

Art Museums, Dining and Lodging: Exploring Architecture's Many Roles

SETOUCHI

Tour Guide

Words by Mari Hashimoto



Benesse Art Site Naoshima



Lee Ufan 'Porte vers l'infini' (2019)
Photo:Tadasu Yamamoto

From the 1970s onwards, Naoshima Town asked the architect Kazuhiro Ishii to design several public buildings, including the town office and educational facilities like a kindergarten and junior high school, with this forming the basis of Naoshima's association with architecture.

Thereafter, Tetsuhiko Fukutake, founding president of Fukutake Publishing, and Chikatsugu Miyake, then mayor of Naoshima, teamed up to develop a cultural and educational area on the island. In 1989, Naoshima International Camp (now located in Benesse Park) was launched under the supervision of Tadao Ando. This provided the impetus for further initiatives, with Benesse House then opening in 1992 as a facility integrating a museum with a hotel, based on the concept of the "coexistence of nature, art and architecture." The scope of these activities expanded thereafter to include site-specific installations and projects in local villages in Naoshima and in the 2000s the initiative expanded to nearby islands like Teshima and Inujima. Since 2010, meanwhile, Naoshima, Teshima, Inujima and four other islands have staged the Setouchi Triennale, a contemporary art festival held once every three years.

Naoshima is now home to numerous art museums, galleries and art projects, including Chichu Art Museum, Benesse House Museum, Hiroshi Sugimoto Gallery: Time Corridors, Lee Ufan Museum, Art House Project, ANDO MUSEUM, Setouchi"
"Archive/Miyanoura Gallery 6, Naoshima



Bath "I♥湯" (I love YU), The Naoshima Plan "The Water", and Valley Gallery. Benesse House also offers four types of accommodation: Museum, Oval, Park, and Beach. Some facilities require online reservations, so please check the websites for details.



Benesse Art Site Naoshima

Link
<https://benesse-artsite.jp/en/>
Hiroshi Sugimoto Gallery: Time Corridors Lounge, 2022.
Photo: Masatomo MORIYAMA

LOG

LOG is a multi-purpose facility in Onomichi, a city that still retains the kind of scenery that movie aficionados might recognize from Yasujiro Ozu's Tokyo Story. Located near Naoya Shiga's former residence, where the writer conceived the idea for A Dark Night's Passing, LOG was originally an apartment block constructed in 1963. After a major conversion project, the building's name was changed to LOG. This stands for "Lantern Onomichi Garden," a name that reflects the building's new role not only as a hotel but also as a site of facilities open to the public that spread awareness of Onomichi's nature and culture. LOG also marks the first time the Indian architecture group STUDIO MUMBAI has worked on a construction project outside of India. Breakfast and dinner are provided in the dining area, with the menus supervised by the food artist Ai Hosokawa. Nearby Setouchi Minato no Yado also offers accommodation. Here,



LOG

Link <https://l-og.jp/en/>
photo:Tetsuya Ito/by courtesy of LOG

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Exploring Tokyo's Architectural Marvels with Loris

TOKYO

Embarking on a journey to discover the aesthetic wonders of Tokyo's museums, we teamed up with Japan-based content creator Loris for a captivating tour to see the architectural beauty found in the city.

Morning: Ueno's Cultural Oasis

Our adventure commenced in Ueno, a district steeped in history and home to a collection of renowned museums and art institutions. We delved into four architectural masterpieces that showcase the intersection of tradition and modernity.

An architectural gem designed by the visionary Le Corbusier; this World Cultural Heritage-listed Museum recently underwent renovation to restore Le Corbusier's original expressive intent. Rodin's iconic sculptures grace the forecourt, adding a touch of timeless elegance to the surroundings.



The National Museum of Western Art

Place 7-7 Ueno Park, Taito-ku, Tokyo 110-0007, Japan

The National Museum of Western Art



Auguste Rodin
《The Thinker (Enlarged)》
1881-82 (model), 1902-03 (enlarged), 1926 (cast)
bronze
The National Museum of Western Art Matsukata Collection
photo : ©Norihiro Ueno

Tokyo National Museum – Gallery of Horyuji Treasures

Our journey led us to the Gallery of Horyuji Treasures, a tribute to the world's oldest wooden building, Horyuji Temple. Designed by the eminent architect Taniguchi Yoshio, this gallery stands as a testament to the seamless fusion of ancient artifacts and modern architecture.

As we approached, Loris astutely pointed out the asymmetrical design, showcasing traditional Japanese beauty through modern lenses. The contrasting sizes of the ponds added an intriguing layer, harmonizing the modern structure with traditional Japanese aesthetic values.



Tokyo National Museum – Gallery of Horyuji Treasures

Place 13-9 Ueno Park, Taito-ku, Tokyo 110-8712, Japan

National Museum of Nature and Science, Tokyo

Filled with captivating exhibits of plesiosaur replicas to Japan's advances in science and technology, the National Museum of Nature and Science boasts a facade that is itself a marvel of early 20th-century modern architecture. With its dignified Neo-Renaissance style, the building resembles an airplane when viewed from above.



Loris appreciated the grandeur of the Neo-Renaissance design, the scratch-tiled exterior from 1931, and the airplane-shaped structure that captivates from a bird's eye view. His attention was also drawn to the intricate stained glass pattern depicting what seemed to be a phoenix. The phoenix, a mythical bird with origins in Chinese legends, has been cherished in Japan for centuries as a symbol of auspiciousness. This subtle incorporation of the phoenix motif exemplifies a harmonious blend of Western and Japanese elements within the museum's aesthetic. The use of stained glass, a serene dome, and the incorporation of

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文化庁 Japan Arts Council

Excerpted from our online articles. Published by: Japan Arts Council

natural light showcases the museum's commitment to creating a captivating atmosphere.

Additionally, the building uses Jurassic marble slabs, and upon closer inspection, ammonites are visible, adding an extra layer of intrigue to its architectural splendor.



National Museum of Nature and Science, Tokyo
Place 7-20 Ueno Park, Taito-ku, Tokyo 110-8718

Lunch Time: Ginza's Timeless Treasures

After the tour around Ueno, we changed locations to the heart of sophistication, Ginza, Tokyo's upscale district renowned for its timeless treasures.

Beer Hall Lion Ginza 7-Chome

For a historical lunch experience, we visited the oldest beer hall in Japan, now officially recognized as a Tangible Cultural Property.



Loris appreciated the meticulous design and historical preservation, saying, "The fusion of red tiles, mosaic murals, and thematic chandeliers creates a timeless atmosphere."

National Art Center, Tokyo



Reflecting on our exploration of Tokyo's architectural wonders, we discovered a harmonious blend of tradition and contemporary design, creating an unforgettable tapestry of cultural richness and artistic excellence.



Kabukiza Theatre

Our next stop is the Kabukiza Theatre, the only theatre in the world solely dedicated to kabuki. First built in 1889, it has undergone four phases of reconstruction and is currently in its fifth iteration, each marking a significant chapter in its history and cultural significance.

Loris commented on the intriguing historical evolution of the building, noting its initial Western appearance. The transition to a Japanese architectural style in the exterior was notably influenced by the opening of the Imperial Theatre, known for staging musicals and operas in a Western-style setting. He emphasized that the reconstruction to the purely Japanese palatial style not only embraced the essence of Japanese culture but also harmonized seamlessly with the offerings of the place. This transformation ultimately shaped the iconic look we now associate with the Kabukiza Theatre.

The Goemon staircase, connecting the rooftop garden to the fourth-floor corridor, provides an opportunity for a detailed examination of the roof tiles. If you take a closer look, you'll be able to spot a unique phoenix tile that is reversed!



Kabukiza Theatre
Place Ginza 4-12-15, Chuo-ku, Tokyo 104-0061 Japan

Afternoon: Roppongi's Modern Marvels

As the sun sets over Tokyo, our exploration of architectural wonders shifts to Roppongi, a district boasting modern marvels.

The National Art Center, a beacon of artistic innovation in Roppongi, captivates visitors with its iconic architecture. Using NACT's architecture guide web application, CONIC, we embarked on an architecture tour, marveling at the glass curtain wall on the south side and the expansive lobby serving as a public space for open-air exhibitions. Designed by renowned architect Kisho Kurokawa, the building's distinctive cone-shaped entrance immediately draws attention.

The lobby houses two colossal concrete structures known as the 'Cones,' strategically positioned to allow unobstructed views between the upper and lower floors. With an inverted cone shape, the design ensures both a spacious dining area and an open, airy lobby, while Kurokawa's innovative use of floor-based air circulation reflects a thoughtful approach to creating an optimal exhibition environment. Visitors can choose from four distinct dining options, each offering delightful cuisine, captivating views, and charming interiors.

Notably, Loris praised the NACT for its inclusive accessibility, highlighting its open invitation to everyone. While featuring special exhibitions, the NACT ensures its luxurious facility is freely accessible to visitors, with free entry to the building. Loris often took moments to pause, camera in hand, capturing scenes that showcased the NACT's picturesque charm from every conceivable angle, both inside and out.



National Art Center, Tokyo
Place 7-22-2 Roppongi, Minato-ku, Tokyo 106-8558 Japan



A visit to the Kusakabe Folk Crafts Museum

Sophie Richard wanders around Japan

TAKAYAMA

Words by Sophie Richard



Japanese crafts are justifiably held in high esteem, as a heritage to protect by the Japanese and as a source of wonderment by foreign visitors. While it is of course possible to appreciate the great variety of Japanese crafts in museums and galleries located in the country's main cities, it can be especially rewarding to visit the places where crafts have actually been produced and used. A recent trip to the city of Takayama in Gifu Prefecture gave me a chance to see folk crafts preserved in a museum which is in itself a remarkable heritage house.



The journey begins by a train ride which gives me the opportunity to admire from my window seat the natural beauty of this mountainous region and the forests and river which contributed to give rise to the rich local culture. Once arrived in Takayama, I find the Kusakabe Folk Crafts Museum in the centre of town, on a street lined with handsome old merchant houses.

The Kusakabe family lived on this site since the mid 17th century. Active as merchants and then also financiers, they became quite wealthy and when their house burned down in 1875, they were able to rebuild it in a grand style. The high ceiling, multiple stories and superb timbers reflect the new freedom that was brought by the start of the Meiji period; during the Edo period strict class rules had restricted rich merchant families to a more modest architectural style. Using the best materials and a celebrated local master carpenter named Jisuke Kawajiri, the house was rebuilt in only four years in a style that indicates this was a transition period: while the layout is still reminiscent of the Edo era, structural elements such as the 13-meter long single beam supporting the soaring ceiling (and in winter the heavy snowfall) demonstrate the latest progress in

carpentry. The building was designated a National Important Cultural Property in 1966 and opened to the public the same year.



The 11th generation of the Kusakabe family, then in charge of the house, decided to put on display the family's heritage, which includes everyday objects such as boxes and straw shoes, heirlooms like wedding kimono, jewellery and cosmetic boxes, as well as historical documents. Folk crafts of the Hida region are therefore on view throughout the spacious house, on the ground floor and in the upstairs area which is accessed via a very steep staircase. Of particular note is a collection of Mingei artworks that are presented separately, in a renovated kura, or storehouse, following the ideas and perspective of Yanagi Soetsu, the founder of the Mingei movement, which highlights the value and beauty of everyday objects created by nameless and unknown craftsmen.

Of generous proportions, the two-storey gallery space holds pieces from the local region as well as other areas of Japan. It is affiliated with the Mingeikan in Tokyo, which was founded by Yanagi Soetsu and the first of such museums dedicated to folk crafts; it strives to offer the same elegant, uncluttered presentation. Among the local craft production I can see there examples of Shibukusa-yaki, a type of pottery developed locally from 1841 and characterised by its palette of celadon, blue, white or red, as well as Shunkei lacquerware, in which layers of transparent lacquer reveal the grain of the wood. Cypress was employed for this and the warm amber colour of the pieces is very attractive; sadly I am told that this type of lacquerware is not made anymore.

There are also inro and netsuke that have been created without any polychrome additions in order to reveal the beauty of the local wood, of which the region has always been proud. Next, my eye is caught by a few remarkable baskets which are made from the bark of cherry trees and whose sophisticated geometrical designs say much about the skills perfected by the basket weavers.



Then, I can admire a small selection of pieces from other regions of Japan, including Hokkaido and Okinawa, and I am also delighted to find a group of attractive and large Onda-yaki (also called Onta-yaki) vases, a type of ceramics produced in Oita Prefecture in Kyushu characterised by their gorgeous dripping coloured glazes and repeated markings on surface.

During my visit I am pleased to find out that there is an audio-guide available in English, which is very good news for foreign visitors. The Kusakabe Folk Crafts Museum not only presents its architectural heritage, collection of family heirlooms and folk crafts, it also organises performances and contemporary art exhibitions annually, thus aiming to be a cultural platform for Takayama.



Kusakabe Folk Crafts Museum
Place 1-52 Oshinmachi, Takayama, Gifu, Japan

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