

Na no Ra

Totsukawa Village

Issue Twelve

The mental and spiritual regeneration of the countryside

Totsukawa hotspring, 'Hotel Subaru'

This hotel is celebrating its thirtieth anniversary since its opening, the ancient Chinese philosopher, Confucius once said that at thirty "I took my stand." The origin of the name of the hotel: Rather than being a time honoured phrase, the name, 'Subaru' is used by the locals to mean a range of bountiful mountain peaks. This hotel was created with that row of mountains in mind.

A note on the characteristics of the hotel's hot spring:

☆ One of the hot springs from Totsukawa's hot spring area, 'Subaru' hot springs is proclaimed as the first hot spring in Japan to have water flowing directly from the hot spring source, as well as boasting a genuine and high quality hot spring. (The water is 100% flowing directly from the source meaning it is not a heated, hydrologic cycle.) There is the free flowing spring and non-heated, hydrologic cycle spring.

☆ This hot spring is a sodium hydrogen carbonate spring meaning it's particularly effective for those with stiff shoulders or sore necks.

☆ The open air bath is accompanied with an area for lying down, so while lying down in the hot spring you can gaze at the stars.

☆ In the past five years the number of foreign tourists has sextupled. In order to facilitate smooth communication, an interpreting device known as a Pocketalk has been introduced.

A message from Hotel Subaru to the readers:



The hot spring pool in hotel 'Subaru'

Every year during the middle of August on the plaza in front of the hotel, four *Odori-hozenkai* (Dance preservation group) groups from the village come together and perform a dance at the summer festival, '*Fureai monogatari*' (Connected stories). If I may borrow the words of Professor Yasuhiro Muto from the Nara Women's University, "Regarding Totsukawa village's *Oodori* festival, in recent years the characteristics of '*Furyuodori*' or wind dancing have been greatly displayed; in 1979 it was designated as an important intangible folk-cultural property.

"Source: "Academic Nara Guide" April, 2009, Showa-do, Yasuhiro Muto



One of the open air baths in hotel 'Subaru'



Hotel 'Subaru's manager, Mr. Miura and the author (In front of the hotel's entrance)

Please enjoy an authentic and wonderful hot spring.

An interview with the Assistant Manager in the Totsukawa Village Town Hall, Industry Division (Tourism Group), Mr. Numahira

Q: Regarding Totsukawa village's tourism, what has been one of the most troubling and serious problems?

A: I would say for tourists it's that it's so hard to get to Totsukawa village.

Q: What has the Totsukawa Village Town Hall been doing so far to tackle this problem?

A: With respect to counteracting the problem, we carried out the bus route cash back campaign from 2014-2018. During the campaign period, if you boarded a local bus and stayed in one of the specified accommodation facilities, then a round trip ticket on the bus was free. The number of visitors increased during the off season of winter.

Q: What measures are you thinking of introducing next?

A: For our next measure we are implementing tourist promotion by striving to cooperate with Osaka prefecture's Sennan city and Wakayama prefecture's Tanabe city. We are striving to attract visitors from the wider Kansai airport area. Also, we are increasing the number of private residents being used as lodging facilities in order to make things more convenient for tourists that come for hiking. Currently, in accommodation facilities efforts are being made to install western style toilets and Wi-Fi; automatic translation devices for transactions are being developed, along with various other efforts.

Tamaki jinja shrine

Tamaki jinja shrine, located over 1000 metres above sea level, has a very long history. Despite not being easy to get to and no matter whether it is the beginning or the end of the year it seems many people come from all over Japan to visit this shrine. At first I thought it was a bit strange, but after actually visiting the shrine I found myself saying "I see" and understanding why so many people come to visit it. Tamaki jinja shrine's surrounding area is home to Nara's oldest cedar tree, 'Jindaisugi' which is said to be about 3000 years old, along with many other large cedar trees; you can really feel the ancient history here.



Can history's growth rings heal people's hearts?

The people who are supporting local promotion



Mr. Numahira and the author (At the UNESCO world heritage stone monument erected in 2004)

The scenery is pretty, but it's difficult to get around, what do the people who live in Totsukawa village think? I was curious,



so I listened to the voices of four residents.



Mrs. Iwamoto who lives in Hatenashi village
(Photograph provided by the Totsukawa Town Village Hall)

★ Presently, in Hatenashi village there are 10 households living there. On one hand the scenery is beautiful, but on the other it seems there are many difficulties to living there without a car. However, in order to decrease the inaccessibility for visitors to the village, the locals have been devising a plan. For example, when I passed in front of the homes of the villagers, I found a rest area which those walking in front of the houses can use to catch a breather. I was really impressed as well as surprised by this display of hospitality.



★ Hotel Subaru's manager, Mr. Miura, a hotel worker with a wealth of experience, who puts effort into Totsukawa village's regional promotion.

On the right hand side you have Hotel Subaru's QR-Code.



★ Mr. Numahira from the Totsukawa Village Town Hall, who kindly gave me information on Totsukawa village, moved back to his hometown to find work after graduating from a college in Kyoto.



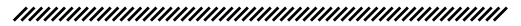
I was truly moved to see the back of this man who had returned from the busy city, to Totsukawa village. I am confident that because there are people like this who love their hometown, Totsukawa village's greenery will continue forever.



Totsukawa village's morning



At 'Kohechi'



★ Mr. and Mrs. Nakaminami, owners of Farm-inn 'Yamamoto,' left an impression on me.

I, a tourist was terrified to see a snake cross the road, but according to Mrs. Nakaminami in daily life here deer, rabbits, monkeys and bears are all things you can catch a glimpse of. I think there are many people who long for the countryside scenery; however along with the beautiful scenery one must imagine the inconveniences and troubles of daily life. If we look at the results of the flooding in the Kii peninsula, the largest peninsula on the main island of Japan, from eight years ago, it seems that due to the disaster there were power and water outages, transportation was suspended and there was a loss of mobile phone signals. However, I was truly moved by the recovery of the area and the wonderful accommodation put forth for tourists.



Mrs. Nakaminami's smile was for me a memory I will not forget.

Chunlan Wu

Totsukawa village's unexplored area

VOYAGER HORS DES SENTIERS BATTUS À TOTSUKAWA

In French we have the saying 'Voyager hors des sentiers battus' or 'Travel off the beaten track and you will go on a journey' in English. It means that if you avoid places where swarms of tourists go, you can find hidden spots.

This time why don't we stray away from Nara prefecture's famous beaten track and go on a journey together to the 'secluded' Totsukawa village, which is brimming with nature.

In order to meet people from Totsukawa village and in order to get to know more about their lives, I spent one night in a farm house inn. The following day I went to KIRIDAS a place where woodwork goods are made and sold by young people who moved to Totsukawa village.

Farm-inn 'Yamamoto'

While staying at the farmhouse surrounded by beautiful nature I was able to interact with the locals and eat delicious food.

When I reached the more than a 100 year old Japanese house, which was surrounded by nature, the sound of the water wheel made me forget the day's tiredness and enabled me to feel refreshed.



After receiving a warm welcome from Mr. and Mrs. Nakaminami who run the farm-inn, 'Yamamoto,' I was shown to my room. This time I stayed in a double separate room that was detached from the main house. There was a bed in one room and a futon in the other. A Japanese *yukata* or bathrobe and towel were left waiting for me. I was very pleased to find that in the detached house there was a toilet with all the latest washing functions attached. The bath in the main house was clean too. There's no need for foreign visitors to worry as there's an explanation written in English on how to use the bath.

After leaving my luggage in my room, I moved to the sitting room and had a delicious home cooked meal prepared by the landlady. I had a Japanese meal with loads of home grown vegetables. I ate preserved food, such as *yubeshi* a dumpling stored in *yuzu*, a type of citrus fruit, for the first time. The *tempura* vegetables, trout and *soumen* noodles were also really good. It was a meal that I had never tasted before.

What's green tourism?

It's the stay tourism phenomenon of spending your free time in a farming environment and living like the people who live there. Along with complying with the needs of the increasing number of tourists to Japan, it's a measure taken to invigorate the rural areas of Japan, which is a widespread practice in Europe. This time I want to introduce two places in Totsukawa village through green tourism.

After dinner I talked slowly with Mr. and Mrs. Nakaminami.

11 years ago, Mr. and Mrs. Nakaminami started the farm-inn as a single facility, in order to provide the children from their local town with an agriculture experience under the name of the 'Children and rural interaction project.' In those days it was a popular project, however, due to the loss of financial aid from the state and the increase in the number of tourists that walk on the World Heritage Site, the '*Kumano Kodo*,' a shift towards accommodation linked to agriculture for tourists occurred. Currently, regarding the people who walk the *Kumano Kodo* and stay in accommodation facilities in the area, half of them are Japanese and the other half are foreigners. Compared to last year, the number of visitors has more than doubled. Among the foreign tourists the majority seem to be from North America, Europe and Australia.

I asked the Nakaminamis how do they communicate with foreigners and they replied that up until recently they only used their mobile phones and gestures to communicate. They just bought an interpreting device three days ago that they then showed me. It's a device that retains more information than a mobile phone and it can interpret from a wide selection of languages. Actually I tried it out and it was able to interpret what I said perfectly from French to Japanese. It's really useful, which means those who cannot speak Japanese do not have to worry.

The Nakaminamis then showed me all the souvenirs that they had been



given from their international guests. Looking at those souvenirs made me realise all the bonds that the Nakaminamis have with people from various countries.

The following morning after having a delicious breakfast, the landlady showed me her vegetable patch. The farm-inn is not just a regular inn, but it's also a facility that allows you to take part in agriculture activities. Depending on the season your experience will differ, this time we picked summer vegetables. While breathing the fresh air, we harvested many fresh vegetables and fruits such as tomatoes, eggplants and cucumbers. We took the vegetables and fruit home with us, being able to eat them was such a fun experience for someone who lives in a city like me.

Although it was only for a short time, thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Nakanami's warm smiles I think my trip to Totsukawa village will stay with me forever. Eating delicious Japanese food whilst being surrounded by such beautiful nature, I was able to interact with the local people of Totsukawa village.

For those who wish to experience something that can only be done in Japan, how about staying in the farm-inn, where you can certainly feel the Japanese hospitality and have different experiences?

Uchino 198, Totsukawa-mura, Yoshino-gun, Nara Prefecture 637-1221

Details :[Homepage](#)

How to reserve :[Kumano Travel](#)



KIRIDAS

96% of Japan's largest village, Totsukawa village is made of forest, making forestry an important industry. As a result of the large scale typhoon that occurred in 2011 and the tremendous losses it caused, Totsukawa village worked hard on a forestry regeneration plan. Based on the thought process of 'It's the people who live in the mountain's duty to protect the mountains,' they have been developing sustainable forestry. Moreover, effort is being put into forestry as a sixth sector industry.

What's the sixth sector industry?

Manufacturers in the agriculture, forestry and fishing industries are not just dealing with production in the areas of forestry and agriculture (Primary sector), but also with the processing and sales (Secondary sector), and the distribution areas (Tertiary sector). A plan that invigorates and places value on rural areas. For more information about the Totsukawa village sixth sector:

<https://www.totsukawaforestry.jp/>

One element of this forestry regeneration plan was the opening of KIRIDAS in 2017.

KIRIDAS, which gets its name from the verb 'kiridasu,' which in Japanese means 'to cut timber' is a facility that displays and sells handmade wooden products as well as furniture made from Totsukawa wood.

KIRIDAS is surrounded by mountains; a beautiful contrast is formed between the bright, white building and the green of the mountains. The building beside KIRIDAS is the workshop. I talked with KIRIDAS' own manager, Mr. Nakayama.



According to Mr. Nakayama the building is being leased from Totsukawa village and the three employees manage it together. As a result of help wanted notices from Totsukawa, Mr. Nakayama who's originally from the Kanto region, the region in the east of Japan that encompasses the greater Tokyo area, moved to Totsukawa village in order to make furniture. Despite not having any experience making furniture, he was able to learn from workers in Totsukawa village.

There are three types of furniture made in KIRIDAS

Furniture in the 「KIRIDAS ORIGINAL」 range are designed by KIRIDAS employees.

Furniture from the 「TOTSUKAWA LIVING」 line are designed by Mr. Eriki Iwakura.

Finally there's the custom made furniture ordered by customers.

All of the furniture is made from Totsukawa's own cedar and cypress wood. Both of which give off such a pleasant scent.

KIRIDAS's furniture's unique cedar and cypress wood make it pretty. The polished designs make for elegant furniture. I recommend this furniture for those who wish to create a warm comfortable interior in their houses. Handmade cutlery, toys among other wooden works are all available for purchase, so for those who wish to buy souvenirs from Totsukawa village, please go to KIRIDAS.

About the event

KIRIDAS carries out events and workshops at different times. Totsukawa village park, a 'Pop-up park' that is opened for a limited time with a wooden playground made from trees from Totsukawa village's urban areas, Totsukawa's forest wood fest and making Christmas reeds are some of the events held. It is through these events that you can experience Totsukawa's wood. There is also a playground made from Totsukawa wood for children.

For more details:

<https://www.totsukawaforestry.jp/projects/park.html>

There is also a cafe attached to KIRIDAS. It was closed when we visited, nevertheless at the weekend delicious drinks and hot sandwiches are available. How about relaxing in KIRIDAS' elegant café while looking at wooden works?

Yamasaki 278, Totsukawa-mura, Yoshino-gun, Nara Prefecture 637-1214
Business hours: 11:00am-17:00pm Saturday/Sunday

Details :[Homepage](#)

Véronique Denis-Laroque

What is 'Na no Ra'?

We're the Coordinators for International Relations (CIR) for Nara prefecture. We work at the International Affairs Division of the Prefectural Government. Our aim is to deepen international exchange between Nara and other countries and help to build bridges between them. 'Na no Ra' is made up of articles about places in the prefecture that we, as foreign residents ourselves, visited and thought would be of interest to both visitors from overseas and the local Nara community. We hope it will be of some interest and will serve to help everyone discover the charm that Nara holds!



A word from our editors

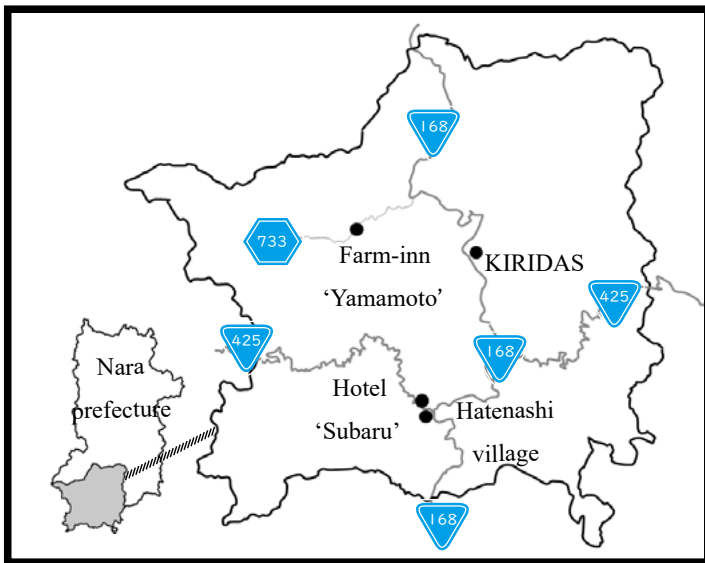
Chunlan Wu

Like the people I was able to interact with through interviews, and through the love that the people from Totsukawa village have and the effort that they put into invigorating their village, Totsukawa village was able to join the ranks of 'one of Japan's most beautiful villages.' In addition to this, the beautiful scenery and the kind hospitality may have made it an area that attracts a lot of people.

Véronique Denis-Laroque

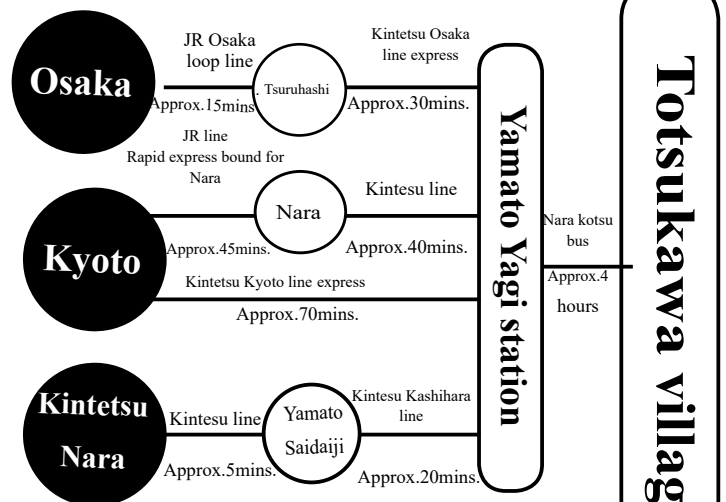
Before living in Nara prefecture, Totsukawa was a place that I didn't know much about and as a result it piqued my interest. I was really happy to interact with the local people there and to touch the lives of those that live there. Next, I think I would like to walk one of Nara prefecture's world heritage sites, the Kumano Kodo, which traverses through Totsukawa village. When I do so, I will definitely stay in the farm-inn.

Totsukawa village



Access

Access by Train



By car

- From Osaka : Approx. 2 hours 20 minutes (using route 168)
- From Kyoto : Approx. 3 hours (using route 168)
- From Nara: Approx. 2 hours 10 minutes (using route 168)

Special Thanks

Na no ra would like to sincerely thank the people of Totsukawa village and all those who assisted in the creation of this issue, including the Totsukawa Village Town Hall, Hotel Subaru, Farm-inn 'Yamamoto' and KIRIDAS.

'Na no Ra'

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For opinions on or questions relating to this publication, please contact Dep. of the International Affairs, Nara Prefectural Government.

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