

# Les Clefs d'Or Japan

# Key News



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# The Ryokan Collection Dinner Gathering

By Mai Hashitani

We are pleased to report that ten members of Les Clefs d'Or Japan participated in the 9th Joint Study Session and Networking Dinner, graciously hosted by The Ryokan Collection.

This year's event took place at the historic Kagurazaka restaurant called Kagurazaka Shimakin. Thanks to the generous support of Mr. Yamada from EDO KAGURA, we were fortunate to witness captivating performances by

traditional Kagurazaka geisha and hōkan (male entertainer in Japan, similar in some ways to a male geisha), offering a rare cultural experience.

Although the originally planned walking tour of Kagurazaka had to be canceled due to inclement weather, the time was instead well spent deepening connections with representatives from 31 facilities from The Ryokan Collection.

We learned insights on each property's unique activities and recent initiatives, gaining valuable information that will enhance the service which we introduce to our guests.

The event also provided a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with familiar faces and build new relationships, including with representatives of properties preparing for their

grand opening. The evening was filled with meaningful conversations and mutual inspiration.

Our members look forward to this annual opportunity to meet directly with those in the field. We are deeply grateful for these relationships, which allow us to confidently introduce our guests to these exceptional destinations.

Moving forward, we will continue to strengthen our partnership with The Ryokan Collection and its member properties, working together to offer truly memorable experiences for travelers visiting Japan.

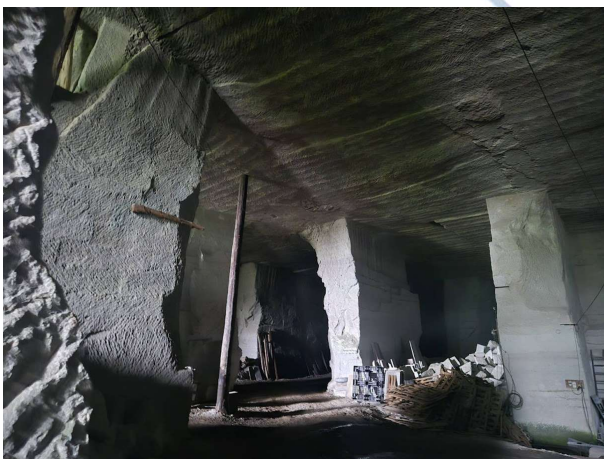


# Ishikawa Prefecture FAM Trip

## By Rise Kamei

On June 23–24, 2025, five members of Les Clefs d'Or Japan participated in a fam trip as part of the Ishikawa Cultural Tourism Content Development Support Project. This visit focused on Komatsu and Hakusan Cities, offering a unique immersion into the region's rich nature, traditional culture, and history.

Our journey began at the Takigahara Stone Quarry, recognized as part of Japan Heritage under the theme of "Komatsu's Stone Culture." Active since the Edo period, the quarry remains in operation today. Guided by curator Mr. Kashida, we learned about its history and cultural significance. Walking through the cool, straight-lined mining tunnels felt like stepping into a vast underground art installation.



After that, we had lunch at the Japanese restaurant Kajisuke. Seasonal ingredients were elegantly presented in Kutani porcelain and Wajima lacquerware. Some dishes were served on plates crafted by Living National Treasures. We enjoyed a piece of art through food.

Next, we visited the studio of Ms. Seito Tamura, the fourth-generation artist specializing in the art of brush-writing micro calligraphy on Kutani ware. This technique, with a history of around 120 years, involves writing classical poetry and literature on ceramics. We were deeply impressed by her skill, especially her ability to handwrite an entire classical Japanese anthology of 100 poems on a dish only 4 cm wide.

At Kaga no Oriza (Ushikubi Tsumugi × MIZEN) in Hakusan, we learned about Ushikubi Tsumugi, one of Japan's three most celebrated types of silk. Made from rare double cocoons containing two silkworms, the hand-spun threads produce a fabric that is strong, soft, and rich in

natural texture. The shop is a collaboration between traditional weaver Nishiyama Sangyo and former Hermès designer Mr. Shunsuke Teranishi, who launched the MIZEN project to blend traditional craft with modern fashion. Visitors can order custom-made MIZEN clothing and try hands-on experiences like pulling silk from cocoons and weaving.

We then had dinner at CRAFEAT, a restaurant produced by Taya Lacquerware, a Wajima-nuri maker. Its concept combines traditional craft with cuisine, offering a refined dining experience served in Wajima lacquerware.

We stayed at Hotel Nikko Kanazawa. At breakfast, we enjoyed local specialties such as kuruma-fu French toast and jibuni stew, giving us a taste of Kanazawa's regional flavors.

Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings. Its architecture designed to withstand heavy snowfall and support sericulture was highly distinctive.

At the Hakusan Kobo workshop, we observed tools and materials used throughout the process of producing Ushikubi Tsumugi, from silkworm cultivation to weaving.

For lunch, we visited Hakusan Quiche House QUI, a gluten-free restaurant in a renovated traditional home. The quiche, made with locally grown rice flour, had a light and crispy texture.

Our final stop was Shirayama Hime Shrine, the head shrine of over 3,000 Hakusan shrines across Japan. Mt. Hakusan is worshipped as the god of water, and the shrine's sacred grounds includes a rare misogi purification site.

This trip gave us a valuable opportunity to connect with Ishikawa's living traditions and evolving tourism initiatives. We extend our sincere thanks to Ms. Hisae Kojima, a Les Clefs d'Or member in Ishikawa Prefecture, whose dedication made this experience possible.



On the second day, we visited the Shiramine area at the foot of Mt. Hakusan. This mountain village is designated as an



## Setouchi Area Fam Trip

**Dates:** June 11–12, 2024

**Participants:** Mayako Sumiyoshi, Asako Koike, Eiji Tanaka

### Day 1

Departing from rainy Haneda Airport, we arrived at Hiroshima Airport in just over an hour, where the rain had lightened to a gentle drizzle.

We were warmly welcomed by representatives from Setouchi DMC, the Japan Tourism Agency (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism), and the Japan National Tourism Organization, who accompanied us throughout the fam trip.

We then headed to Mihara Port, about a 40-minute drive from Hiroshima Airport. Upon arrival, we boarded the cruise ship *Seto Pirika*. During our 40-minute cruise to Ōmishima Island, Mr. Jun Kyoya of SETOUCHI ISLANDER (Uno Port Real Estate Co., Ltd.) introduced us to a variety of charter vessels and activities they offer. SETOUCHI ISLANDER can arrange custom cruises across the Seto Inland Sea, private island experiences, traditional swordsmithing and Bizen pottery workshops, as well as helicopter, chauffeur, and guide services around Uno Port. Their crews are

English-speaking, and catering service is available onboard.



Upon reaching Ōmishima, we visited WAKKA, a comprehensive tourism facility along the Shimanami Kaido. CEO Mr. Arashi Murakami gave us a tour. The facility features kitchen-equipped cottages and glamping accommodations, each equipped with racks for hanging guests' own bicycles and ramps at the café to accommodate cyclists — all thoughtfully designed for cycling enthusiasts, a key activity along the Shimanami Kaido. They also offer cycling taxis, “cycle cruise” services, a well-stocked selection of rental e-bikes, fishing, BBQ, and marine sports.

At the WAKKA café, we heard from Ms. Yuina Nakamura of Mizusaki Co., Ltd., who collaborates with local fisherman Mr. Junichi Fujimoto. Her project connects Fujimoto's catch with top chefs across Japan, creating a sustainable and delicious cycle linking fisheries, cities, and local communities.

Mr. Fujimoto uses a unique fishing method: immediately after catch, he relieves the pressure in the fishes' swim bladders caused by rapid ascent from deep water. He then transfers them into a relaxed holding tank overnight before performing the "ikejime" technique—a humane method that destroys the fish's brain and spinal cord without stress. He then gently bleeds the fish in cold water. This meticulous process preserves the highest level of umami in the seafood.

After the talk, we traveled by car about 30 minutes to Miyakubo Port. There, Mr. Fujimoto's wife and a young fisherman welcomed us aboard a fishing boat. We visited a live fish holding cage where fish were calmly swimming and witnessed a live ikejime demonstration onboard. A few fish were skillfully processed right in front of us, and we were given the fish for lunch later in the special restaurant nearby.



The boat then took us to Oura Port on Hakata Island, a 15-minute journey. Along the way, we sailed through a powerful strait once controlled by the Murakami pirates, experiencing firsthand the strength of nature and the sea currents.

Upon arrival at Oura Port, we transferred to a car and headed to our lunch destination: Akakichi, a sushi restaurant. Chef Junji Akase welcomed us and showed us the beautiful fish caught by Mr. Fujimoto, including those prepared just earlier. We were treated to a luxurious meal featuring turban shell risotto, tempura of clams, Chinese-style stewed red-spotted grouper, grilled white tilefish, and various types of sushi. Each dish showcased the natural flavor of the fish in ways we had never experienced before—an extraordinary combination of the finest ingredients and expert culinary skill.



After lunch, we made our way to Azumi Setoda on Ikuchijima Island, part of the Shimanami Kaido. The hotel, opened in March 2021 and introduced to us by Front Office Manager Mr. Keita Mizukami, was developed by world-renowned hotelier Adrian Zecha. It is a renovated historic mansion that once belonged to the affluent Horiuchi family, who prospered through salt and shipping industries. The hotel features 22 elegantly minimalist

guest rooms, with gardens on the ground floor and balconies on the upper floor. Its public areas include a lounge, library, gallery displaying Horiuchi treasures, and an open-kitchen restaurant offering modern French dinners and traditional Japanese breakfasts. Across the street is yubune, a combined public bath and accommodation facility with a library on the second floor, serving as a local community hub.



Leaving Setoda, we drove about 30 minutes to Ryokan Onomichi Nishiyama in Onomichi City. This historic waterfront inn comprises eight guest rooms across six separate buildings, complete with a lounge, private baths, and a restaurant. We stayed in two rooms: Asahi-no-Ma (Sunrise Room), a Western-style room on the second floor of a Western-style building with panoramic windows overlooking the sunrise over the port; and Chototei, a traditional Japanese house with a tea room, rich in historic furnishings.

Before dinner, we attended a briefing in the inn's conference room by Setouchi Joycruise Company about their luxury

cruisers. Alongside Setouchi Cruise, Inc. we discussed the joys of island hopping, the Seto Inland Sea's famously calm waters, and their international outreach at major boat shows around the world.

Dinner was served at *Yosoro*, the inn's restaurant, where we watched chefs in an open kitchen prepare French cuisine using local ingredients, paired with carefully selected wines. Afterward, we visited the rooftop bar at Onomichi



Club, about 20 minutes away by car, and enjoyed cocktails while admiring the night view over the Onomichi Waterway—an ideal end to our first day.

### Day 2

We began the day with a Japanese breakfast featuring local ingredients at *Yosoro*. Then we drove about 40 minutes to a denim workshop in Fukuyama. There, the brand Boleega creates fully custom or semi-custom jeans tailored to customers' specifications from around the world. Semi-custom orders can be completed overnight. Jeans are packaged in paulownia wood boxes, sealed with sanada-himo cords, and include a crane origami folded from brocade, serving as a certificate of authenticity.

Ms. Miki Tachibana, the District Diplomat of the project, explained how the business supports the local community through youth training, collaboration with local companies, and running a denim school. Their jeans come with a lifetime guarantee,

and their workshop is housed in a repurposed traditional house. Visitors can tour the workshop and participate in the production process—an inspiring contribution to regional revitalization and sustainability.

From Fukuyama, we drove an hour to Kurashiki. The city's picturesque Bikan Historical Quarter features willow-lined canals and white-walled traditional buildings from the Edo, Meiji, and Taisho periods. We had lunch at *Ryokan Kurashiki*, where we enjoyed a beautifully presented seasonal kaiseki meal. Proprietress Ms. Ritsuko Nakamura showed us around the inn, which has been elegantly renovated from multiple storehouses (sugar, rice, and tools) into just eight luxurious rooms, each with a distinct character and private garden views.

We then strolled through the Bikan District to visit another boutique inn, *Yoruya*. Set in a restored Meiji-era kimono merchant's villa, the interior—designed by Mr. Shinichiro Ogata of SIMPLICITY—is a striking contrast to its traditional exterior. It features 13 uniquely designed rooms with rounded corners inspired by ships, reflecting Kurashiki's shipbuilding heritage. As a *ryōri-yado* (culinary inn), *Yoruya* offers refined



Japanese cuisine served at the counter with Bizen pottery.

After a tour of the facility, we returned to the bar and were introduced to the Bizen Osafune Japanese Sword Museum in Okayama Prefecture, a place where visitors can observe every stage of traditional sword-making. Guests can even purchase swords or take part in a “samurai experience” involving sword handling.

After a one-hour drive from Kurashiki, we arrived at Okayama Station, bringing our two-day Setouchi fam trip to a close. Despite being in the middle of the rainy season, we were blessed with pockets of sunshine and experienced an incredibly enriching and diverse itinerary. Each of us returned with a wealth of new content and deep appreciation for the Setouchi area, eager to share its charm with a wider audience.



# Hokuriku Area Fam Trip

**Dates:** June 11–12, 2024

**Participants:** Hisae Kojima, Etsuko Higashide, Marie-Antoinette Mori, Akane Tanaka

## Day 1 – Toyama

The inspection started with a visit to the Toyama Glass Studio, where we experienced hands-on paperweight-making using techniques such as bubble infusion and spiral engraving. We were granted access to a non-public area and impressed by premium services tailored to affluent guests—such as custom packaging, furoshiki wrapping, and same-day delivery. Their meticulous preparations, starting a month in advance, highlighted the spirit of omotenashi. At Piatto Suzuki Cinque, lunch was an elegant experience. Dishes were beautifully presented, with one plate featuring aromatic white powder made from olive oil—memorable in both taste and appearance.



Next, we toured Saburomaru Distillery, operated by a historic sake brewery founded in 1862. We received a special tour of the new blending room, gaining insight into the fusion of tradition and innovation in whisky production.



Later, we visited Rakudo-an, a three-room inn converted from a 120-year-old farmhouse. Sustainability is central to their philosophy—offering local experiences and donating a portion of revenue to community preservation. The space embodied the region's spirit, or Dotoku, where culture and environment merge.



We ended the day in Fukui, walking through Mikuni Minato, a historic port town. We learned about local customs such as wintertime mizu-yokan and seafood auctions. Dinner at Tateru Yoshino Mikuni Minato featured refined French cuisine using regional ingredients. Lodging was at Auberge Homachi Mikuni Minato.



buckwheat varieties created a healing culinary experience.

At Aossa Conference Room, a discussion was held with the hosts. Key insights included:

- New destination options beyond Kanazawa
- The importance of visible local contacts for smooth referrals
- Luxury guest expectations: uniqueness, speed, and attention to detail
- Natural guest interviews help draw out genuine feedback
- Reminder: submit referral information via concierge forms

### Conclusion

This two-day journey revealed the depth and value of Hokuriku's culture, crafts, and people. We return inspired to "translate" these local treasures into meaningful experiences for guests. "Turning everyday local life into something exceptional for the world."

### Day 2 – Fukui

Our second day began with a tour of Echizen Uchihamono blade workshops. At Eto-e, we observed handle-making from rare woods. Ryusen Hamono showcased stylish, high-quality blades, blending craftsmanship and machinery, with strong international appeal.

We then visited Ryoso Yanase Paper Mill, where we experienced traditional Echizen washi making. The female artisans' balance of kindness, discipline, and dedication left a deep impression.

Lunch was at *Urushiya*, a soba restaurant with historical prestige. The quiet, elegant space and devotion to heirloom



# Les Clefs d'Or Summer Party

By Satoru Masuda



The annual Les Clefs d'Or Japan Summer Gathering was held this year at Andaz Tokyo's banquet venue, the Rooftop Studio, located on the 52nd floor of the hotel. Despite the intense humidity and heat, along with unstable weather and thunderstorms in the early evening, the skies cleared just before the event began. All members were able to enjoy a warm and joyful evening together, with the stunning night view of Tokyo Tower. This year's toast was delivered by Ms. Wada from our affiliate of Gaen Corporation.

This year also marked the first occasion to welcome Social Affiliate members, making the gathering even more special. It was a memorable evening filled with heartfelt reunions, smiles, and lively conversations.

## MONTHLY MEETING

### July

The regular monthly meeting in July was held in an amphitheater at Hotel Chinzanso Tokyo.

In Part 1, committee members shared updates on current activities, ongoing initiatives, and future plans.

Regarding the seminar scheduled for January 2026, discussions continued on identifying the most suitable theme and meaningful content that would truly resonate with participants. Through these exchanges, we further clarified the values and direction we aim to deliver, which will be effectively communicated to the keynote speaker, Mr. Dean McWhinney, as we work toward creating a truly unique and impactful seminar.

In the second part of the meeting, affiliates provided recent updates, followed by two reports on inspections “Setouchi” and “Hokuriku Area” conducted by the Japan Tourism Agency.

Mr. Otsuki from Japan Airlines then introduced the Concierge Assistant Service, offering a deep dive into its potential and added value. He wishes to collaborate with Les Clefs d’Or.



### August

The August meeting was held in Yokohama at a Conference Room in Hatoba Kaikan.

In Part 1, committee members delivered their regular reports. Upcoming activities included details on the annual summer party held every August, an invitation to tour the newly opened “Gora Kadan Fuji” in July, and a report on the exchange meeting with “The Ryokan Collection.” Information was also shared about the September and December study tours organized by the Fukui Prefecture Tourism Federation.

Additionally, details were provided about a special seminar scheduled for September 2nd. The speaker will be Mr. Mark Patterson, Chairman of Denmark's 360A/S and facilitator of Education Day at the 2023 International Congress. This seminar will be a rare and valuable opportunity to hear from him directly and gain unique insights from his experiences.

In Part Two, after receiving updates from the attending business affiliates, the CSR representative presented the results of the survey regarding future CSR activities and shared details about the tree-planting activity scheduled for November. Afterwards, the seminar organizer reported on preparation status. Followed by reports on inspection of “Kii Mountains” and “Ise Region,” conducted by Japan Tourism Agency for their project for “Creating High-Value-Added Inbound Tourism Destinations in Regional Areas.”