

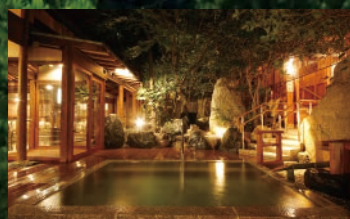


三徳山

A journey of ascetic practice and healing

MISASA

三朝温泉



A National Treasure along the pilgrims' path

The world's leading radon hot springs

Mount Mitoku ♦ Misasa Onsen



Mount Mitoku

Prologue

Gyō
(Ascetic practice)



Misasa —the setting for this story of a journey of ascetic practice and healing—is located in central Tottori Prefecture, which sits along the Sea of Japan (San'in Region, western Japan).

With a population of less than 6,000 residents living in a forested area of 233.52km², Misasa is blessed with an abundance of nature and treasures. Two particularly outstanding treasures are Mount Mitoku, regarded as a sacred Shugendō (mountain asceticism) site for 1,300 years; and the famous Misasa Onsen hot springs resort, which boasts an 850-year history.

Purify your mind and body through ascetic practice at Mount Mitoku, and regain your sense of self through soothing hot springs at Misasa Onsen. This is the travel story offered by Misasa, the wish of townsfolk to welcome travelers.

Let's follow the etiquette of ascetics, who purify their minds and bodies with Misasa hot springs water before setting out for Mount Mitoku, and unravel the story of these two treasures.

MISASA



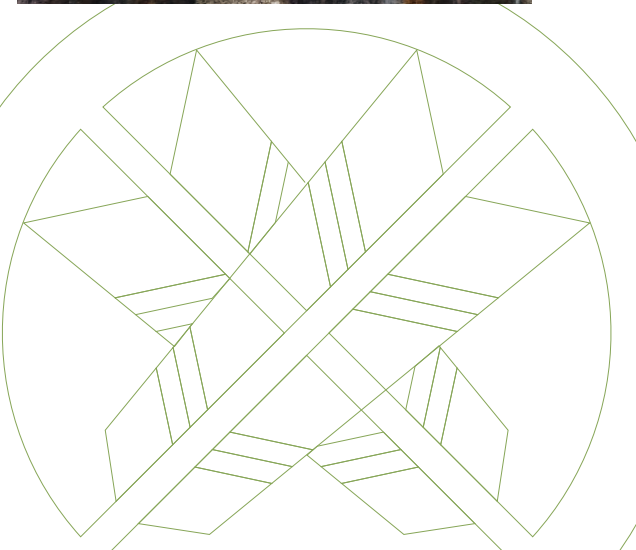
The origins of Misasa Onsen: a samurai and a white wolf

Around the mid-12th century, a samurai named Samanosuke Ōkubo was making a pilgrimage to Mount Mitoku when he spotted an old white wolf and drew an arrow to shoot it. However, thinking that the old wolf could be the incarnation of a deity or Buddha, he allowed it to escape. One night, the Bodhisattva Myōken appeared to Samanosuke in a dream. In appreciation of his helping the white wolf, the Bodhisattva told Samanosuke the location of a hot spring, instructing him to use the spring water to heal people's illness and suffering. Since the wellspring was located at the foot of an old camphor tree, the *onsen* was called "Kabuyu" (with "kabu" meaning roots or stump) and became the wellspring for Misasa Onsen.

Located on the eastern edge of the Misasa Onsen resort area, the Kabuyu facility has public baths, foot baths, and drinking fountains, and it receives an endless stream of visitors. Statues of Samanosuke Ōkubo and the white wolf face each other, quietly watching over the birthplace of Misasa Onsen.

Misasa Shrine—where the guardian deities of Misasa Onsen reside—is also dedicated to Samanosuke Ōkubo, and it has hot spring water flowing on its grounds. Said to be good for purifying one's hands before praying and good for drinking to pray for good health, this "holy water" is beyond compare, even in Japan.

The crest of Misasa Shrine is two arrow feathers intersecting each other. The design reflects the story of how Samanosuke Ōkubo—an expert archer—purposefully missed two shots to allow the white wolf to escape.



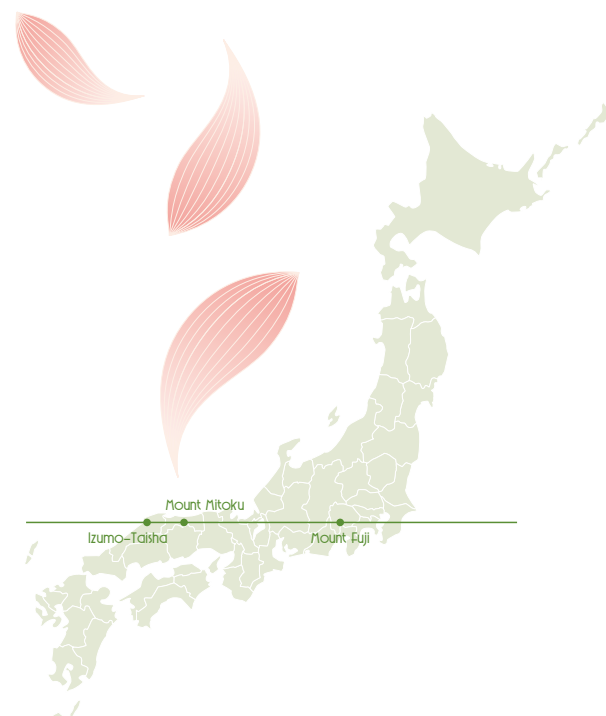


Everything began with a single flower petal that landed on Mount Mitoku

The majority of Japan's land area is mountainous. For Japanese people, mountains are both places to make a livelihood through hunting and gathering, and objects of faith and fear as "places of the gods". Shugendō (mountain asceticism) was born through the connection of mountain worship, Shintō (the indigenous religion of Japan that believes that gods dwell in all natural phenomena), and Buddhism. Practitioners of Shugendō, or mountain ascetics, endeavor to draw close to the realm of gods and buddhas by hiding themselves away deep in the mountains and throwing themselves into strict ascetic training.

Shugendō is said to have been founded by En no Gyōja. One day he threw three lotus petals into the air with a prayer that they would fall on sacred Shintō/Buddhist locations. One of the petals landed on Mount Mitoku, and so En no Gyōja established it as a place to be used for ascetic training, taking the first step in the mountain's long history as a sacred Shugendō site.

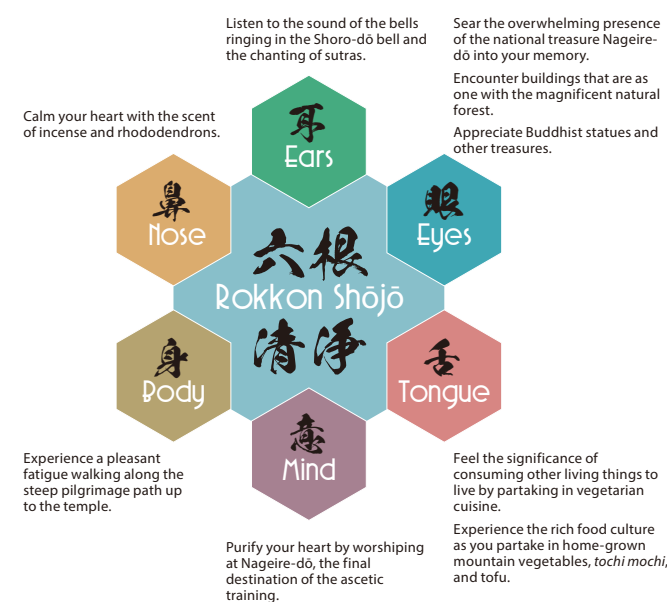
Although En no Gyōja was an actual person who lived in the 7th - 8th centuries, he is said to have had a husband-and-wife pair of demons as servants, and there are various legends about him, including the "Legend of the Lotus Petals" mentioned above. A highlight of visiting Mount Mitoku for worship is Nageire-dō ("Thrown-in temple"), which En no Gyōja is said to have "thrown into" a cave in the side of a sheer cliff. Nageire-dō is perched halfway up 899.9-meter-high Mount Mitoku and cannot be accessed without navigating a steep and precipitous pilgrimage path, hence its reputation as "Japan's most exciting national treasure".



Nageire-dō is located on a ley line running east-west at a latitude of 35 degrees 23 minutes north. There are over 10 sacred sites dotted along this ley line, including Mount Fuji and the Izumo Taisha shrine. The sun rises and sets along this line during the spring and autumn equinoxes. The glorious sunrise viewed from the top of a high mountain is called *goraikō*, and it can be said that for Japanese people—who have a history of worshipping the rising sun above all else—the location of the Nageire-dō holds special meaning.

Purification of the six roots of perception

六根清淨



Cleansing the mind and body

Rokkon Shōjō ("purification of the six roots of perception") is the principle behind Mount Mitoku's asceticism.

The "six roots of perception" refers to the organs that control the five senses (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body) and the "mind".

People inevitably see, hear, and interact with things that are bad. They make mistakes, and their minds may fill with bad thoughts. The Buddhist concept of cleansing and purifying the six roots of perception in order to eliminate such obsessions or desires can also be seen in Shintō prayers.

Ascetic practitioners have long eliminated interactions with secular society in order to avoid impurity, cleansing and purifying the six roots of perception by climbing the precipitous face of Mount Mitoku and offering prayers as they throw themselves into strict ascetic training.

Mind you, when we say ascetic training, what is required now is no longer grueling acts such as standing under a freezing-cold, pounding waterfall. By sincerely accepting everything you experience on Mount Mitoku as ascetic training, we hope that you will experience the sensation of your six roots of perception being purified.



Main Hall of Sanbutsu-ji
The temple building was constructed in the mid-9th century and three statues of Buddhas were enshrined inside. The Main Hall is the starting point for the Mount Mitoku pilgrimage path. First of all, purify the "nose" of your six roots of perception with the scent of incense and rhododendrons. The ascetic training on the way to the Nageire-dō begins here.

Following the pilgrimage paths

Gyō
(Ascetic practice)



Climbing up the temple path connecting Misasa Onsen and Mount Mitoku, you come to a *torii* gate, which is the entrance to a shrine. Originating in India, Buddhism was brought to Japan via the Korean Peninsula in the 6th century and eventually came to connect and coexist with Japan's ancient religion of Shintō. With four temples—Sanbutsu-ji, Rinkō-in, Shōzen-in, and Kaijō-in—Mount Mitoku is an example of this fusion of Buddhism and Shintō, which is symbolized by the *torii* gate that greets visitors.

Cross the Shikuri Bridge behind the Main Hall of Sanbutsu-ji Temple and follow the pilgrimage path leading to Nageire-dō, "Japan's most exciting national treasure".

Instead of wearing monk's robes, dress yourself for ascetic training by draping a monk's stole inscribed with "Purification of the Six Roots of Perception" around your neck.

In the West, people tend to regard mountain-climbing as an act of conquering the mountain. For Japanese people, however, mountains are simultaneously objects of fear and places for living where they can receive the blessings and power of nature, and climb mountains with a sense of gratitude and respect.



Hanging on to the chains, climb the rock face to the top where you will be greeted with magnificent views from the Monju-dō Hall.



The *torii* gate standing over the temple path was rebuilt in 1864, at the end of the Edo Period.



The first difficult spot you will encounter on the pilgrimage path is Kazura-zaka. Use the roots of the trees covering the steep slope as footholds as you climb. The next tough spot is Kusari-zaka.



Once every three years, a ritual called the Miyuki Procession is held in spring. The gods are carried out of the temple and paraded around in portable shrines, bestowing blessings on the people. Departing from the *Otabisho* (resting place for traveling shrines) in front of Sanbutsu-ji Temple's Treasure Hall, the procession and its 200-or-so participants dressed in samurai and other period costumes makes its way through the *onsen* district, presenting a scene that might cause onlookers to feel as though they had travelled back in time to medieval Japan. In 2017, 10 international students from Okayama University participated, joining the local townspeople in creating a colorful procession scene straight out of a picture scroll.



Held in autumn every year, the Mount Mitoku Fire Festival enables you to experience the world of Shugendō. The highlight of the festival is the "fire-walking ritual", in which it is believed that participants can have their prayers answered by walking barefoot through the fire, even if they have not worshipped at Nageire-dō. This ritual purifies the mind of the six roots of perception. It is said that those who have repeatedly committed sins cannot walk through the flames without being burnt.



Purify the "ears" of your six roots of perception with the solemn sound of the temple bell. After passing the Shoro-dō, you will see two sheer cliffs known as Umanose (Horseback Ridge) and Ushinose (Cow back Ridge).

Climb a steep slope by using tree roots to pull your way up. Climb up a rocky incline using chains. You can enjoy these as athletic experiences, but we hope you always keep in mind that these activities are a part of ascetic training.

Everything that you encounter along the pilgrimage path purifies your six roots of perception with a pleasant fatigue from overcoming the difficult spots: the Monju-dō Hall, Jizo-dō Hall, Shoro-dō bell and four other places used for ascetic training standing along the path; the scent of incense and flowers; the sound of bells; the magnificent natural forest; and the view from the hall stage. During the hour-or-so long trek up the pilgrimage path, you will never once catch sight of Nageire-dō.

After repeated ascetic training, you will finally arrive at the national treasure Nageire-dō. Perched in a craggy spot on a precipitous cliff supported by pillars of various lengths, the hall looks as if it is floating on air, radiating an awesome presence. Although the temple cannot be entered and must be worshipped from a slight distance, we hope that Nageire-dō's spectacular beauty and appearance will be engraved on your heart.

En no Gyōja is said to have thrown the temple into Mount Mitoku in 706, but later research revealed that it was in fact built around the 11th–12th centuries. However, the mystery of how it was built remains unsolved to this day.



If you are unable to visit Nageire-dō by following the pilgrimage path, it is also possible to view it at a distance from a spot at the foot of the mountain. This is the only spot where it is possible to see Nageire-dō without actually climbing Mount Mitoku.



At mountain temples, it is possible to experience Buddhist vegetarian cuisine. In compliance with Buddhism's prohibition on taking a life or stimulating worldly desires, no animal-derived ingredients or green onions are used in the preparation of Buddhist vegetarian cuisine. In Buddhism, both eating and preparing food are important parts of training. Purify the "tongue" of your six roots of perception as an opportunity to reflect on the fact that your life is sustained by the lives of others, both plants and animals.



The restaurant at the foot of the mountain serves dishes made with mountain vegetables, *tochi mochi*, and other local ingredients. Experiencing the richness of the food culture through consumption of local ingredients and dishes also purifies the tongue. Time-and-labor-intensive, *tochi mochi* rice cakes are made from horse chestnut conkers that have been processed to remove the bitter taste. The horse chestnut tree is the flora emblem of Misasa.



Shōzen-in is lodging for priests and pilgrims at the foot of Mount Mitoku. The building's thatched roof and other elements recreate its original appearance, and the essence of temple/shrine architecture created by modern-day artisans can be seen throughout the structure.

Healing of the Six Senses Rokkan Chiyu

Soothe your mind and body

After finishing your ascetic training and coming back down Mount Mitoku, relax your mind and body at the Misasa Onsen hot springs resort.

The history of Misasa Onsen has been woven into one where it is a place for people to stay when visiting Mount Mitoku.

The “Healing of the Six Senses” offered by Misasa Onsen is an original travel style inspired by “Purification of the Six Roots of Perception”. It incorporates the hope of the people of Misasa Onsen that, by relieving and healing your mental and physical tensions after thorough purification through ascetic training on Mount Mitoku, you will be able to somewhat “return” to the world and regain your sense of self before going back to your everyday life.

The “six senses” refers to the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste) and the “spirit”. Soaking in Misasa Onsen’s water and seeing the sights of the hot springs district will soothe your mind and body. All you need to do is enjoy Misasa Onsen’s attractions to the fullest.

How your six senses will heal is up to you and is achieved by opening up your mind and having a variety of experiences, among which you may even feel you’ve become a child again. Each individual’s “growth” born of their own feelings make each experience unique.



A rare onsen resort
Soak, inhale,
or drink— whatever
you prefer!



香
Smell

Soak

触
Touch

心
Spirit

Soaking in hot springs water enables radon to be absorbed directly into the body through the skin. Furthermore, the air undergoes slight ionization due to the ionizing action of the tiny amounts of radiation, generating negative ions that produce similar refreshing effects to therapeutic walks in the forest. There are three public baths in the town: Tamawari no Yu, Kabuyu, and Kawaraburo. If you feel a little embarrassed about bathing together with strangers, you could easily enjoy one of the town’s four footbaths.



触
Touch

心
Spirit



A mineral poultice is another *onsen* therapy utilizing Misasa’s hot springs water. Mineral mud warmed in the *onsen* is wrapped in a towel and placed on the affected body area to warm it and alleviate symptoms. This *onsen* therapy is highly effective for back pain, joint pain, and rheumatism. It is also used to treat patients at Misasa Onsen Hospital, where one can also be soothed by the smiling faces of the enthusiastic staff.



Inhale

By inhaling the steam rising from the hot spring water you can easily achieve the hormesis effect. Because radon evaporates at the wellspring and disperses through the atmosphere, entering the human body through inhalation, its antioxidant function is heightened, contributing to the prevention of aging and lifestyle diseases. In the town there are two facilities with radon steam baths especially for “inhaling”. This method is recommended if you are reluctant to bathe with strangers.

香
Smell

触
Touch

心
Spirit



Drink

Drinking the hot spring water is the most effective method for absorbing radon. Wellspring water that has just bubbled out of the ground contains high amounts of radon (which has not yet dispersed) and is also rich in minerals, and it is said to increase blood in the gastric mucosa. In the town there are three public places for drinking hot spring water, and it is often possible to drink it at some of the inns.

味
Taste

心
Spirit





In Curie Park at the entrance to Misasa Onsen, visitors are met by a statue of the loving scientist couple Pierre and Marie Curie.

International friendships

Over the years, Misasa has built strong friendships with France and Taiwan. Being a radon rich hot springs town was the catalyst that began ties with France.

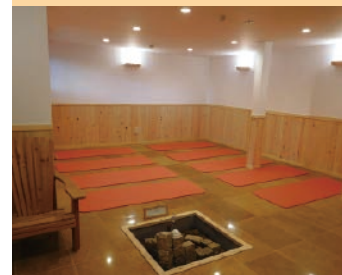
Since 1951 Misasa has been holding the Curie Festival every summer as a means of expressing gratitude for the blessings of hot springs and honoring the woman who discovered radium, Marie Curie. The townspeople also respect France, where she conducted her research and met her husband Pierre Curie. And Misasa has had exchanges with France for many years.

In 1990, Misasa became sister cities with Lamalou-les-Bains, a hot springs resort area in southern France. Friendly exchange has continued between the two towns, with junior high school students from Misasa visiting Lamalou-les-Bains. Since 1993, Coordinators for International Relations have been dispatched to introduce French culture and coordinate exchanges between the two towns.

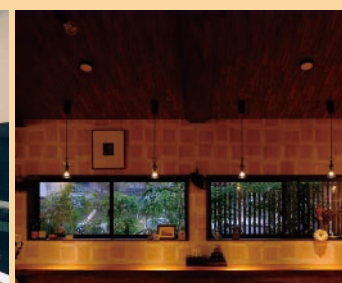
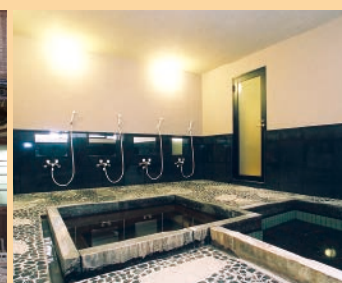
The first exchanges between Misasa and Taiwan began in 1997 through pear tree exportations to the city of Taichung. Then, in 2007, Misasa officially became a sister city with the Shigang District in Taichung City. Ever since, there have been numerous exchanges between Misasa and Taiwan, for instance, official delegations and internships of Taiwanese students in Misasa Onsen's *ryokan*, as well as Misasa's junior high school students visiting Taichung. These continued exchanges between inhabitants contribute greatly to the friendship between Taiwan and Misasa.



Located close to Curie Plaza is the Koitani ("Love Valley") Bridge, which was given the name "Vallée de l'amour" by the then-French Ambassador to Japan in 1987.



Scan here to find the perfect inn for you.



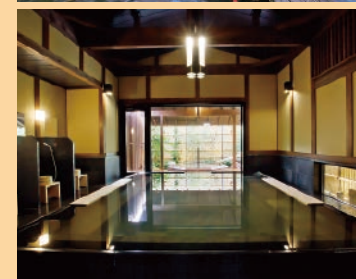
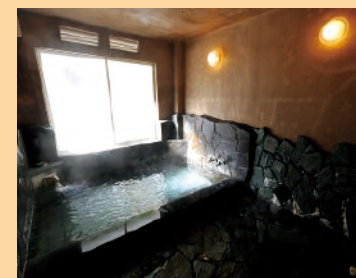
Accommodation Pleasures



Misasa Onsen's 20 or so accommodation facilities each have rich and unique characters—they take pride in their cuisine; in their gardens; they provide home-style hospitality; some are good for long-term stays; some have annexes enabling private stays; there are resort hotel-style inns; and there are even inns whose buildings are designated as cultural properties; and more!

Even considering only the cuisine, each inn prides itself on its own original taste and style, with some providing richly varied buffets, and others serving wild game cuisine unique to Japan.

Naturally, all of the inns boast baths brimming with world-class radon hot spring water. Again, there is a wide variety of bathing facilities in terms of size, amenities, and atmosphere: large baths with entertainment qualities; family baths providing a sense of privacy; outdoor baths exuding a rustic atmosphere; mist saunas, *ondol* floor heaters, and more! You are sure to find an inn that will enrich your journey towards healing.





Equipped with shooting galleries, smart ball (Japanese pinball), and other fun entertainment, amusement centers were once a fixture of Japanese *onsen* culture. The smart ball machines at the Izumi Gorakujō Amusement Place are the oldest machines remaining in Japan today. Still in operation, these smart ball machines continue to entertain visitors every day.

心
Spirit

触
Touch



The only sake brewery remaining in Misasa Onsen, Fujii Shuzō allows visitors to taste their award-winning aged sake and sweet amazake. You can add ginger, green tea, or coffee to the non-alcoholic *amazake* to enjoy different flavors.



味
Taste

香
Smell

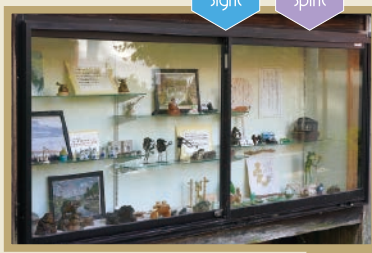
心
Spirit

観
Sight

心
Spirit



Strip shows were once a form of entertainment offered in hot springs districts, but Misasa Onsen's "New Lucky" strip club regrettably closed its doors around 10 years ago. The club's alluring atmosphere has been preserved, however, and is used nowadays for *rakugo* (comic storytelling) performances and silent movie screenings. It has also been used as a shooting location for photographic collections.



Yu no Machi Gallery displays carefully assembled collections in windows, transforming corners of inns and stores into mini-museums. There are about 20 displays dotted around the town, mainly along the main street. Look for the orange signboards!

観
Sight

心
Spirit

聴
Hearing

観
Sight

心
Spirit



Kajikawa's Barbershop and Museum displays art nouveau, Victorian-era shaving mugs, barber chairs, and other barbershop equipment. It is the sole barber museum in Japan.

Strolling around the retro onsen district

Misasa's *onsen* district retains a colorful retro ambience from the 1960s–70s. This atmospheric streetscape evokes a sense of nostalgia in Japanese people in their 50s or older, while also appearing novel to the young generation. Let go and allow yourself to enjoy the relaxed atmosphere of the *onsen* district by taking a leisurely stroll, perhaps even feeling you've become a child again.



What shall we do after dinner?

Spring

Japan's national flower, the cherry blossom, paints the *onsen* district pale pink.



心
Spirit

観
Sight



This traditional festival expresses appreciation for the blessings of hot springs and prays for a bountiful harvest and prosperous business. The climax is a tug-of-war called "Jinsho". Woven 80-meter-long ropes gathered from Mount Mitoku, the two huge east-west ropes weigh 2 tons each and are pulled in an east-west direction.

Autumn

Autumn leaves paint the *onsen* district in vibrant colors. The autumnal leaves in the Oshika Valley in the southern foothills of Mount Mitoku are especially beautiful.



観
Sight

心
Spirit



観
Sight

聴
Hearing

心
Spirit

The Oshika Valley is designated as a National Place of Scenic Beauty. The valley's numerous waterfalls, strangely shaped rocks, and huge boulders create a mystical landscape. The season of fresh greenery is also beautiful.

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Epilogue



Misasa's treasures: Mount Mitoku, Misasa Onsen, and Misasa's townspeople.

With an unmatched love of conversation, people cannot stop chatting once they start. People aspiring to make Misasa Onsen the Baden-Baden (Germany) of Japan, people who proposed the Yu no Machi Gallery to make strolling around town even more fun, and people pouring energy into protecting fireflies and Kajika frogs.... Aspiring to become a Misasa Onsen specialist *radiumelier* ("radium sommelier"), people from various industries—not only people employed at accommodation facilities—have undergone training.

The inhabitants want Misasa to become even more widely known and they want to make Misasa even better. Their hearts are overflowing with love and passion for Misasa.

Thanks to the international students studying at Okayama University and the "Coordinators for International Relations" system, the warm people of Misasa often exchange with people from various countries, building long lasting international relationships. They will be more than happy to make new friends!

Although few local residents speak English, you can try to strike up conversations using a translation app or other tools.

Warm interpersonal exchange is sure to further deepen and enrich your journey of asceticism and healing in Misasa, ensuring it to be an experience you will never forget.

We would love to meet you in Misasa



1 Enkeigekijō Kurayoshi Figure Museum

Originally an elementary school, the building was renovated and reborn as a museum thanks to the desire of local residents who didn't want to see the aging school building demolished. Because circular school buildings can be constructed efficiently on small land sites, they became trendy during the 1950s and 1960s, when around 100 circular school buildings were constructed nationwide.



2 Shirakabe Storehouses (White Wall District)

This streetscape looks straight out of the frontispiece of Volume 1 of the manga *A Distant Neighborhood* by Jirō Taniguchi

Short trips from Misasa

Located in the central region of Tottori Prefecture, Misasa provides easy access to Tottori's renowned sightseeing spots. Even sites such as the Tottori Sand Dunes and Gōshō Aoyama (the author of *Detective Conan*) Manga Factory are within an hour's travelling distance. Misasa is located within the Daisen-Oki National Park. Blessed with spectacular natural scenery, the park offers a full range of walking, trekking, and cycling courses.

We particularly wish to recommend Kurayoshi, Misasa's neighboring town, which is about 20 to 30 minutes away by car or bus. After immersing yourself in Misasa's *onsen* district retro atmosphere, enjoy another kind of retro in Kurayoshi's shopping streets.

Merchant houses built during the Edo (1603–1868) and Meiji (1868–1912) periods and earthen warehouses with white stucco walls line the riverbanks; this district was the setting of the manga *A Distant Neighborhood* by Jirō Taniguchi. And it was so popular in Europe that it was made into a live-action French-Belgian film in 2010. Here you can stroll around the exact townscape shown in these works, enjoying their worldview.

The Enkeigekijō Kurayoshi Figure Museum is truly the holy land for figurines. Here you can see not only displays of Cool Japan's symbolic figures, but you can also try your hand at making a figure for yourself. The setting is Japan's oldest existing circular school building (completed in 1955). Also notice the building's unique features such as the spiral staircase that children boisterously ran up and down in days past and the fan-shaped classrooms that recreate the atmosphere of its days as a school.



3 Tottori Sand Dunes



4 Gōshō Aoyama Manga Factory

Misasa Onsen Ryokan & Hotels Cooperative

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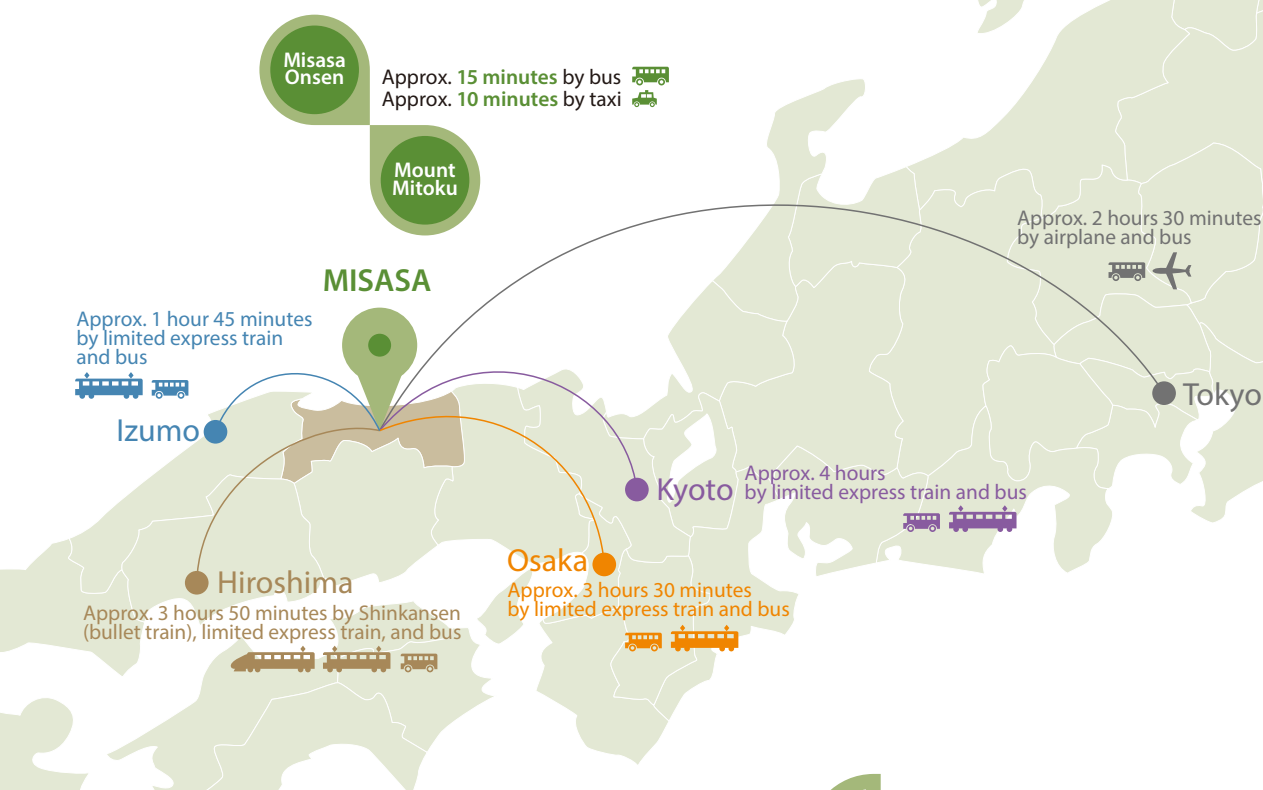
Official site



Youtube



Instagram



Access

(Does not include waiting time)