

WALK JAPAN

Educational

国東

Kunisaki: Revival in Rural Japan

6 nights, 7 days

This program to Japan's Kunisaki Peninsula connects students with the traditions and beauty of rural Japan. Students will: engage in community projects designed to restore the natural ecosystem and promote sustainable farming; explore the locality on foot, following some of the routes of itinerant monks; and learn some of the local artistic and cultural traditions. If it is the right season, the trip will conclude with a visit to Fukuoka and the annual Kyushu Sumo tournament!

www.walkjapan.com

Contents

Contents

| | |
|----------------------------------------------|----|
| Meeting instructions..... | 3 |
| Itinerary..... | 4 |
| Packing List..... | 8 |
| Travel Advice (Diet, Health and Safety)..... | 10 |
| Japanese words & phrases | 12 |
| Japanese etiquette..... | 13 |
| Day-specific study notes | 15 |
| Maps | 19 |

Meeting instructions

Meeting Instructions

Meeting time: *****

Where: *****

Flight: *****

Departure time: *****

Do not be late

Do not forget essential documents: PASSPORT
and *****.

Itinerary

Day 1.

***** ~ Fukuoka ~ Ota

Flight: *****
Departure ***** *****
Arrival Fukuoka *****

After arrival at Fukuoka Airport we transfer by coach to a quiet village deep in the Japanese countryside. Our accommodation is composed of chalets atop a small mountain and we stay here for the next two nights. A briefing on Kunisaki and our program is accompanied by an exploration of our surroundings, which includes the atmospheric remains of a old temple. For dinner we walk to a neighboring restaurant which serves delicious farmhouse cuisine.

Accommodation: Log Cabin

Day 2.

Ota

Today is a day of community project work. Substantial parts of Japan's native woodland habitat have been destroyed by a large-scale program of uprooting old forests and creating cedar plantations designed to supply lumber for the construction industry. Under these conditions the forest floor, starved of sunlight, becomes a barren environment where few other plants and wildlife are able to survive.

Today we assist in the recreation of a diverse woodland ecosystem consisting of fruit and nut trees, bushes, vegetables, vines, and medicinal plants and flowers.

We also help a farming couple with the cultivation of shiitake mushrooms and harvest various radishes. Later on we use the radishes to create dishes for our evening meal.

Accommodation: Log Cabin

Day 3.

Ota ~ Himeshima

More community project work in the morning, followed by lunch and a short journey by bus to the beginning of our afternoon hike. This starts at the towering Kumano Magaibutsu, which are 1,000 year-old buddhist relief carvings.

Our walk today ends at Fuki-ji, which has one of the most beautiful buddhist temple buildings in Japan. From here a bus takes us through the centre of Kunisaki to Imi Port. Hime-shima, a small island off Kunisaki's north coast, is 20 minutes away by ferry. Our accommodation, a Japanese inn, for the night is a short walk from the quay.

Upon our arrival, we take some time to learn the vital do's and don'ts of living in the traditional Japanese style; Where do we take off our shoes? Where are the beds? How do we use the baths? The lessons learnt here are important, and will be vital later on during the tour when we stay with Japanese families. Have a look at Japanese etiquette section in this handbook for some hints and tips.

Accommodation: Japanese Inn

Day 4.

Himeshima ~ Akane Onsen

We return to Imi Port by ferry and then spend the morning here at a craft workshop. Activities include *take-zaiku*, bamboo working, and *ikebana*, flower arranging.

Following lunch, another walk this time through the extensive grounds of Kyu-Sento-ji, a once powerful temple. Two impressive Nio guardian deities, myriad gravestones, ancient stone walls and foundations are all that remain today.

Our descent brings us to our accommodation, which includes a Japanese favourite; *onsen* thermal hot spring baths. Private bathing facilities are also available.

Accommodation: Japanese Inn

Day 5.

Akane Onsen ~ Futago-ji ~ Bungo-Takada

This morning we visit a local temple in Kunisaki. Here we try zazen, buddhist sitting meditation, under the friendly guidance of the young priest of the temple. He will also show us around the extensive grounds of his lovely temple and introduce us to the religious history of Kunisaki area.

After the meditation, we transfer to Bungotakada for lunch before meeting our host farm stay families. We are divided into small groups. Each group is then paired with a family and we will be with them until tomorrow morning; a great opportunity providing for getting to know the Japanese and their culture at first hand.

Accommodation: Farm Stay

Day 6.

Bungo-Takada ~ Fukuoka

After breakfast we gather with our farmstay families in Bungo-Takada for a farewell ceremony. We transfer back to Fukuoka by bus. After dropping our luggage off at our hotel, we take our seats at the Kyushu Sumo tournament. The highest ranked wrestlers appear later in the afternoon and their battles provide an exciting climax to the day.

After dinner in local restaurant we partake in a Japanese favourite, *karaoke*, for a celebratory end to our tour.

Accommodation: Western hotel

Day 7.

Fukuoka ~ *****

Given time, a stroll through the city of Fukuoka and some time for souvenir shopping before our flight back home.

Flight: *****
Depart Fukuoka *****
Arrive ***** *****

Notes

1. This itinerary is subject to change.
2. The group will be met as a group at Fukuoka Airport by the Walk Japan tour leader. All travel according to the itinerary in Japan is included.
3. The Walk Japan leader, an experienced guide, is fluent in English and Japanese and knowledgeable about many aspects of Japan.
4. Meals provided in are noted in the itinerary above. Japanese cuisine is as varied as it is high in quality.
5. Japanese inns are traditional Japanese style accommodation, and hotels provide western style accommodation. Meals will be delicious Japanese cuisine.
6. Entrance fees for guided visits to museums and the like are included.
7. There is no porter service in Japan. One piece of luggage, besides a day pack for walking, per person is advised.

Packing list

Packing list

To help maintain a comfortable body temperature while walking it is best to have a number of layers of clothing that can be easily peeled off or added on as required. Please be prepared for rain. Also, a hat is recommended for warmth and to ward off the sun. Please remember a sense of humour, curiosity and sensibility too!

- Hat
- Rain resistant outer jacket
- Rain resistant outer trousers
- Warm Fleece-style jacket/zip up top
- Warm trousers (2 pairs)
- T-shirts/Long sleeved shirts (7 sets)
- Warm hiking socks (7 pairs)
- Underwear (7 sets)
- Gloves
- Scarf
- Night clothing – slacks/leggings & top

N.B. *Yukata*, evening gowns, will be provided at our lodgings. These may be worn for dinner and to sleep in. A warm over-jacket will also be provided. However, it is a good idea to also bring slacks/leggings and a top to wear underneath the *Yukata* and help ward off any cold air.

- Water resistant hiking boots
- Athletic shoes
- Small daypack/backpack

The daypack is to carry water bottle, camera, spare clothing, etc. while walking. Our main luggage will be sent ahead by vehicle on each morning to our next lodgings.

- Collapsible umbrella (*Optional*)
- Small towel
- Sunglasses

- Personal medication
- Toothbrush and toothpaste
- Personal Shampoo, comb, brush, etc
- Skin lotion, suntan lotion, chapstick
- Packets of tissue / toilet roll

Packing list

N.B. Soap and shampoo will be provided at our lodgings. Also, mosquitoes, etc. will not be a problem at this time of year and insect repellent unnecessary.

Rucksack / Wheeled suitcase

A medium suitcase with wheels or medium to large sized rucksack should be sufficient to contain everything for this tour.

Passport

Camera and film/memory and charger (*Optional*)

The electricity current in Japan is 120 volt and plugs are the same style as those in the USA.

Pencil/pen

Notebook

Refillable water bottle (*Optional*)

Snacks for the trail (*Optional*)

Prior to departure (Spending money)

You should buy yen in your home country to carry with you. Changing any currency into yen in Japan is inconvenient and time-consuming, so bring with you what you need. Credit cards work in Japan but you will not be able to access your bank account at a bank ATM – only at ATMs in Post Offices or Seven-Eleven stores. Snacks and drinks can cost up to 1500 yen a day. Gifts range from 500 yen up. Plan spending money accordingly.

Travel advice

Ability to accommodate Special Dietary Requirements: When the group stays in traditional Japanese inns, the dinners and breakfasts are decided weeks in advance using local produce available in that region.

Meals usually include raw and cooked fish, meat, and vegetables. In Japan, specific dietary requirements such as vegetarianism, kosher food, and a number of food-related allergies and problems, such as coeliac disease, are not widely understood nor catered for and we cannot guarantee to provide vegetarian, vegan, kosher, or other specific meals. However, we will endeavour to cater wherever possible to individual requirements, and many vegetarians and vegans have both participated in our programs and enjoyed the food on them.

Our general policy is to contact the accommodation we use and notify them of particular requirements. Most, if not all, will be able to provide one or two alternative dishes for participants with specific dietary needs. Please let us know of any requirements well in advance if you have any special dietary needs.

Please note that soy sauce, which in Japan always includes wheat, is an ingredient common to many dishes in Japan and there may be a limit to how many dishes can be altered for those who require a gluten-free diet. If you have specific dietary needs we suggest you also bring other food items to help supplement your meals.

Health and Safety Overview. There are no compulsory health-related procedures before entering Japan and no vaccinations or prophylactic medicines are required (although Japanese encephalitis inoculations are recommended by some authorities).

However, it is the school's responsibility to ensure that all students are aware of and have taken all medications, vaccinations or health precautions which may be suitable to them well before the tour.

Students are responsible for any medicine they may require during the program. Please note that medicine that may be available or prescribed in Japan may differ from other countries. Therefore, students should bring all medicine that you may need.

The fact that Japan is one of the safest countries in the world makes this it an ideal destination for young students.

PLEASE SEE THE ACCOMPANYING RISK ASSESSMENT DOCUMENT FOR A MORE COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH AND SAFETY OVERVIEW

Clothing & baggage. It is advisable to bring a variety of layers ranging from t-shirts to a top with long sleeves and a sweater/fleece. We recommend good quality walking shoes/boots. You may also like to bring some comfortable, casual shoes — sneakers, sandals, etc. — for use in town. The sun's rays can be strong and we recommend a sun hat, sun screen, etc. A lightweight, packable waterproof and a compact, foldable umbrella should suffice for any inclement weather. (Note, 24-hour stores, which are found almost everywhere in Japan, sell cheap umbrellas and rain capes). *Yukata*, evening gowns for sleeping in, are provided at each lodging. However, we recommend leggings, a top, etc. to wear underneath. This will provide a degree of modesty and help ward off any cold air. Coin laundry facilities are not available during this tour.

When walking our main luggage is sent on ahead to the next lodgings by vehicle. Each day we carry only what we need (camera, water bottle, note book, rain jacket, etc.) for the walk itself.

Access to cash. Exchanging cash or travellers' cheques in major currencies is possible but a very time-consuming exercise. Instead, we recommend alternatives including arriving in Japan with some Japanese currency, using credit cards, and withdrawing cash from ATMs.

ATMs at Japanese post offices, which are ubiquitous in Japan, and Seven-Eleven stores provide cash against the following credit cards - Visa, Mastercard, American Express, Diners Club International, PLUS, Maestro, Cirrus and JCB. Most Japanese bank ATMs do not, nor will they provide access to foreign bank accounts.

International telephoning, cell phones and the internet. Making international telephone calls and using the internet outside of major urban areas can be difficult or impossible. Please bring a telephone charge card issued by your local telephone company, such as AT&T, BT and Telstar. These can be used almost anywhere.

The Japanese cell, or mobile, phone system uses a specialised CDMA technology which is incompatible with most overseas systems. Some G3, Blackberry smartphones and iPhones operate in Japan, however, please confirm with your provider whether your phone set will work. If your phone does not work in Japan you may like to rent a cell phone from providers such as NTT Docomo, Cellhire, Mobalrental, Worldroam, Softbank, etc.

Tipping. There is no tipping in Japan. No Japanese expects or will solicit tips.

Japanese words & phrases

Note: adding the bracketed word makes the phrase more polite.

| | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Yes | <i>hai</i> | Grilled skewered chicken | <i>yakitori</i> |
| No | <i>iie</i> | Cooked rice | <i>gohan</i> |
| Thank you | <i>arigatou (gozaimasu)</i> | Tofu/soya bean curd | <i>toufu</i> |
| Don't mention it | <i>dou itashimashite</i> | Miso/fermented | |
| Excuse me | <i>sumimasen</i> | soya bean paste | <i>miso</i> |
| I am sorry | <i>sumimasen</i> | Salad | <i>sarada</i> |
| | | Rice wrapped in seaweed | <i>onigiri</i> |
| Good morning | <i>ohayou (gozaimasu)</i> | Rice cakes | <i>mochi</i> |
| Hello, good day | <i>konnichiwa</i> | Rice crackers | <i>(o)sembei</i> |
| Good evening | <i>konbanwa</i> | Savoury pancake | <i>okonomiyaki</i> |
| Good night | <i>oyasumi (nasai)</i> | | |
| It's fine weather | | [Green tea] please? | <i>[Ocha] o kudasai</i> |
| today, isn' it? | <i>otenki desu ne</i> | | |
| How are you? | <i>(o)genki desu ka</i> | Another [orange juice] please | |
| Very well, thank you | <i>genki desu</i> | <i>[orenji jusu,] mou hitotsu kudasai</i> | |
| | | | |
| I am James | | How much is that? | |
| | <i>watashi wa Jaimuzu desu</i> | <i>ikura / (o)ikura desu ka</i> | |
| I am American | | | |
| | <i>watashi wa Amerika-jin/desu</i> | May I have the bill please? | |
| | | <i>(o)kanjou kudasai</i> | |
| Nice to meet you | <i>hajimemashite</i> | | |
| | | Do you speak English? | |
| Breakfast | <i>asa gohan</i> | <i>eigo ohanashimasu ka</i> | |
| Lunch | <i>hiru gohan</i> | | |
| Dinner | <i>ban gohan</i> | Big/small | <i>oukii/chisaii</i> |
| Meal in a box | <i>bentou</i> | Cheap/expensive | <i>yasui/takaii</i> |
| Chopsticks | <i>(o)hashi</i> | Good/bad | <i>ii/yokunai</i> |
| | | | |
| Cheers! | <i>kanpai</i> | One | <i>hitotsu</i> |
| | | Two | <i>futatsu</i> |
| Water | <i>(o)mizu</i> | Three | <i>mitsu</i> |
| Orange juice | <i>orenji jusu</i> | Four | <i>yotsu</i> |
| Coffee | <i>hotto kofi</i> | Five | <i>itsutsu</i> |
| Ice coffee | <i>aisu kofi</i> | | |
| Tea | <i>koucha</i> | | |
| Green tea | <i>ocha</i> | | |
| Tea ceremony green tea | <i>macha</i> | | |
| | | | |
| Buckwheat noodles | <i>soba</i> | | |
| Wheat noodles | <i>udon</i> | | |
| Chinese-style noodles | <i>ramen</i> | | |
| Chinese-style dumplings | <i>gyouza</i> | | |
| Fried rice | <i>chahan</i> | | |
| Sushi (raw fish on rice) | <i>sushi</i> | | |
| Sliced raw fish | <i>sashimi</i> | | |

Japanese etiquette

The Japanese are forgiving towards their foreign guests. However, there are a few essentials to abide by and other manners that will be quietly appreciated by your hosts. Some manners may seem a bit oppressive when read here but in practice are much less onerous. If in doubt ask your Walk Japan tour leader.

Essential manners

Never enter a house or *ryokan*, Japanese inn, with your shoes on. Within the entrance there is usually a step up into the building proper. Slippers, which are to wear inside, lined up awaiting use are another common indicator that you are at the appropriate place to remove your shoes. Ideally, you should slip out of your shoes, stepping straight up into the interior and not walk around in stockinged or bare feet in the entrance way.

Do not wear slippers into *tatami*, straw mat, rooms. Slip them off and leave them at the entrance to the room. Always walk on the *tatami* in stockinged or bare feet. Slippers are also slipped out of when entering a toilet. Inside you will find another pair of slippers for exclusive use there. Always remember to leave them in the toilet after use and not walk around the building in them. This is a faux pas that creates great laughter and causes your host to quickly scurry off with the offending articles. The slipper shuffle does not apply to public toilets, where you keep your shoes on.

The Japanese wash before soaking themselves in the bath. By the side of each bathtub is a shower unit. Completely rinse of any soap and shampoo before getting into the bath. The bath is shared in turn by everyone

so do not empty it after you have bathed. Also, replace the wood or plastic cover, if there is one, to the bath. The Japanese like bathing in fairly hot water (40 ~ 48 degrees centigrade, 104 ~ 118 degrees Fahrenheit). If you find it too hot you may add some cold water, but not so much that it becomes tepid. Others in the bath queue will not appreciate it. The bathing etiquette remains the same for *onsen*, hot spring baths, although there will be no cover and you will not be able to control the bath water temperature.

In hotels with en suite facilities you may bathe in the same manner as you would in the west.

Dining manners

Do not stick your chopsticks vertically into a bowl of rice and leave them there. Do not pass food to someone else with your chopsticks. These are both taboo because they are associated with Buddhist funerals.

Do not play with, point with, or spear your food with chopsticks. You may, though, very occasionally see Japanese surreptitiously spear a particularly slippery morsel.

Do not leave your food, especially rice. You can usually control the amount of rice you receive and can always have more. If you have ever grown rice the Japanese way, which is time-consuming and laborious, you will appreciate why they tend not to leave even one grain. Never pour soy sauce over rice. Japanese rice is considered good tasting - and it usually is - and does not need to be 'spiced up'. When eating sushi or sashimi, and the like you will be provided with a separate small dish for soy sauce. Pour in only

as much as you will use. You can always add more to your dish should you run out.

Note: A clear refusal of anything, especially at a time of enjoyment, is a bit jarring to Japanese sensibilities.

It is polite to say *Itadakimasu* once before eating or drinking, and *Gochiso sama deshita* to your host or the restaurant's staff after finishing your meal.

Other manners

Do not sit on tables or in the *tokonoma*, an alcove traditionally displaying a scroll with a seasonal theme, flowers, and/or a ceramic objet d'art.

In a *ryokan* your futon will be laid out for you but if you lay out your own have it such that your head is pointing in any direction except north. Only the deceased are laid out at funerals with their head to the north.

Refrain from blowing your nose in front of other people and only use paper tissues for the purpose. If you cannot help having a blow or need to sneeze turn your back on your Japanese counterpart. When face to face a dainty dab or wipe is not considered rude.

Japanese tend not to eat while walking along or standing around on the street. Eating and drinking on local trains, but not long distance express trains, is also frowned upon.

When riding on trains and buses turn your mobile/cell phone to silent mode and do not use it for conversation. Text messaging, though, is not considered a problem and you will see many younger Japanese furiously tapping away.

When visiting a Japanese family take a small gift. A food item is ideal. Do not point your finger, feet, or chopsticks at people. If you have to indicate a person, object or direction, wave your fingers with the palm downwards in the general direction.

Umbrella stands are often found outside shops and restaurants. Use these on rainy days before entering. Some establishments provide plastic covers for umbrellas. Slip this over the wet article and walk in with it in hand.

If you are given a business or name card accept it with both hands. First look at it before carefully putting it away. If you are sitting at a table, place the card on the table in front of you. Do not fold it, play with it, or write on it especially in front of the giver. At an appropriate moment, either at the end of the meeting or after a reasonable period of time has elapsed, put it away into your wallet or card holder.

If you are visiting someone, especially for business, do not sit down of your own accord. Allow your Japanese host to indicate the seat for you to use. This would, in normal circumstances, be considered the best in the room.

Day-Specific Study notes

Day 1

Kunisaki

Kunisaki is a circular peninsula in the north east of Kyushu that juts out into Japan's Seto Inland Sea. Kyushu is the most westerly of the nation's four main islands. The peninsula is a beautiful area, largely untouched by modern Japan. It also has a rich religious history, particularly in Buddhism and Shintoism. Today, however, the traditional way of life here, as in so many parts of rural Japan, is under the twin pressures of an ageing population and decline in agriculture.

Day 2

Satoyama & bio-diversity

Satoyama, a Japanese term that describes the integrated, self-sustaining traditional rural life. This life has largely disappeared but it is a lifestyle that appears to offer some solutions to the problems modern society has created for itself. *Satoyama* does, for example, embody the 'small is beautiful' scales of economy expounded by E.F. Schumacher. Schumacher, incidently, gave weight to his ideas by introducing Buddhist principals. *Satoyama* is also the epitome of the 'produce locally, consume locally' idea that underlies much thought on the quality of food and the environmental cost of modern food production.

Satoyama is the border zone area in the foothills of mountains between forests and arable land. Literally, *sato* means livable land or home land, while *yama* means hill or mountain. Satoyama have been developed through centuries of small scale agricultural and forestry use.

The concept has several definitions: The first definition is the management of forests by local agricultural communities. During the Edo period, young and fallen leaves were gathered from community forests to use as fertiliser in paddy fields. Villagers also used wood for construction, cooking and heating.; Secondly, and more recently, satoyama has been defined not only as community forests, but also as an entire landscape that is used for agriculture and to the support the life of the local community. According to this definition, satoyama contains a mosaic of mixed forests, bamboo groves, paddies, arable fields, grasslands, streams, ponds, and reservoirs for irrigation. Farmers use the grasslands to feed horses and cattle and provide material for traditional thatched roofs. Streams, ponds, and reservoirs play an important role in supplying water to paddy fields and also allow the farming of fresh water fish.

Besides supporting the local community, the very mixed land use in satoyama provides abundant habitats for a wide range of wildlife. Ponds, reservoirs, and streams in particular play a significant role in the survival of water dependent species such as dragonflies and fireflies.

changes in the way of life and society in the rural areas. The first includes, for example, the replacement of locally derived charcoal, firewood and compost with imported heating oil and chemical fertilisers; and the second includes changes to rural populations as the young moved to the cities for work in industry as Japan's economy leaving an ageing and shrinking community in satoyama.

Day 3

Religion

Kunisaki was a major centre of buddhism from the 8th Century until the 16th Century. It was one of the first regions in Japan to develop a strong buddhist identity. It became a stronghold of Tendai buddhism, which was brought to Japan from China by Saicho. Saicho was a Japanese monk and founder of the Tendai sect in Japan. Like much of the early buddhism to arrive in Japan, Tendai syncretised with the indigenous shinto religion. Many shinto deities and practices were incorporated into the buddhism. The peninsula developed as a region for monks to go through ascetic hardships to gain enlightenment and promotion within the Tendai hierarchy. Kunisaki was remote from the political centres in Nara and Kyoto, and, because of its geographical insularity from the rest of Kyushu and rugged, mountainous geography, remote from the rest of society, even Kyushu. The whole area became the domain of the nearby powerful Usa Shrine, to this day the head shrine of Hachiman. Hachiman is the shinto protector deity of Japan. By the 12th Century, though, Usa had lost control over Kunisaki to the warrior class, the samurai. The samurai had by this time gained power over the nation and, besides establishing the first shogunate government, cultivated Zen buddhism, the last major form of buddhism to be brought to Japan. Kunisaki, though, continued to thrive as a buddhist centre until the 16th Century. After that the Kunisaki faded into obscurity although the Buddhist tradition was maintained by the local inhabitants.

Like many centres of buddhism in Japan, in its heyday Kunisaki came to be regarded as a mandala of a sutra, in Kunisaki's case the Lotus Sutra. For some it even became the Lotus Sutra itself. Of all the sutras the Lotus Sutra is held in high esteem to this day in Japan. However, both the Lotus Sutra and Shintoism were among the factors that led Japan on its belligerent path beginning in the late 19th Century. Two features of this part of Japanese history are found in the area – the remnants of a kamikaze suicide airbase and a *kaiten* suicide submarine training base.

Besides buddhism and shintoism on Kunisaki there are still vestiges of an ancient religion worshipping deities embodied in standing stones. At the top of one mountain is a circle of massive rocks, the origins of which are obscure but undoubtedly have been a focus of worship since Japan's early history. Also found here is *koshin*, a combination of Chinese and Japanese folk superstitions, and Kobo-san, the worship of the deity of Kukai. Kukai, the founder of *Shingon* buddhism in Japan, was a contemporary of and the great rival of Saicho and his *Tendai* buddhism. In the north of the peninsula Petros

Kibe, one of Japan's earliest saints, was born. Petros journeyed in the early 17th Century to Rome, where he studied to become a priest. He returned to Japan, where christianity was outlawed, and was eventually martyred for his beliefs in 1639.

Days 4 & 5

De-population and ageing societies

A look at most of the people in Kunisaki indicates they precarious nature of society here. By far the majority of the inhabitants are aged, children are rare and the middle-aged mostly absent. Meanwhile, abandoned houses and fields are found everywhere. And this is not just a phenomenon of Kunisaki: it is the same in most parts of rural Japan.

There is huge concern and uncertainty about the future of rural Japan. The reality is that many communities have already become unsustainable and will be abandoned within the coming decade or less. The long steady decline of rural populations since Japan's industrial economy began to grow rapidly in the 1950s is now being compounded by the death or departure to the homes of children in the towns and cities of the last generation of the elderly. While some retiring sons or daughters, who had salaried jobs in the city, return to their home villages the great majority show no signs of being persuaded to do the same. And, in any event, of those who do return most will never be able physically to take up the hard, physical work required to sustain rural traditions and also learn a sufficient range of necessary skills.

Himeshima, a delightful island off Kunisaki's north coast, though, is an exception to this apparently bleak future. Himeshima is a rarity in rural Japan in that the local community is thriving and children are aplenty. A principal reason for this is that the community tries to spread any economic benefits to everyone on the island. For example, many of the jobs in the local government are work-share. Himeshima makes an interesting contrast to the rest of Kunisaki, where children are few, schools are closing and pensioners predominate.

Day 6

Shinto

Shinto is Japan's native religion and is based mainly in local folk traditions. Most Japanese profess to believe in Shinto as well as Buddhism. The original systematisation of Shinto was caused in part by the intrusion of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism into Japan. These Chinese systems imparted some beliefs and logic to Shinto but at the same time threatened to overwhelm it. Shinto, however, was intimately connected with ideas of fertility and purification which were crucial to local communities as well as the new Japanese state, so rather than being crushed, Shinto defined itself and co-existed with the new ideas. gods with those of Shinto. The two religions were also close physically since Buddhist temples were frequently built adjacent to

Shinto shrines. The tendency to combine the two dissimilar religions became even more prominent between the 13-19th Centuries when Ryobu Shinto, or Dual Shinto, developed. During this period, priests functioned as both Shinto and Buddhist priests and it became virtually impossible to differentiate the two.

Shinto began once again to be defined as separate from Buddhism. In the Meiji period (1868-1912), state Shinto was developed as an important part of the ideology of the government. The identification between Shinto and the imperial family in ancient times was revived and used to provide legitimacy and to focus the loyalty of the population.

In its purest and most intimate form, though, Shinto reveres nature. Shinto shrines are notable for their location and their architecture. These are commonly in places of natural beauty and where worship is made to deities drawn from the immediate surroundings such as rocks, wind, sun, water springs and trees. The entrance to a shrine is usually marked by a torii, a distinctive gate, and shimenawa, a straw rope attached to which are gohei, folded white paper strips. The shimenawa indicates the sanctity of the shrine precincts, the shrine building itself or the object of worship - a uniquely shaped rock or an ancient tree, for example.

Purification is a crucial matter in Shinto. This practice is important in sumo wrestling where wrestlers carefully purify the venue by throwing salt and also themselves by washing out their mouths with water. Salt is also, for example, sprinkled over anyone returning home from a funeral before they can cross the threshold.

The Shinto concept of god is a complex one. Kami is the word that translates as 'god'. However, in Japanese, the word has a variety of meanings depending on circumstances. A kami is thought to reside in or around sacred objects like trees, rocks or even entire mountains. Individual humans who are exceptional may be viewed as kami. Thus, students might pray to the scholar and high official Sugawara no Michizane (845-903 AD).

Shinto differs greatly from other faiths in that there are no sacred icons or texts and there is no congregational worship. It does, though, have festivals which are frequently scenes of great activity. In addition to the rituals that must be performed, the festivals are occasions for the community to gather. Wherever people gather, food and drink are necessary and stalls appear in the shrine's vicinity. Whether in the countryside or the large cities, shrine festivals are popular, noisy and entertaining. Shinto is primarily a religion of life and reproduction and marriage ceremonies are typically a Shinto function. So too is the ritual of taking children to shrines for special blessings.

Maps: 1) East Asia and Japan



2) Northern Kyushu



3)The Kunisaki Peninsula and Himeshima

