

N O V E M B E R 1 5 2 0 1 4

Discovering

Shimokamagari

The Murmur of the Sea Wind in the Pine Needles...

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Where in the World?

Shimokamagari Island is small island located 1 hour drive from Kure City Station. This small island, unknown to many a traveller is home to one of the most beautiful, traditional and historic locations in all of Japan. Since olden times, Kamagari Town has been an important port for marine transportation on the Seto Island Sea, south of Hiroshima.

To commemorate the proud history of the small town, the local people launched "Project Garden" to attract people to traditions, artifacts and antiquities long lost over the years. Today, the sightseeing spot "Shoutouen Garden" is the labour of love by the towns' people, boasting important historical buildings, reincarnated as museums for tourists to enjoy.

There are four museums in the Garden; the Gochisouichibankan, the Ceramic Museum, the Lamp Museum and the Guard House.

Personal

As I boarded the bus for the Omotenashi Seminar I was overcome with excitement. What kind of place was Shimokamagari Island? As a foreigner I had heard nothing of this place that was spoken so fervently by locals. Upon arrival, and walking the street I was confronted with a piece of history that was unlike any other.

The museums were spectacular, holding my breath through most of the experience. Each building represented pieces of history of the small island, emphasized by the local peoples' deep connection with them.

It is a consistent effort by the local people of the town to maintain the beauty of this special location. It is evident, from my brief experience here, that all who care for this place hold respect and deep-rooted desire to show the world.





White Snow House “*Hakusetsuro*”

The most spectacular visit was to *Hakusetsuro*, or the “White Snow House”. This house was transported four times, the most of any other building on the island. Once a house for scholars, the room of the second floor

Climbing the steps, the gardens are perfectly manicured and exude an aura of complete Zen. The smell of Japanese Cypress and the texture of tatami beneath your feet liberate an experience of understanding Japanese Culture.

On the first floor we engaged in tea ceremony, the warm green tea and sweets were very welcoming. The second floor holds a magical room.

The Guard House “*Bansho*”

The Guard House was built by the Asano clan, and had been set up as a checkpoint for marine transport into the inland sea. This model in the *Shoutouen* is a replica, the original remains standing in Yamaguchi prefecture.

It is equipped with traditional weapons that would have been used to defend the island; including bows, arrows, harpoons, rifles and swords.

Outside, it boasts a beautiful Zen garden and the white stones reflect sunlight in a gorgeous array of tranquility and simplicity. The surrounding Japanese-style gardens are neat and tidy, appealing to the eye interweaving *wabi-sabi* components that compete the harmony of the *Shoutouen*.



“There is something really special about Kamagari Island. Perhaps it is the way that it remains in a silent, more simple time and everything has a purpose is creating a harmony with nature and people of the land”

The Great Banquet Hall *Gochisouichibankan*

During the Edo Period, the Grand Banquet Hall served to weary messengers, serving splendid meals with the finest ingredients collected from near and far.

Today, the display rooms exhibit the many types of recreated versions of the dishes used. Beautifully preserved, the cabinets are filled with gorgeous fine china with various patterns, styles and origins.

The museum also depicts a parade, life-sized statues of messengers and a model replica of the Korean ships that sailed to Japan, including various paintings and documents that belonged to these messengers and their ships in the 17th to 19th centuries.



The Lamp Museum

Formerly a property of Mr. Yoshida from Yamaguchi Prefecture, this museum has a collection of rare lamps from all over the world. The most impressive display is the fairy lamps, gorgeous as they flicker against the dark wood of the Japanese Cypress.

The Ceramic Museum

Originally designed as a town house on Miyajima in the late 18th century, this building is now the protector of antique Japanese masterpieces, such as Arita, Bizen, Kutani and Hagi. In Addition, there are many ceramics from China and Korea, journeyed from the trading days.

