

# *Les Clefs d'Or Japan*

# **Key News**



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## SITE INSPECTION TRIP to TOYAMA

On June 5th to 7th, seven of our Les Clefs d'Or members gathered at Toyama prefecture arranged our affiliate member Ms. Eiko Wada of Gaen Corporation. Thanks to her and Toyama Prefectural Government Tourism Promotion Office, we had the opportunity to discover the gems of Toyama.

### <Day 1>

We have visited Takaoka City and the Tonami City on our first day. Takaoka City is known for the Takaoka Copperware and holds top share of the domestic casting market. Our trip started by visiting Nousaku. Nousaku began manufacturing Buddhist ritual Japanese tea sets and vases made of brass and bronze. They have been in business for more than 100 years. We observed craftsmen enthusiastically manufacturing everything by hand. We were impressed by the beautiful brass and tin products. The store offers a variety of products, and the headquarters building and interior have won numerous design awards.

We then moved to Tonami city to visit the Wakatsuru Sake Brewery. Wakatsuru Brewery is a traditional sake brewery that began making sake at the end of the Edo period (1862) and started producing whiskey after the war (1952). After a delicious lunch at the attached restaurant, we visited the whiskey distillery. The wonderful aroma of malt filled the air, and some of the barrels were made of wood from Toyama Prefecture. We were all impressed by the smoky flavor of the whiskey we tasted. We got to see the world's first cast pot still "Zemon".



Then we moved back to Takaoka City, and visited the Takaoka City Foundry Museum. This is a museum where visitors can learn about the history of Takaoka castings, which have been produced for 400 years. We were amazed at the wide variety of colors available for finishing.

We then had the chance to visit Yotsukawa Works. It is located in Kanaya-cho town with its beautiful old townscape, we saw the innovative and modern products, which are highly admired both in Japan and abroad. We were impressed by the sophisticated design of these award-winning products.

We then visited the Festive Float Museum. This is a facility where festive float, a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, is exhibited throughout the year. The float is almost 9 meters high which is overwhelming.

### <DAY 2>

On the second day we visited Toyama City, Takaoka City, and Imizu City. The Iwase district of Toyama City, which has become popular among food connoisseurs in recent years, is characterized by Kitamaebune shipping agents' residences and famous restaurants adjacent to them. Part of this district has been renovated and restored in harmony with the old buildings. Mr. Masuda, president of a local brewery, introduced the up-and-coming restaurant he has attracted to the area.

In the afternoon, the group visited two famous museums. At the Takaoka City Museum of Art, we saw the Furusato Gallery, which honors the artwork of Fujiko F. Fujio (born in Takaoka City), creator of the cartoon "Doraemon," and was able to see rare manuscripts from before his debut. At the Toyama City Museum of Glass, we also enjoyed the stylish architecture designed by Kengo Kuma that extensively uses glass and aluminum, installations by world-renowned glass artists, and delicate and beautiful works by local glass artists.

And the most impressive place was Zuiryujii Temple in Takaoka City. The temple's gate, hatto and butsuden (main halls), designated



national treasures, stand side by side in a tranquil space. The building has a calm atmosphere typical of Zen Buddhism, but the detailed carvings are breathtakingly beautiful. From the priest's talk, we learned that the temple was built as a family temple for the feudal lord of the Kaga domain and was a place of great historical importance.

### <DAY 3>

On the third day we visited Kotokuji Temple. Located in Fukumitsu, Nanto City, Kotokuji Temple is related to Shiko Munakata. Shiko Munakata evacuated this area, and many of his works remain, including the stunning sliding door paintings that Munakata is said to have painted all at once. The temple is also beautifully decorated with Mingei folk art from Japan and abroad collected by the abbot at the time, giving it a wonderful atmosphere more like a museum than a temple.



We have then visited Gokayama Village (Ainokura/Suganuma). Two areas with Gassho-zukuri-style folk houses are registered as World Heritage Sites. In Ainokura, we heard interesting stories from the locals living in the Gassho-style houses about how the village has survived and how the people live. Suganuma is a charming village with stunning scenery. Simply walking around the village provided an enriching experience.

After visiting Gokayama we moved to Inami to see the Inami Woodcarving (Inami Carving). A local guide showed us around the woodcarving town. We visited a studio and observed an artisan at work. While exploring the charming streets, we enjoyed looking for cat carvings. The stunning carvings on the gate of the Zuiryuji old temple were truly impressive and worth a visit.



We then moved to observe IWA. IWA is a Japanese sake brewery founded by Richard Geoffroy, the former chief brewer of Dom Pérignon. It is located in the mountains and offers a stunning view of Toyama Bay. The beautiful building designed by Kengo Kuma and the story of IWA are both inspiring. The sake-tasting experience was exceptional, with a unique mouthfeel and rich flavor that surpassed expectations.

We then came back to Toyama City to the Shusui Museum of Art. The museum is known for its rich collection of Japanese swords, including important cultural properties. The passionate explanations by the director and curators were impressive. The methods used to showcase the swords, including lighting to highlight their intricate blade patterns, were terrific.

The 3-day visit showed us many different charms of Toyama. We wish to introduce the experiences to our guests.



## Getting to Know Our Members

### **Mai Hashitani**

*Assistant Chief Concierge  
Palace Hotel Tokyo*

■ Experience as a Concierge : 10 years

■ Member of Les Clefs d'Or : 2 years

■ **Highlights of your hotel:** Last year, we celebrated our 10th anniversary on May 17th 2022. We announced new suites called "Premier Suite".

Our hotel has 284 rooms, 10 restaurants & bars, a spa, function rooms, a wedding chapel, and so on. It is nice to spend time reading books and having breakfast in our guestroom with a balcony, which provides excellent ventilation and picture-perfect views of the Imperial Palace gardens. Our art tour is one of the popular activities in the hotel, over 720 art pieces are welcoming you.

■ **How I spend my time on my day off:** I love to watch a play on my off day such as Kabuki, Takarazuka and musicals at theater.

Also, I love to go fishing at Tokyo bay with my friends. Watching by YouTube, I handle the fish and cook by myself.

Once in a month, I spend a whole day as a maintenance day to refresh by myself going spa, nail salon and hair salon.



■ **Special place to visit:** My favorite place is Baikado Japanese sweets shop in Kakuozan, Aichi prefecture. Their famous item is Onimanju which is steamed cake with sweet potatoes. It is one of a famous foods of Aichi prefecture. Every time I return to my hometown, I reserve the sweets more than 10 pieces and bring them back to Tokyo!

■ **Favorite Hotel Movie:** My favorite hotel movie is The Grand Budapest Hotel. French member shared us the hotel movie list during stay-home term. I watched this movie and impressed by the les clef d'Or network and impressed by the les clef d'Or network from the movie. Several les clefs d'Or concierge cooperate using their own network and respond to the difficult inquiries like a magic!



### Akil Thiwari

*Director of Concierge and Guest Experience  
Mandarin Oriental Tokyo*

Experience as a Concierge : 23 years

Member of Les Clefs d'Or : 6 years

**Highlights of your hotel:** Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo's visionary design and award-winning service have been recognized as the epitome of sophisticated luxury in the city. The hotel features luxuriously appointed guest rooms and suites, various restaurants and bars and an award-winning spa situated within the soaring, Cesar Pelli-designed Nihonbashi Mitsui Tower. The site offers spectacular views of the city skyline while providing access to stately banquet and conference facilities within the adjacent Mitsui Main Building, a Japanese cultural-heritage property. Enjoy Eye-popping views from all its rooms, bars and restaurants.

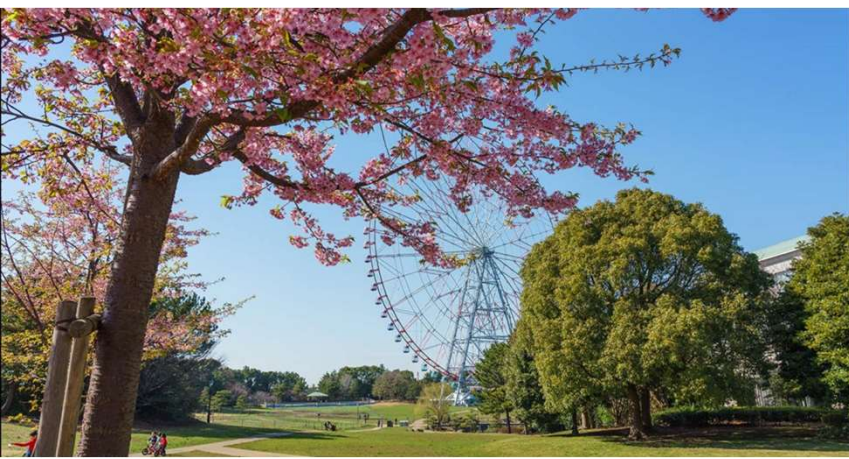
**How I spend my time on my day off:** I often enjoy reading newspapers online to be aware of current affairs and having quiet days but at the same time I also enjoy going out with friends, having a fun time with family or watching television and enjoy cooking to refresh my mind. I often try waking up early and going for a long run. Lot of my best ideas come to me while I'm running. While you're out in the open, the combination of invigorating activity and the calmness of spirits setting in is beautiful.



**Special place to visit:** At Kasai Rinkai Park, you could spend an entire day. It is the largest park in central Tokyo, located in the far eastern corner of Tokyo's Edogawa ward. There are Sea Life Park, Sea Bird Sanctuary, various type of flowers, Ferris Wheel, hiking trails, spaces for barbecue and many more. Take a rest at one of the kiosks or at the restaurant Blue Marine for a well-deserved break. Try "Park Train," especially if you're in a group or traveling with children which will take you on a 3.1 km journey around the park in about 25 minutes. The Tokyo Water Bus also operates its Kasai – Odaiba line from Kasai Rinkai Park.

**Favorite Restaurant:** On the 7th floor of Four Seasons Hotel Tokyo at Marunouchi, Daniel Calvert's two-Michelin-starred restaurant SÉZANNE introduces a dynamic dining journey in the heart of Tokyo. The show kitchen

invites you to engage with the cooking journey, while Andre Fu's interiors speak a language of relaxed luxury. The restaurant is composed of three different elements: the "Salon" where you can enjoy an aperitif with a view of the city, the "Main Dining Room" where you can see the realistic kitchen, and the "Chef's Table" which is a private room.



## Monthly Meeting

### MAY

- A showcase was presented by Ms Yumita from Tokyo Pearl. She showed us their own products and explained the difference by comparing some types of pearls such as the one from fresh water, the other from sea water and from different pearl companies in Japan. We also have learnt how we should take care of the pearls when polishing.
- Announcement from CSR Team. Les Clefs d'Or Japan is supporting Kidsdoor, the organization who supports underprivileged children with various difficulties, by arranging talk sessions. In the past we offered English lessons and talked about foreign countries. Also introducing the life of a Hotel Concierge services which may interest the children's future career in the hospitality industry.
- There was a report from restaurant affiliate members that after the pandemic, they still had not been able to open all the tables due to the staff shortage. On top this there were many no shows especially from inbound guests which ended up with further table and revenue loss. In order to resolve the issue, the restaurant has recently introduced online booking system with the credit card guarantee from each booker.



### JUNE

- The monthly meeting in June was held in Shozan Resort Kyoto. Although we will be still continuing hybrid system, we are trying to shift into on sight only style by arranging more active programs especially for the members who attend on site. The following monthly meetings to be held more in regional areas such as Niigata, Ishikawa and Hiroshima.
- A sight inspection fam trip was held in Toyama prefecture organized by one of our affiliate member Ms. Wada from Gaen collaborated with Toyama Prefectural Office. The details can be found in the separate article.
- There was a presentation by Mr. Akira Kamei the president of Erizen the historical kimono draper in Kyoto. Mr. Kamei showed us the rare original "haneri" one part of Kimono and the roots of the draper's name Erizen. Mr. Kamei also spoke about how the Kimono could be made from the 13m rolled cloth without wasting any piece of cloth and how the kimono could pass onto the next generations from father to son or mother to daughter by altering smartly using the hidden insertions. As of this, Kimono is naturally based on SDGs also could be symbol of the diversity as there is a custom to accept how the other people wear the Kimono by sometime choosing less vivid



colors or inserting simpler accessories to make the other person to be highlighted depends on the occasions.