する機会には是非山梨県のお菓子を召し上がって下さい！

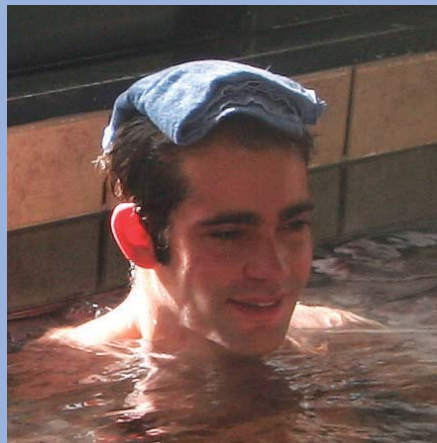


いただきます！

田中エリカ

MEET THE AUTHORS

Proving that he will go to any lengths to get a good story, British CIR **Ben Morris** stripped off in the name of the *Grapevine* and immersed himself in deliciously warm natural spring water on no less than two occasions in order to write this edition's article. He hopes to push himself even further next time, with an article tentatively entitled, '*Sake tasting in Yamanashi's finest hotels*'.



After two years of dictatorship, **Sebastien Noel** gives up the *Grapevine* editor position to Jonathan Smith. However, your favorite French CIR will continue to explore the wildest area of Yamanashi to bring you the latest news with style (as seen in this picture taken in a bat cave near Mt. Fuji).

A Florida boy through and through, new American CIR **Jonathan Smith** enjoys the scenery and crisp air of his first Yamanashi winter, but definitely not the low temperatures. When not seizing before the ever more intoxicating fumes of his kerosene heater, you'll find him running about Kofu City in a desperate attempt to raise his body temperature.



After having spent a freezing Christmas in a snowy Nikko and cold winter days in Yamanashi (without much snow), 1st year Brazilian CIR **Érica Tanaka** is just looking forward to the coming of spring and its cherry blossoms when she will finally get her Master's degree.

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Send your thoughts our way! For Reader's Corner submissions, free subscriptions, or change of address, please contact:

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