



THE AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IN JAPAN

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THE VOICE OF GLOBAL BUSINESS IN JAPAN

A portrait of Akio Mimura, an elderly man with glasses, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a patterned tie. He is standing in front of a background of green bamboo. The portrait is framed by a red border.

Akio Mimura

ACCJ Person of the Year

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Membership information in the fall/winter 2023 issue reflects Q4 records.

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OF COMMERCE IN JAPAN
THANKS OUR PRESIDENT'S
CIRCLE MEMBERS FOR THEIR
ONGOING SUPPORT**



Bridging Nations

On 75 years of shaping US–Japan business relations and our evolving role.

The 75th anniversary of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) is an important time to reflect on all we've accomplished, how far we've come, and how much more there is to achieve.

The ACCJ was founded in 1948 by 40 companies. Today, the chamber comprises nearly 600 companies and 3,100 members.

The mandate 75 years ago was clear: to further commerce between the United States and Japan, to support Japan's economic recovery following World War II, and to improve the international business environment in Japan. Today, the two nations have one of the world's most important alliances. Based on shared values, the bilateral relationship is the cornerstone of peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

As we find ourselves in a much more complex world—one that is changing rapidly—the ACCJ must be agile and adapt if we are to continue serving our purpose and our members.

State of the Chamber

Over the past year, through strong advocacy and high-caliber speaker and networking events, the ACCJ has proven why it is known as the voice of global business in Japan. This is a tribute to all the contributions of our members, who are the lifeblood of the chamber and drive its activities.

We've made significant progress on the four priorities tied to the ACCJ core pillars that I outlined at the start of the year:

- Maximize advocacy impact
- Increase in-person networking
- Improve committee efficiency
- Deepen community service

We've seen great strides in key advocacy areas: strengthening the US–Japan security and economic partnership, digital transformation, and promoting diverse talent, including marriage equality in Japan.

Our many engagements with US and Japanese government officials—including during both the DC and Diet Doorknocks—

highlighted how policymakers trust the ACCJ as a resource on US and international business issues in Japan. We've strengthened relations with stakeholders across both sides of the Pacific and continue to make our positions heard on key issues impacting US–Japan relations.

Act Fast and Be Decisive

As I mentioned, the world is changing and the ACCJ must continuously improve itself to remain effective. I started my career as a fighter pilot, and the key to winning in aerial combat is to make decisions in an ever-changing environment. We called it the OODA loop—observe, orient, decide, act. The pilot with the faster cycle was usually the winner. The same applies to business and the chamber.

The US–Japan relationship is at its highest point ever. Good times like this present the best opportunities to get the most done and have the difficult conversations, and the ACCJ and our members have a critical and relevant role to play.

This year also marks the end of my presidency. I thank all my fellow board members, committee leaders, and ACCJ members for their contributions and support. Personally, and professionally, it has been a privilege to work alongside you. I learned so much from our members and made many friends.

I'm honored to pass the reins to Victor Osumi. I know he will do an amazing job as your next ACCJ president.

I strongly encourage more members—especially our newest members—to participate and get involved. We need your passion, expertise, and voice to continue effecting much-needed change.

Seven-and-a-half decades after its founding, the chamber continues to thrive and grow, and I'm confident that, whatever challenges lie ahead, all of you will advance our strong 75-year legacy and further enhance the US–Japan business environment as well as our alliance and friendship.

I wish you all a safe, healthy, and prosperous New Year, and look forward to participating in the ACCJ's success in the future! ■



Om Prakash
ACCJ president

Bishop Scholar

Matthew Trani, the first recipient of the Bishop Family Memorial Scholarship, shares what the opportunity means to him.

Last year, on Christmas morning, Bill Bishop, his wife Izumi, and their daughter Sophianna lost their lives. The tragic death of Bishop, a long-time member of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ), shook the community. Over 50 years, the South Dakota native became a key part of the US business community in Japan and a devoted leader of the chamber's Healthcare Committee.

In his memory, the ACCJ and the United States–Japan Bridging Foundation launched the Bishop Family Memorial Scholarship Fund in July. The scholarship supports students who will come from the US to study at Temple University, Japan Campus, where Bishop was a lecturer and board member.

The first Bishop Scholar, Matthew Trani, arrived in September and, in addition to studying at Temple, began his internship at the chamber. *The ACCJ Journal* sat down with Trani to learn about his path to Japan and where he hopes the opportunity will lead him.

Tell us about your background.

I'm from Long Island, New York, and have been living there for the past 21 years. I went to high school and college about 15 minutes from my home.

Originally, I enrolled in Hofstra University to study music and political science. I got into music about 13 years ago, being strongly suggested to do so by my parents. I joined a chorus and learned to sing. That turned into an overall love of music. In high school, my voice matured, and it was good, so I ended up singing at a lot of functions. I performed at Carnegie Hall and sometimes on TV. And just this month I got to perform at the ACCJ Charity Ball.

When it was time to enter university, I was shopping around for scholarships and got a decent-sized one, along with a grant, from Hofstra. So, I went there. But other than the fact that I was a performance major, I really didn't know what my plans were from there.

What got you interested in Japan?

I had to choose a language course, and my mom had taken Japanese at Villanova University. She recommended that I take it. I ended up studying Japanese for three semesters. In my third semester, I decided to switch to a double major in Japanese and music while keeping my minor in political science. I intended to study abroad or work in Japan after college anyway, but I wasn't sure how it was going to line up.



I was thinking about applying to several places like the University of Tokyo, Kyoto University, Waseda University, and Keio University, but I ran into Temple University, Japan Campus and ended up going there because the college transfer between US universities is much easier.

How did you become a Bishop Scholar?

My major adviser in the US recommended that I apply for the Bridging Scholarship through both the American Association of Teachers of Japan and the United States–Japan Bridging Foundation, which partners with other organizations in Japan, including the ACCJ. I got a notice of acceptance in mid-June. With it came an intriguing email from Tom Mason, executive director of the Bridging Foundation. He said: "I have

an opportunity that I think you might like. Reply back with a time either tomorrow or the day after so that we can do a Zoom call.” There were no other details.

I thought, “What else could this be?” I already knew that I had been awarded the Bridging Scholarship. On the call, [Mason] explained that the ACCJ was looking to establish a new scholarship in remembrance of Bill Bishop. Because of Bishop’s activity as a board member and lecturer, the scholar was to be a Temple University student in Japan, and they wanted to award me the scholarship.

What are your first impressions of the ACCJ?

I would say the interactions are very community focused, even among staff. Everybody looks out for each other, and they want you to push yourself, but not too hard. I can learn a lot and be able to work in ways that I hadn’t previously. And I like that the chamber is not really partisan in any way. They’re about what they can do to best support member businesses in Japan and the lives of foreigners as a whole.

What do you want to focus on?

I have been very involved in assisting at events but, given my background in political science, I would like to be more involved in external affairs. Generally speaking, I want to get more people’s opinions on the

organization and the greater business community in Japan. Events are the best way to do that, and I think I’m already there in some respects.

Has there been a favorite event?

I really enjoyed the How Technology is Driving Innovation in Healthcare event. I found it interesting despite not being involved in that industry at all. I think, sometimes, not being involved makes it more interesting, because you don’t really know what the new innovations in those industries are. The event gives you a glimpse into what’s being worked on that you otherwise wouldn’t know about.

What do you most want to gain from the internship?

Number one is making new connections. I think I’ve been doing that and, fortunately, I have a lot of time to continue doing so. Second is an understanding of day-to-day operations. I had never worked in an office environment before the ACCJ, and I want to get a sense of how that works. ■

Trani will intern at the ACCJ until April 2024 and is expected to graduate from Hofstra University in May after completing his studies at Temple University, Japan Campus.



Trani performing at the ACCJ Charity Ball on December 2 at the Hilton Tokyo.

Photo: MediaSense K.K.



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1. The 16th Chubu Champagne Ball and Awards Evening was held on November 17 at the Hilton Nagoya. This year's theme was Wild, Wild West!
2. From left: Nuala Connolly, Simone Thomsen, Steve Briggs, Lavanya Wadgaonkar, and Haruko Watanabe were panelists on Day 3 of the ACCJ Kansai Diversity & Inclusion Summit Series 2023: Unleashing the Power of Inclusion on November 28 at the InterContinental Hotel Osaka.
3. A Night of Stars and Stripes Celebration: ACCJ Celebrates the Fourth of July was attended by many special guests from the US and Japanese governments.
4. From left: ACCJ President Om Prakash, Ireland Japan Chamber of Commerce (IJCC) President Yoshihiro Tsuchiya, and Irish Ambassador to Japan Damien Cole toast at the ACCJ-IJCC joint networking event at Ambassador Cole's residence on September 28.
5. US Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel joined leaders from the ACCJ-Chubu chapter and Chubu government officials on July 31 to discuss resumption of direct travel from the Chubu region to the United States.
6. Industry leaders listen to pitches at the ACCJ Healthcare x Digital 2023 competition at the Osaka Nakanoshima Museum of Art on December 1.



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7. Jesper Koll presented Japan Outlook and Opportunities: Ambitious Re-Imagination with his signature flair on September 4 at Tokyo American Club.
8. The ACCJ welcomed New Jersey First Lady Tammy Murphy to the chamber's Tokyo office at Cambridge Innovation Center on October 17 to discuss the role of women in the workplace.
9. Minister of State for Economic Security Sanae Takaichi (center) and US Deputy Chief of Mission Raymond Greene (fourth left) with ACCJ leaders during the Security Clearances Event at the White & Case Tokyo offices on September 22.
10. Tenth-grade Japanese language and literature students at Nagoya International School hosted the charity fund presentation ceremony on November 7, giving appreciation for the ¥4.5 million received from the ACCJ-Chubu Walkathon.
11. ACCJ leaders met with Japanese business leaders as part of a DC Doorknock debriefing with Keizai Doyukai, the Japan Association of Corporate Executives, at the Industry Club of Japan Hall on September 28.

Shining Bright

Diamond Charity Ball celebrates the ACCJ's 75th anniversary.



Barbara Hancock
Chair



Kevin Naylor
Vice-chair



Ryan Watson
Vice-chair

Members of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) and guests gathered at the Hilton Tokyo in Shinjuku on December 2 for one of the chamber's largest annual events. And this edition, the Diamond Charity Ball, offered a chance to celebrate a major milestone—the chamber's 75th anniversary—while also raising funds for charity.

The exceptional venue, amazing culinary offerings, spectacular entertainment, stellar selection of fine wine and spirits, and expansive silent and live auctions and raffle helped us achieve our goal.

Jesper Koll and Nahoko Bolden emceed, and performers included Marcus Pittman and the High Roller Horns (featuring the Q Factor G.N.P.) and Wakiri, a group of passionate artists comprising drummer and dancer Akira Katogi, *shamisen* player and composer

Etsuro On, and Shunsuke Kimura, a Japanese composer who plays flute and *tsugaru-shamisen*. ACCJ intern and Bishop Scholar Matthew Trani also shared his singing talents.

Together with the ACCJ staff, the Charity Ball Committee—Barbara Hancock, Kevin Naylor, Ryan Watson, Tomomi Fujita, Sonia Dhillon Marty, and William Titus—worked diligently to organize the event.

But success would not have been possible without the invaluable support of our generous sponsors, enthusiastic attendees, and the many individuals who took part in our online raffle and auction.

The committee extends its deepest gratitude to our sponsors and the ACCJ community for making a big difference in our ability to help those in need. We are grateful to each and every person involved, and extend a huge thank you to all! ■

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Temple University Japan Campus
Yellow Toes Art Gallery



Photo: MediaSense K.K.



Photo: MediaSense K.K.

Legacy of Giving

The ACCJ Charity Ball has long been a source of help for those in need.

The Charity Ball is not only one of the biggest events on the annual social calendar, it is also one of the ACCJ's most important fundraisers. The money raised during the event is key to the chamber's ability to support the community and help those in need.

The Charity Ball Committee works closely with the ACCJ Community Service Advisory Council to activate this effort with the generous participation of member

ACCJ Community Service Fund. We will also contribute to charities that help at-risk children, families, children's hospitals and homes, and programs for these children.

"The ACCJ has a well-rounded mission that includes not only networking, information sharing, and advocacy, but also constructive engagement with the community," said Andrew J. Conrad, an ACCJ governor and general counsel at longtime Charity

"The ACCJ has a well-rounded mission that includes not only networking, information sharing, and advocacy, but also constructive engagement with the community."

companies and the membership at large. The annual Charity Ball is a time when we come together to share our success in Japan with each other and, at the same time, generate funding for charities qualified by a rigorous process.

This year we are proud to support the Mike Makino Fund for the Homeless, Food Bank Kansai, and the

Ball sponsor Aflac Life Insurance Japan Ltd. "The charities are great, and we really are thrilled for the opportunity to contribute to the ACCJ's support of the community. This is important to sustaining the effectiveness of the ACCJ."

Sponsors are critical to the success of the event, and we thank the many member companies and community businesses that generously provide financial support and donate prizes for auctions and raffles.

Aflac has remained a top-level supporter of the ACCJ Charity Ball for more than two decades.

"The Charity Ball is an important opportunity for the ACCJ community to get together at the end of the year and just spend some time together," said Conrad. "And we need to be a responsible corporate citizen and to be contributing to the ACCJ's continued success. Being a Charity Ball sponsor is one way that we do that." ■



Sanyukai Homeless Center



Smile Hospital Japan



Food Bank Kansai



Person of the Year: Akio Mimura

The ACCJ honors the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry honorary chairman for his enduring support of international businesses in Japan.

On November 9, 2023, the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) recognized Akio Mimura as the 2022 ACCJ Person of the Year. He was chosen for his efforts to bring the Japanese and international business communities closer together during his nine years as chairman of the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI).

The person of the year is normally honored in spring, but this year's event was delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

During a special luncheon at The Place of Tokyo, the former chairman and president of Nippon Steel Corporation spoke about his long career.

The event began with a VIP session where ACCJ leaders greeted Mimura, after which ACCJ Executive Director Laura Younger welcomed guests and provided background about the award. ACCJ President Om Prakash delivered remarks and invited Mimura to the podium.

"I am truly honored to be nominated as the 2022 ACCJ Person of the Year, because 2022 was the year I concluded my 60-year business career, 51 years in the Nippon Steel Corporation and nine years as the chairman of the JCCI," Mimura began.

"The last nine years have been especially worthwhile periods in my life," he continued, noting that the coronavirus pandemic, during which he closed out his time as JCCI chairman, required action and guidance to protect the most vulnerable people and businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

"I devoted my energy to three initiatives," explained Mimura, who requested:

- Balanced measures to contain Covid-19 that allow free economic activity
- All possible measures from government to ensure that businesses survive
- SMEs use the pandemic as a wake-up call and promote self-reformation

"Luckily, Covid-19 is finally coming to an end, and most SMEs were able to preserve their business con-

tinuation," he said. "Overall unemployment in Japan was kept very low, at 2–3 percent. Our real challenge is to position this pandemic and the worldwide inflation as a turning point, and to rejuvenate the Japanese economy, which has been stagnant for the past quarter century."

Mimura shared that another great memory is encountering the philosophy of Eiichi Shibusawa. Born in 1840, Shibusawa played a key part in business development during the Meiji Period (1868–1912) and is often referred to as the father of Japanese capitalism.

"We business leaders must somehow achieve the harmony of private and public interests in our own way."

"He was involved in the founding of 481 companies and played an active role in the launch of 600 social contribution institutes. Can you believe it?"

The latter especially resonates with Mimura.

"In recent years, I have been very heartened to see the increasing global interest in [strategic development goals] and stakeholder capitalism," he said. "However, I have personally felt dissatisfied with the fact that this interest often remains only on the surface, limited to general overviews or investor-related presentations without translating into concrete actions."

Shibusawa, he notes, insisted earnestly that business leaders should pursue profit but also contribute to the public interest, namely by enriching society and making people happier.

"He was not only a person of action but also a visionary leader," Mimura said. "We business leaders must somehow achieve the harmony of private and public interests in our own way." ■



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zenDine

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Information as of December 4, 2023

Equal Partners

Five years in, the ACCJ's campaign for marriage equality gains speed.

In September 2018, the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) released a viewpoint entitled *Support the Recruitment and Retention of Talent by Instituting Marriage Equality in Japan* in collaboration with the Lawyers for LGBT & Allies Network (LLAN) and five other chambers of commerce. Five years later, the viewpoint has been endorsed by 139 domestic and international entities.

Across Japan, support for marriage equality is gaining momentum among the population, with 278 municipalities and prefectures now offering same-sex partnership registration. This includes the Tokyo Metropolis as well as major cities such as Sapporo, Osaka, Kyoto, and Fukuoka.

Traction can also be seen in the general population, with surveys indicating support for marriage equality of 44 to 82 percent, with stronger support among younger people and women.

Yet calls for marriage equality continue to fall on deaf ears in the Diet.

"This year, we did have the very first LGBT legislation, the 'awareness bill,' so that domino has fallen," said LLAN co-founder and co-chair Alexander Dmitrenko. He noted that the watered-down language does little more than say, "Please be aware there are gay people out there."

But there are ways to influence the national government, he said.

"One way is to really work with local governments to ensure that, to the extent they can support recognizing equality, they do it."

Some prefectural governments, he said, have made strong efforts to afford greater rights to same-sex partners.

Dmitrenko said the LGBT community is very grateful for this, but warned that, when talking about this progress, "we need to be very careful not to dilute focus on the actual goal, which is equality. These move us a small step closer, but they're not equality."

A second way, he explained, is through the courts.

The impact of the ACCJ viewpoint can be seen in litigation efforts. In 2021, Sapporo

District Court Judge Tomoko Takebe referenced the ACCJ position in a case brought against the government by three same-sex couples. Takebe ruled that prohibition of same-sex marriage is unconstitutional, but denied demands for compensation.

There have also been favorable outcomes in Tokyo, Nagoya, and Fukuoka. The message from the first-level courts was that there's definitely discrimination. And, like Sapporo, these cases also referenced the ACCJ viewpoint.

"But ultimately, court cases, unlike in the US, can't change the law. Only the Diet can," Dmitrenko explained. "Yet, those cases create important pressure points."

Growing support from Japanese corporations is also helping move the needle. The Business for Marriage Equality campaign had the support of 458 companies and organizations as of December 8.

The ACCJ issued an open letter to the government on April 21 stating the business case for marriage equality and protection of LGBTQ+ rights, and will soon release an updated viewpoint. Both can be viewed on the ACCJ website. Any company can endorse the viewpoint by contacting info@llan-japan.org.

Dmitrenko is confident that Japan will eventually join its G7 partners in recognizing same-sex marriages.

"It's a very slow, local train to equality, making all the stops, getting everyone on," he said.

"Which is fine. Just a little faster, please." ■



Alexander Dmitrenko

Co-founder
and co-chair,
Lawyers for LGBT
& Allies Network



A Matter of Demographics

Connecting four megatrends that will shape Japan's future.



Jesper Koll

Global ambassador
Monex Group Inc.

The year 2023 will go down in history as the moment when global investors began to take a serious interest in Japan.

Yes, Warren Buffett had already started buying Japanese companies two years earlier, but it was in 2023 that the global mainstream followed. The combination of cheap yen, geo-strategic realities, and a newfound can-do attitude among domestic leaders has put Japan back in play as a global contender. Leaders in finance, industry, and innovation around the world are now pressed by their boards to develop concrete Japan strategies. *Yokoso!* Welcome back! What took you so long?

This Time Is Different

Before we get too carried away by the current Japan hype, let me outline some key forces that, in my view, will work to create sustainable Japan opportunities over the next decades, for both global and domestic companies. Here are the four Japan mega-

This demographic reality has unleashed a growing tsunami of mergers and acquisitions (M&As). Businesses that were never for sale are now up for grabs. Your chances of partnering with or buying a Japanese company have never been better. The M&A wave will get bigger. Roll-ups and industrial consolidation will create unprecedented opportunities for global players to raise their market share and profit from increased economies of scale.

2. Freeing Up Household Wealth

Japanese households have accumulated some \$30 trillion of wealth. About \$20 trillion of this is in financial assets. The remaining \$10 trillion is stashed away as *tansu yokin*, the famous mattress money.

Again, demographics is key to unlocking real structural change. About \$12 trillion of these household financial assets are owned by people aged over 70.

Make no mistake: the legacy of the legendarily high savings rate of Japan's baby boomers will significantly boost next-generation purchasing power.

trends you and your corporate strategy must seek to exploit.

1. Demographics Forces Industrial Consolidation

Japan has about 3.6 million companies, 2.5 million of which are owned and run by founders who will be over 70 years old next year. Of these, 1.6 million do not have a successor, a son or daughter interested in taking over.

This means \$5 or 6 trillion—or 1.3 to 1.5 times Japan's current gross domestic product—will become unfrozen over the next decade. Even after inheritance tax, this implies a significant boost to the purchasing power of Japan's younger generation.

Make no mistake: the legacy of the legendarily high savings rate of Japan's baby boomers will significantly boost next-generation purchasing power. Most economic forecasts completely ignore this wealth



transfer effect, thus underestimating the potential growth in domestic demand.

3. From Seniority-based to Merit-based Pay

The war for talent is intensifying and will only get worse. Japan's young generation feels its power, and the tables have turned. Graduates are no longer begging for jobs. Companies are begging increasingly scarce graduates to join. And retention of employees is becoming tough. According to several studies, as many as one in five University of Tokyo graduates now quit their initial employer within the first five years.

Importantly, employees don't just want higher pay. They also seek greater responsibility and impact. If you joined a top Keidanren company in the 1960s, it took on average 13 years for you to become the general manager. Today it takes 24 years.

Companies which inspire and empower their employees will pull away from those that insist on the old ways. Labor mobility will surge, and companies that offer genuine and transparent career planning and merit-based compensation are poised to move ahead. Here, global companies still have a lead, but as local Japanese companies adapt, the war for talent—and thus the need for increasingly creative leadership—will intensify. The net result? Productivity will surge, and so will employee incomes—yet another reason why standard economic forecasts are too pessimistic on domestic demand.

4. Open-Door Japan

Japan will become an immigration powerhouse. Before the pandemic, the country was on track to accept

about 150,000 new non-Japanese employees per year. This more than doubled to almost 350,000 in the first half of 2023. There are now approximately 3.2 million non-Japanese residents of Japan, up from barely half a million 30 years ago. Visa and permanent-residency requirements continue to ease. Most importantly, the biggest obstacle to employing non-Japanese talent—seniority-based rather than merit-based compensation—is beginning to change. All said, it is now perfectly reasonable to expect that about 10 percent of employees will be non-Japanese by 2030. That's more than double the current rate of just below four percent.

Common Theme

Underlying these four Japan megatrends is demographics. Far from being a negative—fewer people must equal lower consumption—Japan's demographics will turn out to be a catalyst for positive change.

- Industries will consolidate, thus allowing greater efficiencies and economies of scale.
- The mattress-money wealth of Japanese households will be freed and reenter economic circulation.
- Increasingly scarce labor will be empowered and gain purchasing power.
- And global talent will build careers and make their fortunes here in Japan.

Importantly, all these forces represent real structural change that will remain in place for the foreseeable future.

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SYNTHETIC SAVANTS

AS GENERATIVE AI SWEEPS THE WORLD, HOW WILL IT TRANSFORM THE WAY WE WORK AND INNOVATE?



We live in an age of intelligent machines. Since the introduction of consumer-facing artificial intelligence (AI) applications such as OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Bard over the past year, generative AI has transformed how people work around the world.

From \$40 billion in 2022, the market size for generative AI will balloon to \$1.3 trillion over the next 10 years, according to Bloomberg Intelligence. First popularized through image generators, the technology has been applied in fields ranging from neuroscience to advertising, sometimes in surprising ways.

Generative AI programs like the large language models powering ChatGPT are trained on enormous volumes of data to sense patterns and predict how they will play out in a piece of content. These models can be trained on linguistic, financial, scientific, sensor, or other data—especially data that is uniform and structured—and can then create new content in response to user input. They have had remarkable success, particularly in image and text generation, and have seen rapid uptake in sectors ranging from education to computer programming. “This technology is set to fundamentally transform everything from science, to business, to healthcare ... to society itself,” Accenture analysts enthused in a report. “The positive impact on human creativity and productivity will be massive.”

Powerful New Assistants

Generative AI first gained public attention thanks to its ability to change how we communicate through words, images, and video. It's no wonder, then, that the world's largest public relations company has embraced it. Edelman worked with OpenAI to launch the original ChatGPT-2 and delivered the first application in an ad campaign. In the spots for Hellmann's Mayonnaise, the tool is tasked with finding new ways to use leftovers.

Edelman believes the technology will reconfigure the communications industry, but it won't replace human ingenuity, strategic advice, and ethical decision-making that builds trust, said Meghan Barstow, president and representative director of Edelman Japan.

“We predict that AI will become an essential assistant in our work, helping to brainstorm, research, summarize, trend spot, monitor media, and generate content, among other tasks,” explained the ACCJ gov-

ernor and chair of the chamber's Communications Advisory Council. “The emphasis here is on ‘assistant,’ as we believe there will always be a human in the loop, that AI and people working together will provide the most effective and valuable work output.

“As with any technology, there are risks that require appropriate caution, education, processes, and policies to ensure the safe and trustworthy use of generative AI to protect our work, our clients, and end users from issues related to disinformation, bias, copyright infringement, and privacy.”

Similarly, lawyers such as Catherine O'Connell are also using generative AI as smart assistants. O'Connell is principal and founder of Catherine O'Connell Law and co-chair of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) Legal Services and IP Committee.

After taking a course on how to get the most out of ChatGPT, she has been using it for writing keynote speeches, article outlines, posts on social media, and skeletons of presentations. She compares the tool to a human intern, and praises its time-saving efficiencies, but warns that it should not be used for legal work, such as contracts or legal advice. Attorneys in the United States, she noted, have found themselves in trouble after producing legal filings referencing non-existent cases that generative AI simply made up.

“Generative AI is like a teenager that has a lot of promise but has not learned how to be a whole professional yet; it needs guidance,” said O'Connell. “However, in terms of an idea generator or idea expander, a time-saving device, and an assistive tool, generative AI is an asset. The rest falls to me to add my human touch to check and verify, to add my own personality and insights only I have, and to make the output my very own. I think generative AI is so good that its cousin, Google search, may be out of a job sometime soon.”

Smart Tools for Talent

Recruiting is another industry in which workers deal with mountains of structured data, in the form of resumes and online posts, that can be utilized by AI. Robert Half Japan, an ACCJ Corporate Sustaining Member company, uses a system called AI Recommended Talent (ART) to match resumes to client needs. The system speeds up matching for job hunters and employers, allowing staff to spend more time with clients.

“The real power of generative AI is how



Meghan Barstow
President and representative director,
Edelman Japan

ACCJ governor
and chair,
Communications
Advisory Council



Catherine O'Connell
Principal and
founder, Catherine
O'Connell Law

Co-chair,
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Steven Li
Senior division
director for
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much it can integrate with our existing systems,” explained Steven Li, senior division director for cybersecurity. “We are piloting ChatGPT-4 integration in our Salesforce CRM. Studies have shown benefits from integrating generative AI into workflows. Other industry examples that highlight the benefit of integration include the GitHub CoPilot generative AI feature.”

The effectiveness of AI in recruiting has led some people to speculate that it could render many human recruiters obsolete. Deep learning algorithms are figuring out what a good resume looks like, and generative AI can craft approach messages and InMails, a form of direct message on the popular LinkedIn platform, noted Daniel Bamford, Robert Half’s associate director for technology.

“However, the real value of agency recruitment is not, and never was, a simple job-description-to-resume matching

for Northeast Asia, also sees great potential in the technology. “The biggest changes that I foresee will be related to the enhanced visibility into, and agility of the management of, the global supply chains of our clients on an execution level,” he told *The ACCJ Journal*. “The data aggregated will allow logistics service providers [LSPs] to deliver predictive and proactive solutions to our clients. If clearly interpreted by the LSPs, stability and uniformity of costs and deliverables will be provided globally and locally to our clients.”

Generative AI may even help us live longer, healthier lives via long-term patient monitoring. Sydney-based medical AI startup Prospec-tion recently launched its first generative-AI model in Japan to analyze anonymized patient data for pharmaceutical companies so they can better understand patient needs. A Japanese drug company, for instance, could look at cancer patient

“Generative AI is like a teenager that has a lot of promise but has not learned how to be a whole professional yet; it needs guidance.”

service,” added Bamford. “Agency recruitment done well is a wonderful journey of problem-solving, involving the goals of organizations and teams and the values and desires of individuals. Excellent recruiters will thrive. They will use AI’s capacity to handle simple tasks like scheduling and shortlisting. This will free up time for high-value interactions, delivering even greater value for their partners and industries through the human touch. The future of excellent recruiters will be brighter with AI’s support.”

Tracking Ships and Patients

Even a traditionally hardware-oriented industry like logistics is being transformed by generative AI. Shipping giant Maersk is using a predictive cargo arrival model to help customers reduce costs with more reliable supply chains. It also wants to harness the power of AI to recommend solutions when shipping routes are congested, advising on whether goods should be flown or stored, and better understand the sales process, Navneet Kapoor, Maersk’s chief technology and information officer, told CNBC.

Maurice Lyn, head of Managed by Maersk

outcomes across the country and find that they are slightly worse in a particular region, possibly because less-effective drugs are prescribed there.

Founded in 2012 and operating in Australia, Japan, and the United States, Prospec-tion now has data on half a billion patients. For the first 10 years, it was using traditional AI methods, but generative AI has opened new services for the company. Users can query Prospec-tion’s AI services about typical pathways for patients who took a certain drug, or what therapy they underwent after quitting the medication. A Prospec-tion model can predict whether a patient will experience a certain event, such as needing to be hospitalized, over the next year.

“The ChatGPT transformer model is trained on billions of sentences consisting of words. We see each patient’s journey as the sentence and events in the journey as the words. That’s the vocabulary,” said Eric Chung, co-founder and co-CEO of Prospec-tion. “The data is very powerful. There are lots of insights to be gained from data on 500 million patients. It’s beyond the power of humans to analyze, but AI can do it.” ■



Daniel Bamford

Associate director
for technology,
Robert Half Japan



Maurice Lyn

Head of Managed
by Maersk for
Northeast Asia,
A.P. Moller-Maersk



Eric Chung

Co-founder
and co-CEO,
Prospec-tion

RENEWABLE AMBITIONS

JAPAN AIMS TO MIX UP POWER, BUT ARE
THE TARGETS ACHIEVABLE?



Japan has detailed ambitious plans for the wider deployment of renewable energy sources throughout the economy, with the government in October 2021 announcing the Sixth Strategic Energy Plan and setting a target of between 36 and 38 percent of the nation's power coming from renewables in 2030.

That would be about double the 2019 level and significantly above the previous 2030 goal of up to 24 percent.

Japan's target renewables mix would include up to:

- 16 percent from solar
- 11 percent from hydropower
- 5 percent from wind
- 5 percent from biomass
- 1 percent from geothermal

The contribution from nuclear energy was left unchanged, at between 20 and 22 percent. This will require a minimum of 30 reactors to be operational.

The targets tie in with the Clean Energy Strategy, unveiled by the government in May

and human resource pools to hit targets," points out Andrew Statter, a partner at the Titan Consulting Group and head of its GreenTech division.

"However, policies and subsidies are unclear, and there are conflicts between ministries that are causing questions for investors while potentially profitable asset types, such as large-scale agrisolar, are not yet eligible for project financing," he told *The ACCJ Journal*. "All of which puts a huge pause on the potential accelerated development that industry is ready to deliver."

Japan needs to go beyond the "what" in its policies and clarify the "when," "where," and "how" to encourage investment, Statter said.

Favorable Winds

Turning to specific energy resources, Statter said offshore wind is critical as Japan has geographical and physical limitations on the volume of onshore renewables that can be developed. "With vast ocean resources, offshore wind is the ideal renewable technology which is proven and scalable to give Japan a shot at hitting renewable energy targets,"

"With vast ocean resources, offshore wind is the ideal renewable technology which is proven and scalable to give Japan a shot at hitting renewable energy targets."

2022, announcing an ambitious 46-percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in fiscal 2030 and carbon neutrality by 2050.

And, given the impact of instability involving Russia and in the Middle East, the two traditional primary sources of energy for Japan, combined with the yen at 10-year lows against other leading currencies, it would be in Japan's best interest to dramatically reduce its reliance on imported energy.

Yet energy experts caution that Tokyo is unlikely to reach those targets as progress in the development of renewables has slowed, with fewer large-scale solar projects, delays in offshore wind generation, and local resistance hampering the acceleration of other technologies, such as onshore wind and geothermal power.

"Private capital markets are ready to invest in Japan, and both multinational and Japanese firms have developed technology

he said. "Key here is the need to accelerate floating offshore wind, as Japan's waters become very deep quite close to shore."

Statter also sees a secondary benefit to Japan's expansion of floating technology. The country could become a technology exporter on a regional scale as Asia-Pacific markets embrace the technology.

Akira Amano, country manager of Invenenergy Wind Development Japan GK, agrees on the importance of offshore wind to the nation's overall energy goals, pointing out that "Japan has the right resources to become a global leader in renewable energy, especially offshore wind."

He also concurs that significant challenges need to be navigated for the renewables sector to thrive.

"In order to accelerate progress and meet our nation's goals, there will need to be long-term regulatory certainty, increased



Andrew Statter

Partner, head of
Titan GreenTech



Akira Amano

Country manager,
Invenenergy
Wind Development
Japan GK



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transmission capacity to deliver energy to customers, and long-term planning to address challenges like cost uncertainty.

Amano also noted that, with strong leadership, Japan can accelerate the build-out of clean energy and meet its energy goals in a timely manner.

Rocky Foundation

If the authorities are serious about making the most of offshore wind, Amano said, a number of regulations need to be revised, not least the unbundling of generation, transmission, and distribution at existing electricity utility companies to get rid of unfair competition. The sector also needs the authorities to increase the price for renewable energy certificates, he added.

Hideyuki Ohnishi, regional general manager for GE Renewable Energy in North Asia, agrees that Japan needs to make the most of its exclusive economic zone—one of the world's largest—for offshore wind.

"The wind conditions, the speed and quality of the wind, is much better when

all the critical components of the turbine. Construction of the nacelle is now largely done by local labor and with components utilizing the local supply chain, all of which will have a long-term benefit for the community, Ohnishi added.

Lofty Aims

While the government's 2030 targets can be achieved as battery storage and grid technology improve, in tandem with innovations in the use of the grid, the 2050 targets are "a real moonshot," Ohnishi admitted. "The 2050 goal is very, very challenging, but a majority of us have agreed to aim for it," he said.

The Japanese government has also been a vocal advocate of hydrogen as an effectively limitless source of energy in the future, although questions are being asked as to whether this is the most appropriate path.

"Generally speaking, I think the industry and international impression is that Japan's hyper focus on hydrogen to solve all problems has been outsized and unrealistic," said Ken Haig, vice-chair of the ACCJ Energy

While the government's 2030 targets can be achieved as battery storage and grid technology improve, in tandem with innovations in the use of the grid, the 2050 targets are a real "moonshot."

you go to the seaside," said Ohnishi. "In the mountains, there is turbulence and such, and average wind [speed] is not as strong. So, it is important for us to go to the places where we have better wind."

Yet there are challenges, particularly in laying the foundations for turbines.

"We have to install big wind turbines in the sea, where the depth differs," he explained. "Wave and seabed conditions have an impact. The geosurface is very important. Rocks and related conditions impact our design, and it's not easy in terms of technology."

Equally, the investment required to get the blades turning is significant, and projects must be considered in the long term.

The Japanese government is also pushing for 60 percent of the components in offshore wind farms to be manufactured locally.

General Electric started working with Toshiba in 2021, initially focusing on the nacelle at the top of the tower that houses

Committee. "It is also too future-focused, relying on technologies that will not become commercially viable or scalable until well after 2030."

Haig noted a comment made by former ACCJ President Glen Fukushima in a recent *Kyodo News* opinion piece: "Japan's support for innovation in green hydrogen, perovskite technology, and offshore wind is the right move," said Fukushima, "But METI should take a 'yes, and' approach by also immediately boosting funds to deploy existing clean energy technologies like solar and wind power—technologies that have already proven successful for Japan."

Whatever the source, the renewables sector agrees that Japan's need for home-grown energy is only going to intensify. The Sixth Strategic Energy Plan is billed as a rethink of regulations that have thus far inhibited development; for developers, the elimination of red tape cannot come soon enough. ■



Hideyuki Ohnishi

Regional general manager for GE Renewable Energy, North Asia



Ken Haig

Vice-chair, ACCJ Energy Committee

The Hunt for DX Champions

Japan faces an uphill climb when it comes to digital transformation.

Despite being a nation renowned for assimilating advanced machinery and technology into everyday life, the reality of Japan's IT workforce paints a very different picture.

According to a survey of companies conducted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, Japan's information and communication technology (ICT) sector is falling short when it comes to digital transformation (DX). This is largely due to a lack of qualified technology talent. In 2018, there was a shortage of about 220,000 ICT workers, and the shortfall is expected to reach 450,000 by 2030.

At the same time, Japan's economic landscape is experiencing a generational shift, influenced by new government policies and changing regulations designed to elevate the country to the global DX standard.

Slow Road to DX

Robert Half Japan supports clients undergoing digital transformation and is seeing promising progress.

"In many Japan-headquartered global companies, the pace of change has tended to be slow and incremental," said Managing Director Lyndsey Hughes. "But this has started to shift over the past few years and momentum is building."

"Even prior to Covid-19, we had started to see signs of large Japanese corporations incorporating

their DX agenda into their corporate vision and hiring 'disruptive' senior executives from outside the organization—even from outside Japan—to expedite transformation," he said. "It seems now there really is an appetite and a glimmer of commitment from corporate Japan to transform their global businesses."

The 2022 IMD World Digital Competitiveness Ranking ranks Japan 29th out of 64 countries examined in terms of know-how, development of digital technologies, and preparedness to exploit digital transformation. Asian countries finishing ahead of Japan include South Korea (8th), Taiwan (11th), and China (17th).

Hughes noted that many companies have been stalling in their DX initiatives, often because they lack real commitment from the top, face resistance from middle management, or are short of know-how on how to manage global functions. They may also struggle to attract, and appropriately compensate, 'new' skill sets to implement the change.

DX touches every area of an organization, he explained, and while every company faces its own unique set of challenges, there are consistent themes that Robert Half is hearing from its customers. These include overhauls to human resources policies to adopt pay-for-performance compensation to attract specialized talent.

Robert Half is seeing companies start to take diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives seriously, and many are ready to pay higher agency fees to prioritize the scouting of female talent as well as hiring, and even importing, more foreign talent. And while there is still a long way to go to embrace all types of diversity, at least the conversations have started, Hughes said.

In addition, large Japanese companies are beginning to move away from in-market IT to globally distributed IT functions that allow them to benefit from scale, respond more quickly to market changes, and mitigate cybersecurity risks.



From left: Marcus Aakerholm and Lyndsey Hughes

Photo: Shelley Mae Photography

There has also been a surge in the hiring of chief data officers to centralize data and analytics expertise, as well as breaking down data silos and harnessing the power of data across an organization.

Too many companies are entering uncharted DX territory, Hughes pointed out, and often lack the skills and expertise to deliver on such projects. This is where Robert Half and its business consultancy subsidiary, Protiviti, come in.

Helping Hand

“At Robert Half Japan, we have a strong focus on placing bilingual technology talent with foreign affiliates in Japan to bridge with their HQ, or to global Japanese firms looking to bridge their overseas subsidiaries,” explained Marcus Aakerholm, division director of business transformation. “As an enterprise, we have a unique capability to support DX initiatives in different ways, whether by placing permanent employees across various functions, specialist contractors to jump into different projects, or through Protiviti.

“In many cases, we offer a tailored and blended solution of outsourced consulting assignments combined with project contractors and permanent resources,” he added. “This allows us to respond flexibly to the fluid and diverse needs of our customers, across their global operations.”

Aakerholm has witnessed firsthand the unique market conditions affecting DX in Japan.

“A typical scenario for our team is assisting foreign-affiliated organizations that need to undergo a corporate-wide system update,” he said. “In these cases, the US office will send an internal team to implement the changes but, due to the unique market requirements here, their efforts are rarely implemented or understood by domestic teams. Our bilingual project managers and functional experts bridge that gap.”

Robert Half supports many Japan-headquartered clients that require bilingual talent with subject matter or technology expertise to interact with overseas subsidiaries.

In one example, Aakerholm’s team helped a global media company by bringing in a specialist consultant with the required language abilities, project management skills, and knowledge of system implementation to complete the introduction of finance modules of the Workday system.

Look Within

“When a company needs to evolve, it’s not just about bringing in new people,” said Hughes. “Organizations

also need to create a culture of internal evolution so they can continue to adapt to changes in the market, customer needs, and so on.

“Generally, organizations think in functional silos, and those silos are often lacking a specific skill set,” he said. “But those skill sets may exist elsewhere in the organization. There are all sorts of capabilities floating around in every company, perhaps in a different function or a different market, so there isn’t necessarily a need to rush out and hire quickly.”

Smart leaders are adept at unearthing the hidden potential in an organization, he added, and creating an environment of empowerment to enable the enablers.

One Robert Half client innovated by introducing a “chief future officer” role and invited a relatively new hire to join the company’s transformation steering committee, alongside senior leaders from across the business, to bring a fresh perspective and add a new voice.

“People new to the organization often have the clearest minds to and come up with innovative solutions,” Hughes said. “Younger generations want their voices to be heard, to feel they are contributing, so tapping into their passion and capabilities is very important and can be a key catalyst for successful DX.

“Often, a manager thinks the candidate they need is a reflection of who they are and their own skills,” he said. “But they need to identify where they and their organization are coming up short and then find the person to fill that gap.”

The deficiency might be a hard skill set, such as expertise in a new technology stack or building global enterprise architecture standards, but it might also be the ability to champion new ways of doing things, exposure to different industries, or diversity in hiring to bring in better creative problem-solvers.

“I believe leaders need to be deliberate in understanding the current skill, personality, and knowledge gaps,” Hughes said. “And then ask themselves what their team members can do to help drive the transformation, what unique talents can they bring to the table.” ■

Smart leaders are adept at unearthing the hidden potential in an organization.

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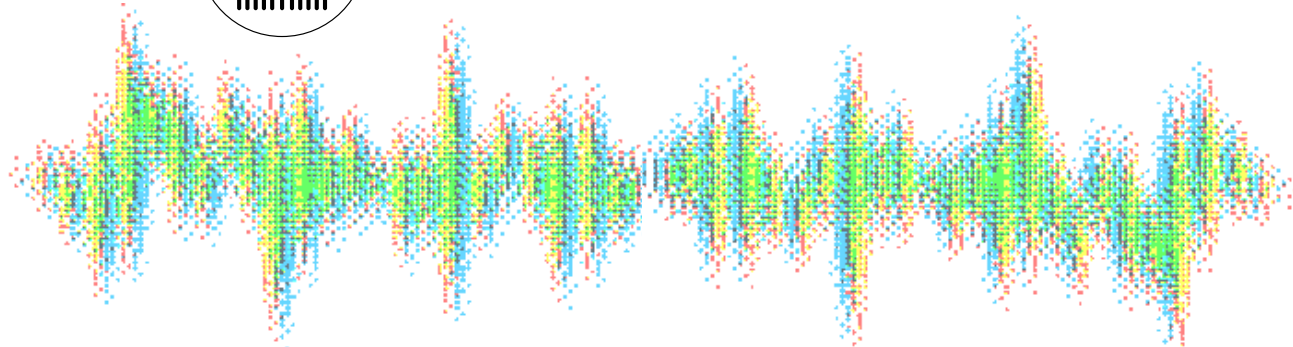
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Japan Unlocked

Kreston ProWorks opens doors with local expertise and global reach.

Kreston Global, the world's 13th-biggest accounting network in terms of revenue according to UK-based trade magazine *International Accounting Bulletin* (IAB), is now the 10th-biggest in Japan per the IAB, up one spot from the year before.

With 160 independent member firms and 25,000 experts across 750 offices in 115 countries, Kreston Global provides unparalleled access to a wealth of international resources and expertise.

There are three member companies in Japan. Two provide audit services and the third, Kreston ProWorks, offers a full slate of inbound accounting, payroll, tax, and corporate services.

Established in 2007 by Marek Lehocky, the firm has built a strong reputation as an indispensable partner for companies looking to enter the Japanese market. "Our mission is to make setting up and operating businesses—including immigration, accounting, payroll, labor, and tax compliance—as easy as possible in Japan, so our clients can focus on building their business," Lehocky told *The ACCJ Journal*.

Full Slate of Services

Kreston ProWorks delivers a nimble team of bilingual experts with intimate knowledge of how processes in Japan differ from those in other countries. Specialists in inbound accounting, tax, payroll, and human resources, Kreston ProWorks offers a much wider range of services than other companies:

- Company formation and corporate services
- Employer of record (EOR)
- Immigration and business license support
- Legal and transactional support
- Nominee representative
- Virtual office services
- Market entry and business consulting

EOR, for example, is especially helpful, as it allows companies to come in for a short time and deploy resources quickly to complete a specific project. It is also a way to test the waters when considering Japan



market entry without investing in a full move.

"With all the requirements and steps involved, it can take at least seven or eight months before people can come into the country," Lehocky said. "We can cut that to just three or four months with foreign employees and a few weeks with local hires."

Local Knowledge Matters

Just as understanding the local market is key to a business's success, so are local operations. While many companies provide services offshore, Kreston ProWorks does everything in Japan.

"Clients want to have closer proximity to Japan, because Japan is a black box of sorts, and they want to make sure that the people who are handling their operations actually understand the intricacies and nothing is being lost in translation," Lehocky explained. "We act as our clients' internal team of experts and 'goalkeepers' for each of the service areas that we provide. We stay on our client matters and drive the parts that we are in charge of so our clients can focus on other parts of their business. Communication and getting things done is a key to success."

If you are interested in exploring market entry or are already here and wondering if you are doing everything the right way, Lehocky invites you to get in touch.

"Reach out," he says. "We would be happy to arrange a time to introduce ourselves and get to know you and your needs. You always have alternatives." ■

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Get in touch today for a free consultation:

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Ancient Trails, Modern Tales

Traversing Kanagawa reveals paths from long ago and comforts of today.

To keep feudal lords loyal during the Edo Period, the Tokugawa shoguns forced them to live in the new capital of Edo every other year. And when they returned to their home province, they had to leave their families behind in the capital as hostages.

The back-and-forth journey they had to make was long, something we discover firsthand on a hot and sunny autumn day under the guidance of local Shin Kaneko. As the nationally licensed tour guide leads us along a stone-paved road running through the beautiful forest—beams of sunlight piercing the leafy canopy of towering cedar trees—we find ourselves on a trek made by nobles and commoners alike for hundreds of years.

Many visitors are familiar with the Tokaido Shinkansen. What they may not know is that the tracks run alongside an ancient route built not for bullet-train carriages but rather palanquins. Thankfully, unlike passengers of old, today's travelers need not bite on rope to protect their tongues from the rough ride.

Born and raised in Hakone, Kaneko also spent six years in France and five in the United States growing up. Later, he studied business at the University of Southern California and set off on a career as a strategist for Japanese retail giant Aeon Co., Ltd. But the call of home—and nature—grew louder and louder, and he left Tokyo life in 2015 to make his way back to the lakeside haunts of his childhood.

As Kaneko observed English-speaking visitors staring holes through maps as they tried to guide their own way, he

decided to create Explore Hakone, a bespoke agency that provides tours limited to one group per day. And today, we get to experience it for ourselves.

The development of the Old Tokaido Road, Kaneko explains, is tied to key events in Japanese history, and the preferred paths through the Hakone area have changed over the centuries. Some 1,300 years ago, during the Nara and Heian Periods, people used the longer, flatter Ashigara Mountain Pass to the north, which runs along the border of Kanagawa and Shizuoka Prefectures. But when Mount Fuji erupted in 802, the path was covered in ash and became difficult to traverse. Travelers began opting for the shorter but more mountainous route we are taking today.

The section of the 500-kilometer Old Tokaido Road that we're traversing is known as the Hakone Hachiri, the 32-kilometer stretch between the Odawara and the Mishima post stations. Hakone Sekisho is located at Lake Ashi, one of 53 checkpoints erected by the Tokugawa Shogunate. Due to the very steep climbs—the total elevation change is about 900 meters—travelers during the Edo Period needed regular breaks. There were once nine teahouses on the route offering refreshment. Today, just one remains: Amazake Chaya.

We stop for an energizing cup of *amazake*, the warm non-alcoholic rice drink from which the rustic rest stop takes its name. Paired with two surprisingly filling pieces of *mochi* rice cake, the *amazake* was a welcome respite, as it must have been for those ancient sojourners.

While rejuvenating for the next leg of our journey under



Guide Shin Kaneko



The Old Tokaido Road

the thatched roof of history, we talk to Satoshi Yamamoto, the current owner of the business that has been passed through his family for 13 generations.

For more than 400 years, the doors of Amazake Chaya have been open, every day. The only time they were closed was for a brief period during the coronavirus pandemic.

"I want to keep the teahouse as it has always been, serving people in a traditional way," Yamamoto says. "Although we own the teahouse, the atmosphere is created by our customers. We only provide service. The culture and story behind [Amazake Chaya] have been made by travelers for centuries."

He says he also enjoys meeting travelers from abroad and learning more about other cultures while sharing his own.

"While the world might change, communication between us and the travelers will never change," Yamamoto adds. "They may have different outfits, they may speak different languages, but the concept of welcoming guests will always remain the same."

Back on the road with renewed energy, we cross one of the highest points between Tokyo and Kyoto and begin our descent to Lake Ashi, our final destination.

As we near the Hakone Sekisho checkpoint, we walk under the shade of 400-year-old cedar trees planted by the shogun to shelter travelers from the elements at this key point of their long journey. A nice gesture. But off in the distance is Otamaga Pond, named after a woman who was captured and beheaded for sneaking out of Edo. So, while the shogun could show kindness, he also showed no mercy. You played by his rules. But those rules also brought peace to Japan after nearly two centuries of civil war and upheaval, allowing art and culture to bloom and the society we know today to take shape.

Kijitei Hoeiso

After the long hike, my legs are demanding a reprieve. Fortunately, Kijitei Hoeiso *ryokan* was happy to oblige.

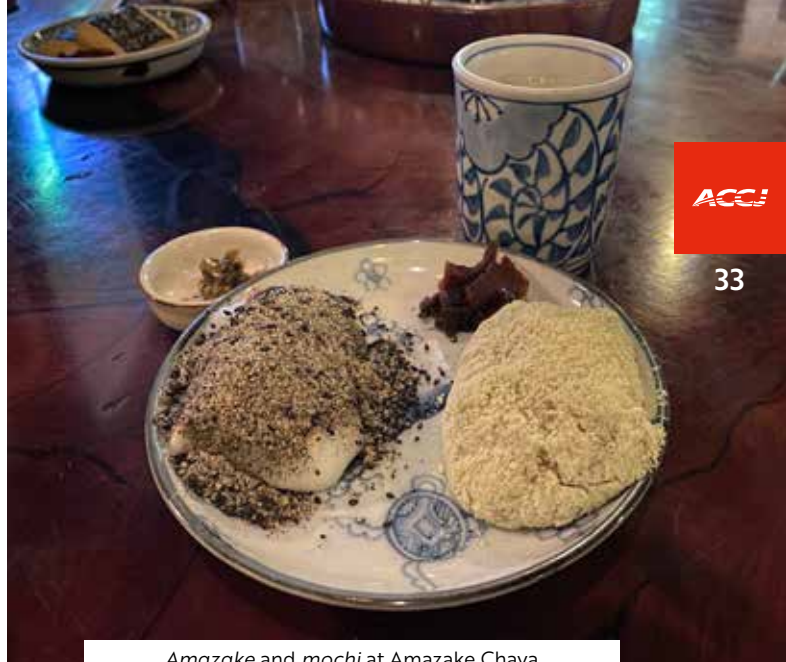
Nestled in the verdant hills of Hakone, the traditional Japanese inn is a delightful escape from the stresses of modern life. Like Hakone Hachiri, Hoeiso transports you to a simpler time when nature was an integral part of life.

We are welcomed by the inn's owner, Kenichiro Hara, who shares a bit of the property's history as we gaze out windows that dissolve against the lush backdrop of the mountainside. In the distance, we see the open-air hot springs we'll visit later tonight.

And as a tease of the delectable flavors to come, we are offered *yumochi*, a traditional Japanese sweet made of rice flour. During my 27 years in Japan, I've enjoyed many such sweets, but this is truly a standout.

After the exertion of the day's hike, I'm certainly feeling peckish, and a highlight of my stay is the cuisine. Hoeiso is renowned for its menu that features pheasant—a game bird often associated with the British countryside that is actually native to Asia—and the chef's creativity does not disappoint.

Of particular note is how Hoeiso can accommodate various dietary needs and preferences. While the pheasant menu



Amazake and mochi at Amazake Chaya



Steamed pheasant-egg custard and tri-colored dango

is very popular, vegetarian options are readily available—something not easy to find in Japan.

I opted mostly the standard course, but, because I do not eat most seafood, Hoeiso prepared a course that was perfect for my palette. This is often a sticking point for me in Japan, but is no problem here.

Steamed pheasant egg custard with ginger and tri-colored *dango* dumplings lead the way ahead of pheasant round with salt from Sado Island, *sashimi* of fresh pheasant breast with *ponzu*, and pheasant and *shiso* porridge. Just highlights of an overflowing *kaiseki* course dinner bursting with color and flavor.

As dusk gives way to the darkness of night, I grab my towel and make my way to the private outdoor *onsen* situated alongside a mountain stream. I cannot adequately express how rejuvenating it is to sit alone in the steaming water, the sound of the trickling stream dancing in the background as I look up at the twinkling stars in the pitch-



Garden at Engaku-ji reflects Japan's landscape



Higanbana mark the fall Ohigan period.

black sky. I've rarely felt so connected to the universe as in this moment. It's as if the energy of distant worlds is flowing around me.

Retiring to my spacious room, I gaze out the windows at the night sky that is normally obscured by city light and recall those childhood evenings of stargazing in my grandmother's countryside front yard.

The next morning, Hara and several Hoeiso staff see me off as I board the bus to Hakone Yumoto Station. An impeccable ending to an absolutely relaxing stay.

Kamakura Gardens

From Hakone, we make our way around Sagami Bay to Kamakura, seat of the first Kamakura shogun, Minamoto Yoritomo, more than 400 years before the Tokugawa shogunate developed the Old Tokaido Road. But we're not here to see the usual landmarks. Instead, our journey today takes us around the historic city to explore its gardens.

We meet our guide, Saori Imoto, just outside Kita-Kamakura Station. Imoto is a garden designer who studied in Japan before moving to the United Kingdom. The Kamakura local joined her husband there when he was transferred for work and found the perfect opportunity to build on her love of horticulture. Studying in London, she became an expert in English garden design and has won multiple awards for her work. Since returning to Japan, in addition to crafting landscapes for clients, she has been sharing the beauty and history of Kamakura with visitors through private guided tours.

Our first stop is Engaku-ji. Founded in 1282, it is one of Japan's most important temples and the second of those known as Kamakura's Five Mountains or Gozan.

"The reason I choose this temple," she explains, "is that it has a beautiful Japanese garden and is surrounded by mountains, so we can see a lot of natural scenery as well."

As we approach the Butsuden main hall, small children from the nearby kindergarten are practicing in the courtyard for their upcoming *undokai*, or sports day. Surrounded by a circle of seven juniper trees, they run, jump, and laugh as popular kids' music plays on portable speakers. It's a striking juxtaposition of ancient and modern culture and traditions.

The excitement of the children also contrasts with the reason we find evergreens here.

"Zen temples are very strict, and the monks need to concentrate on meditation and train very hard every day," Imoto explains. "If there are a lot of deciduous trees, like cherry trees or Japanese maples, the monks can enjoy the seasonal transformation. They're not allowed to do that, so

Zen temples prefer planting evergreen trees, which create a calm and unchanging atmosphere, and show longevity."

After touring the temple's halls, we come upon a tranquil garden that reflects the landscape of Japan. A small pond at the center represents the sea, undulations conjure mountains, and gravel paints the coast.

To Western eyes, the lack of color may seem unusual. But, Imoto explains, there's a reason for the absence of flowers. "In Japanese gardens, we try to replicate the natural scenery of Japan." That means mountains, not fields—some 70 percent of Japan is mountainous. "Mountains are covered with trees, so we use a lot of trees instead of flowers," she adds. "This creates a calm atmosphere, highlighting the simple beauty typical of Japanese gardens."

In need of a rest, we stop at Butsunichian, an open-air café on the temple grounds that serves green tea as well as other light drinks. The tea is refreshing—I opt for hot *matcha* despite the unseasonably warm day—and am soon ready for the hike to our next destination.

After a long walk, we arrive at Eisho-ji, Kamakura's only nunnery, founded by a wife of Tokugawa Ieyasu in 1636.

The grounds are covered by *higanbana*, or red spider lily. This striking flower, Imoto explains, is a symbol of Ohigan, a Buddhist period that falls around the spring and autumnal equinoxes. *Higanbana* mark the September observance. During this time, whose name means "other shore," Higan, the world of enlightenment, and Shigan, our own world of greed and earthly desires, are believed to come closest to one another. This makes it the ideal time to remember those who have passed and to focus on spiritual awakening.

To end our exploration of Kamakura, we visit a cemetery at nearby Jufuku-ji Temple where Hojo Masako, the wife of the first Kamakura shogun Minamoto Yoritomo, is said to be buried. Masako was key to Yoritomo's success and the power of the Kamakura Shogunate. Following his death in 1199, she became a nun but continued to yield great influence over the government until she passed away in 1225.

As we search for her final resting spot, we cross paths with a group of students who have dropped by the graveyard after school. Given Masako's place in history, Imoto notes, they study about her in class and are curious to see the tomb firsthand. Like us, they use smartphones and GPS to locate the alcove tucked away in the back of the grounds.

As has happened many times during our two days in Kanagawa, past and present intersect in ways that highlight just how far back the history and culture of Japan stretch. There's also something new to learn and explore. ■

Serene Shrines and Sauruses

Fukui Prefecture offers crafts, fossils, relaxation, and so much more.

As a tourist destination for inbound visitors, Fukui Prefecture often gets short shrift, especially compared with more glamorous neighbors such as Kyoto and Ishikawa Prefectures. But this may start to change when the Hokuriku Shinkansen adds Fukui, Tsuruga, Awara Onsen, and Echizen Takefu Stations to its pit stops in March 2024.

For now, Fukui's sightseeing spots remain relatively quiet and uncrowded, making it an ideal road-trip destination for those with a little more time to spare. Our visit this fall takes us around the cities of Katsuyama, Awara Onsen, and Echizen—all of which yield rich rewards for the visitor willing to rent a car and take the wheel.

Mossy Matters

Gently sloping and meandering, the stone path to the main building of Heisenji Hakusan Shrine is flanked by towering cedars. It is serene, save for birdsong; few visitors are here on a weekday morning. The mid-morning sunlight filtering through the canopy casts dappled patterns of light and shadow on the velvety green moss blanketing the ground, yesterday's rain heightening the dewy verdure. It's so absurdly beautiful that I almost want to curl up on the moss and never leave.

However, if you ask historian and resident head priest Hiraizumi Takafusa, the gorgeous mosses on the shrine precincts aren't the be-all and end-all of these grounds. "It's not like we promote this place with its moss. We supposedly have over 200 types of moss," he says. "I can recognize only 20 of the varieties." According to Hiraizumi, the history of the shrine and the surrounding area are the true highlights.

Located on the edges of Hakusan National Park in what is now Katsuyama City, Heisenji Hakusan Shrine was established as a Buddhist temple in 717 by a monk named Taicho. For centuries, it operated as both Shinto shrine and Buddhist temple—as was common practice prior to the Meiji Restoration—and served as a base for pilgrims making their long, arduous way on foot to the sacred mountain of Hakusan.

At its peak, thousands of monks lived on the precincts, which were about 10 times the size of the present-day sprawling shrine complex. It's mind-boggling to consider. It will surprise no one familiar with Japanese temple architecture that the complex burned down in the 16th century and was subsequently rebuilt.

The formal separation of Shintoism and Buddhism in the 1870s meant that it became a Shinto shrine first and foremost. However, its name points to vestiges of its Buddhist ties from centuries past—it is a rare instance of a Shinto shrine whose name ends in -ji, meaning "temple."

The shrine has much to offer history buffs, especially when paired with a visit to the more famous Eihei-ji Temple, about 40 minutes away by car. But even without a deep interest in Japanese history, the beauty of this shrine complex alone is mesmerizing enough to warrant an hour or two spent strolling around the grounds. I could happily spend that long peering at feathery mosses, watching long-legged spiders and beetles navigate the moss-furred stumps and stone steps.

The shrine is best visited in spring, fall, or rainy season. Winter is beautiful, too, but perhaps impractical for a visit given the snowy conditions.



The path to Heisenji Hakusan Shrine

Coming of the Raptors

Ask the average Japanese person what Fukui is famous for, and there's a high chance they'll say dinosaurs. You could point to any number of reasons for this. For example, many of the dinosaur fossils discovered in Japan were found here. Six new species were identified in (and named after) Fukui: *Fukuisaurus tetoriensis*, *Koshisaurus katsuyama*, *Fukuiraptor kitadaniensis*, *Fukuititan nipponensis*, *Fukuivenator paradoxus*, and *Tyrannomimus fukuiensis*. And, Katsuyama City is home to the world-class Fukui Prefectural Dinosaur Museum (FPDM), which is also an institution dedicated to ongoing dinosaur research and education.

But really, the main reason everyone associates Fukui with dinosaurs is that the area leans hard into being the self-styled Dinosaur capital of Japan. Dinosaur motifs are everywhere in Fukui: themed restaurants, hotel rooms, playgrounds, stationery, hand towels, and even regular road signs. You'll find huge dinosaur animatronics outside Fukui Station (they sport Santa hats in winter) and Dr. Raptor on a bench inside. One of the prefectural mascots is a green dinosaur, Rapt-kun, named after the fukuiraptor. I should stress that all this is mostly delightful, rather than gimmicky.

Unsurprisingly, the FPDM is beloved by locals and out-of-prefecture visitors alike. It's so popular that you'll see a flashing sign board en route to the museum asking whether you've reserved your tickets, which tend to sell fast during summer vacation and major public holidays. The museum even fills up some weekdays.

In truth, I've never been interested in dinosaurs, but the FPDM does an excellent job of conveying just how cool

these ancient animals are. The main hall is an impressive start to the museum. In a domed exhibition space crammed with dioramas, fossils, and full-body dinosaur skeletons—10 of the 50 specimens on display are actual fossils—I spent a fair amount of time staring at the all-too-realistic T-Rex animatronic glaring ferociously at all of us. If this is what our prehistoric ancestors had to contend with, I am happy to be living in modern times.

As befits one of the world's leading dinosaur museums, the FPDM has clearly invested in competent translators: the English-language captions are well done, if a tad dry. Plus, it's fascinating to see how giant raptors evolved into tiny birds over millions of years. It's well worth spending a few hours here, even more so if you have kids in tow. A shopping spree at the museum's 100-percent dinosaur-themed gift shop is optional but thoroughly encouraged.

A Bath of One's Own

Located in what feels like the middle of nowhere (although just a short drive from the Tojinbo Cliffs), Awara Onsen is one of Fukui's only hot spring towns of note, famous for its healing waters and local cuisine.

We spent the night at the historic *ryokan* Haiya, whose name translates to House of Ash, a tribute to the craftspeople who produced fine ash used in dyeing clothes worn by Kabuki and Noh theatre actors. The unintentionally amusing name notwithstanding—Uncle Roger would have a field day—Haiya is a *ryokan* I'd spend several nights in every month if I had the time and money.

Built in 1884, the inn sprawls over three buildings with a total of 43 rooms. The property retains its Meiji-era architectural trappings—along with modern updates like Wi-Fi and coffee machines—and is large enough that a map might almost come in handy for finding one's way in the maze of winding corridors. All rooms in the original 1884 Shofuan Annex and the recently renovated Kangetsutei Suites, and most of the rooms in the Jurakutou Building, have traditional Japanese garden views.

According to the inn, the room assigned to me—Korin (光輪, meaning “halo” or “nimbus”—was named by Prince Takamatsu. I have no way of verifying this, but the name certainly suits the space with its high ceilings, intricate latticework on the sliding doors, tasteful tableware, 16 tatami mats of space (for up to six people), a private moss-covered garden, and outdoor cypress bath. Best of all, I have it all to myself. Perfect for pretending to be a wealthy writer on sabbatical.

Food and baths are the real draw at most *ryokan*, and Haiya is no exception. The *kaiseki* dinner was a leisurely, two-hour affair, a parade of little dishes showcasing freshly caught seafood from the Sea of Japan and produce from the nearby Sakai Plains.

Two highlights from dinner: One, a whole live abalone cooked *jigokuyaki*-style, or “hell-grilled,” right in front of you until it stops moving. Bouncy yet tender and ocean-fresh, this style of abalone is not for the squeamish. The other,



Fukui is the Dinosaur capital of Japan.



Abalone “hell-grilled” right in front of you.



Pottery is more challenging than it looks.

okami's sake purin, a creamy pot of custard made ever more beguiling with its undertones of boozy umami. To our dismay, this is not a year-round staple, but a seasonal dessert. The idiom “*ichigo ichie*,” or “for this time only,” has never felt so salient and cruel. (More reason to plan a return trip next October.)

But it's Korin's cypress bath I keep coming back to in my mind. Before I checked out, there was a moment where a shaft of sunlight pierced the gap in the bamboo screens in front of the bath just so, illuminating wisps of steam curling up from the surface of the hot water. There was something simple yet transcendent about all these elements coming together for a few minutes before the sun moved on.

The Pleasures of Pottery

In addition to crafts like making *washi* paper and knives, Fukui is also known for its pottery: Echizen-yaki, or Echizen ware. Notable for its understated coloring, and usually being fired sans enamel, this type of pottery centers on one of the Six Ancient Kilns of Japan, the others being Seto, Tamba, Bizen, Tokoname, and Shigaraki.

Echizen ware is, in fact, a recent term. According to the permanent display at the Echizen Old Kiln Museum, it was coined by the researcher Kuemon Mizuno and Fujio Koyama between 1942 and 1945 as a way to group a number of disparate pottery styles local to the region under a single categorical umbrella. Perhaps unintentionally, this seems to parallel the municipal mergers of the Meiji Era, where many villages and hamlets were amalgamated into new or existing cities.

Both the Old Kiln Museum and the Fukui Prefectural Museum of Ceramics (FPMC) next door have much to offer the ceramics lover by way of exhibitions and beautifully made pieces to add to one's suitcase. There's also a traditional teahouse and garden where you can sip on green tea from Echizen ware. But there's nothing quite like getting your hands dirty to appreciate, on a visceral level, the craft that goes into a piece of pottery.

My visit to the FPMC included a workshop using the electric potter's wheel. The task was to shape a vessel—anything I wanted, as long as it had a mouth. I had 30–90 minutes. As seems to be true of all craftspeople, ceramicists make their craft look easy when it is anything but. It's more challenging than it looks to maneuver a solid, spinning hunk of clay. Too little pressure and nothing happens; too much pressure and all hell breaks loose. (Here's a life lesson: never wear a nice white shirt when taking a ceramics workshop.)

Fortunately, there was a skilled staff member on hand to guide my hands and help fashion the clay into something vaguely presentable. Unless you're a quick learner, it's not possible to master the electric potter's wheel in a single session. It takes practice and more than a little intuition.

If your work primarily involves a computer, as mine does, it's easy to forget the pleasures of creating something with your hands, no matter how messy or clumsy the result. Taking a ceramics workshop at a place like the FPMC is a great way to reconnect with the physical world. Reservations here are mandatory, particularly if you'd prefer instruction in English (there are only two English-speaking members on staff). For those living in Japan, they'll fire and mail the finished piece to you for an additional fee.

Lustrous Lacquer

The Echizen Lacquerware Hall is not somewhere you'd chance upon unless you were looking for it. Located in Sabae City—these days more famous for spectacles than anything else—this unassuming building is all too easy to drive past. Of course, this would be a waste, since it's a fine place to view superb examples of lacquerware, watch artisans make lacquer magic, shop for lacquerware, and even try out various types of lacquer art for yourself, from applying lacquer to plain wood or painting already-lacquered wood.

This was the final stop on our two-day tour; we were there for the *chinkin* experience. Briefly put, this involves carving a design onto a lacquered surface, applying a thin layer of lacquer into the engraved lines, then covering it with gold dust or leaf. You then take your finished work home. How difficult could this be?

As the saying goes, these were famous last words. After tracing a motif of your choice onto a lacquered surface—I foolishly chose a detailed crane drawing—you then use a spindly metal chisel to gouge out the lines you've drawn, scraping away from yourself in a single direction. Engraving is not at all like drawing; my lines were nowhere as precise as I wanted them to be. Those with fine motor skills will have a better time of it.

I had never thought much of lacquer as a craft, but I gained a newfound respect for lacquer artisans that day. Having tasted a little of what it's like to carve a design, the exquisite details on the lacquerware on display at museums and exhibitions have taken on more weight and meaning. These days, my clumsily carved crane plate sits on my dining table, reminding me not to take for granted the craft behind beautiful handmade things. ■



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