

# REIHO

*fuji*

WINTER 2020

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◆ A town that was once a highly celebrated for its textile-making, with record of its products found in historical documents from as far back as 1000 years ago, Fujiyoshida saw its heyday during the Showa Period when the national economy boomed and textile sales soared.

This bustling town of retailers and artisans would soon develop its own watering hole. An entertainment district just as lively and accommodating as the economy itself. Drinking establishments and eateries lined the narrow back alleys of the city's original commercial district and were frequented by visitors and locals alike.

As the bubble burst and the economy declined, so too did the interest -- and perhaps more significantly -- the means for frivolous entertainment, and these alleyways eventually fell quiet. A common fate for similar commercial enterprises in rural Japan.

The REIHO FUJI is published by the International Affairs Desk in Fujiyoshida City Hall. For questions regarding content or if you would like to contribute please feel free to contact us!

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Time has stood still in this abandoned former nerve center with sporadic shops still in operation amid a surplus of shuttered storefronts and rusting rooftops, still serving their small group of regulars, an increasingly aging population of clientele. Drinking remains a popular pastime here particularly amongst male cohorts, however, and the market has remained viable for small establishments.

Seeing an opportunity amid growing pressure for reform in rural communities throughout Japan, the city decided to back a project to renovate and rebrand one particular back-alley tucked deep within the former entertainment district. Such an undertaking, though well-intentioned, was hardly an easy feat. Bureaucratic red tape notwithstanding, a lasting less-than-wholesome image of the area all but guaranteed that rebranding would in fact prove to be the heftier task. Nonetheless the tourism boom in Japan and the city's claims to Mt. Fuji ushered in unprecedented numbers of international tourists, creating a new demand for nightlife and setting the stage for a small-scale revival.

Re-emerging as *"Shinsekai Kanpai Street,"* a small conglomeration of eclectic establishments, the quirky underground vibe is reminiscent of better-known larger-scale operations like the prominent *"Omoide Yokochō"* in the Shinjuku ward of Tokyo where a maze of pedestrian-packed narrow alleyways is dotted with dozens of tiny cubbyhole bars one after another. Unlike its counterpart set within a sprawling metropolis however, Fujiyoshida's Shinsekai Kanpai Street, is one short passageway lined with no more than seven establishments, hidden in such a way that a first timer might question whether they've not made some kind of mistake.



Not long after traversing the initial entrance - marked with a discreet albeit illuminated overhead sign - however, one can make out the distinct sound of music and chatter, telltale signs of life in a rural town otherwise comatose after dark. Your options here range from a chic Italian restaurant at one end to a yakitori joint at the other, with everything from ramen and American fusion à la chili cheese fries, to a Caribbean music bar, a dance club, and a "lounge" (a euphemism for a bar offering female companionship) in between. The operation is overseen by the city while managed on the ground by the owners of each individual establishment. It remains partially government-funded even after the initial renovations were completed, which has led to an intricate dance between public and private stakeholders.

Trends of population decline in regional Japan continue to put pressure on smaller municipalities for budget reform. With the threat of dissipating funding, store owners are faced with a new challenge: prioritizing innovation. Though the future is relatively uncertain and questions of sustainability loom, if the name of the street, "Shinsekai" – new frontier & "Kanpai" - cheers, is any indication of the resolve to push boundaries, it seems as though the clinking of glasses won't be ceasing any time too soon ♦ Check out more about Shinsekai Kanpai Street at their website: <https://kanpai.info/>

## - VOICES FROM AFIELD -

### A conversation with Doan – Owner of “MASADON KITCHEN”

- Doan, how did you end up with this gig? What have you enjoyed the most about it?

*It all started by becoming best friends with the manager of the first shop on Kanpai Dori. Connecting with her network of other business owners opened up doors, first with running a festival stand for a couple of years, and eventually leading me here..*

- You have a unique public-private ecosystem here on Shinsekai Kanpai Street and cater to an increasingly diverse clientele. What have been some challenges with regard to how to operate your business here? What's been fun?

*The biggest challenge has been opening up to the conservative-rural local mindset to a foreigner perspective. The success in meeting new people and seeing the impact of a more accepting community grow has been immensely rewarding and tons of fun.*

- What have you observed about the local resident to tourist ratio and what do you think that says about the overall reception of this enterprise?

*Being a foreigner-run establishment, most locals were afraid to come in, even after I had gained support from other local businesses. It took A LOT of time and effort to get locals to open up and even then, tourists have remained my main source of revenue. I think there is a generational conflict at play here as well. Revitalization efforts force previous generations to face younger people whose attitudes and ideas often run counter to their own.*

- What do you believe to be the key in restoring the city? Do you think there is a possibility for this area to see a resurgence as a commercial epicenter?

*I think the key in uniting the community is having a synergistic goal rather than having everyone be out for themselves. This does not mean we all have to have the same exact goal. But many don't see how one goal can overlap and support another's goal.*

- Working alongside Japanese business owners, what have you noticed about how Japanese think about / approach business?

*A common trend among business owners is their ability to do things on their own without direction from a superior. Workers in Japan often seem incapable or unwilling to do anything on their own/show initiative. It feels like, counter to this, business owners don't want to be a simple cog in some business machine. Smaller businesses also tend to treat their employees as part of a team rather than as simply another part.*

- Innovation in the *inaka* (rural Japan). Fun or futile?

*Fun but definitely not easy. Takes a lot of time and effort and it can feel futile at times, but the community has shown me that it's not a futile endeavor. Seeing the changes in local's minds is proof of that.*

- If you could promote your business however you wanted to, what would that look like?

*I SO wish I had WiFi for my location. Then I could keep my laptop at the shop so I could use the internet to reliably upgrade the website and keep up a social media presence on sites such as Instagram and Facebook.*

# WHAT'S THE POINT?

"Point Cards" - Fujiyoshida Supermarket Edition

CAN ALSO BE A  
CHARGEABLE  
CASHCARD

## ❖ ICHIYAMA MART いちやまマート

No Annual Fee / ¥ 200 Sign Up Fee



- ¥ 300 spent = 1 POINT
- 250 POINTS = 1 blue chip ticket
- 8 blue chip tickets = ¥ 1000 in store

## ❖ SELVA セルバ

No Annual Fee / No Sign Up Fee



- ¥ 200 spent = 1 POINT
- 100 POINTS = ¥ 100 in store



## ❖ OGINO オギノ

No Annual Fee / ¥ 100 Sign Up Fee



- ¥ 270 spent = 1 POINT
- 250 POINTS = 1 ticket
- 3 tickets = ¥ 1000 in store

## ❖ THE BIG ザ・ビッグ

No Annual Fee / No Sign Up Fee



- ¥200 spent = 1 POINT
- 1 POINT = ¥ 1 in store

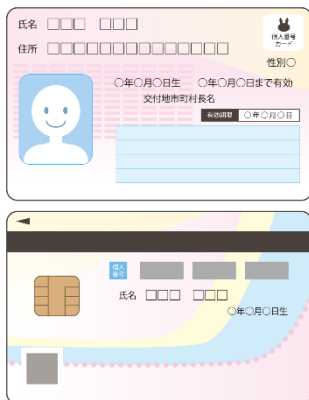


POINT CARDS offer incentives for shoppers in the form of points that can be traded for tickets worth money that can be spent in store. The number of points that you can earn differs by card and store.



# Word About Town

## Do you know what a My Number card is?



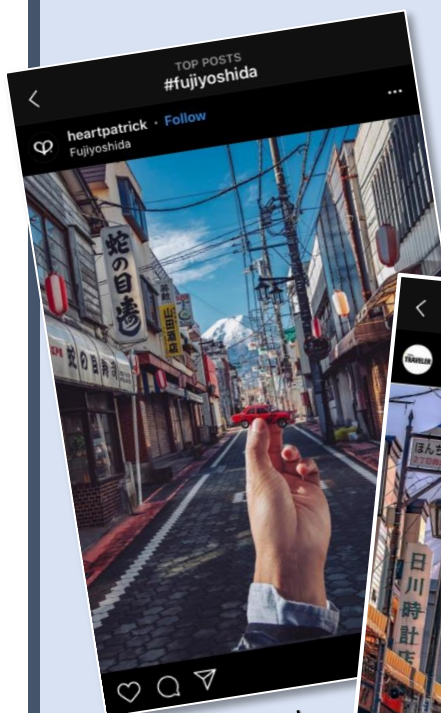
Your unique individual number, often known colloquially as “my number,” is a 12-digit number assigned to anyone who lives in Japan regardless of nationality. You may have already received your notification card, which comes in paper form, but the card itself is only available to those who sign up. The card is being touted as an ultra-convenient, all-in-one official ID. Sign up is incredibly easy and convenient and can be done online. For those with any questions, the multi lingual hotline is available at this #: **0120-0178-27**

APPLY HERE

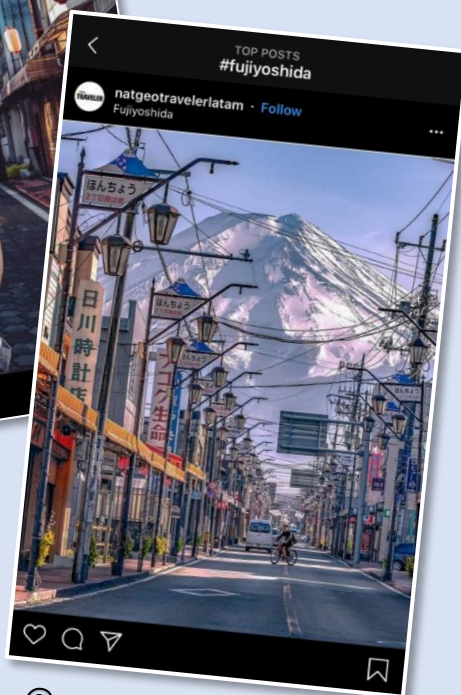


## #FUJIYOSHIDA

We LOVE what we find under the tag **#fujiyoshida** on Instagram! Visitors from all over the world find new and creative ways to capture our city and tell a story that only striking imagery truly can. For those of us who take living in such a picturesque part of the world for granted, it's a great reminder and point of pride. Though we love how many photo takers have flocked to our streets, we do urge all visitor to heed traffic signs and be mindful of local drivers. Dashing out in the middle of traffic is dangerous, even if it is for that special shot! Happy shooting ☺



@heartpatrick



@natgeotravelerlatam



## TRAIL NAME:

## PRO SUMMARY:

## COURSE SPECS:

### NAKANOUCHAYA TEA HOUSE – Yoshida Tainai Caves Loop Hike

A pleasant and simple hike through the forest at the foot of Mt. Fuji. It takes in the famous Nakanochaya Tea House on the Mt. Fuji waking trail and the Yoshida Tainai Lava caves in the nearby forest.

Distance: 3 km | Difficulty: easy (all ages) | Equipment: torch

## BUS ACCESS



From Nakanochaya, follow the trail northwest into the forest. Keeping to the left trail will take you down a very pleasant forest track. It's especially beautiful in mid-April when the cherry blossom trees that line the track are in bloom and the forest warblers are in full voice. After about 500m the path forks, follow this to the left. Continue to follow this as it bends to the right.

You may see signs on the trees for the Tainai Cave (吉田胎内), you can follow these as the path takes you across the stream bed and into the dense forest beyond. After a few minutes, you'll arrive at the cave area.

The Tainai caves were formed in a large volcanic eruption of Mt. Fuji in 937BC, and are the result of lava flowing and cooling over several fallen trees. The glassy walls of these tubes were thought to resemble a woman's womb, hence the name 'tainai' in Japanese. They remain an important pilgrimage spot for the disciples of the Fuji-Ko religion and especially women with newborn infants. Although the main cave is locked and not open to the public (apart from at a festival on the morning of April 29<sup>th</sup>), there are several caves that can be seen by following the path south of the main cave. This is where your torch comes in handy,

but be careful not to bump your head on the low, sharp lava above you!

After exploring the caves and the surrounding lava tree molds, you can return to Nakanochaya by the same route, or by heading north to the main road, then entering the forest again a few yards on the right (see map). If you've built up a bit of hunger, why not finish off your stroll with a hot bowl of local udon noodles at the Nakanochaya Tea House?





# ALT REPORT

We are very lucky in Fujiyoshida to have such a diverse group of English teachers from all over the world! In this segment we chat with them about life in Japan & Fujiyoshida



ADELAIDE "ADDIE" KELLEY  
(Mt. Fuji from Lake Yamanakako)

In this edition we talked with Addie from Chicago, Illinois in the United States. Addie has a background and interest in languages and international relations. She studied abroad in Chile and majored in Spanish, Anthropology and International Studies in college. She currently teaches junior and high school English and also spends some time in a kindergarten. Addie is wrapping up her first year here in Fujiyoshida.

## QUICK Q&A

■ *We all know that life in Japan as a foreign national can be a bit lonely. What are your homesickness remedies?*

When I first got here I tried very hard to find classes and activities that I could take part in. I take a dance class every week and most weeks I drop in a yoga class. Depending on the time and weather, I go for walks while listening to something in English. If I can call home, I do. I also talking with friends here, eating foods that remind me of home and reading books.

■ *What do you see as strengths and weaknesses in the Japanese education system?*

I think the sense of community fostered by the education system here is awesome. My students all seem really close. I would say that the class sizes are the biggest weakness. It is hard to give students enough feedback or attention when you essentially have a minute per student each class period. It is hard to make small groups and give each group a chance to present in a 45-minute class.

■ *If you could describe your sojourn in three words, what would they be?*

Happy coincidences! Most of the best things that have happened to me here have been unexpected many ways!

■ *What is your favorite Japanese word you've learned?*

Yasashii (easy). I like it because my students always say muzukashi (difficult) to everything in English. I like to remind them that just because something is difficult for you does not mean it can't ever be easy

■ *What words of advice do you have for anyone considering living and working in Japan? In Fujiyoshida?*

Learn Japanese. Even if you don't have much time to learn before you get here, learn hiragana and katakana, it will make your life easier. Oh, and sharpen your guessing skills, even with katakana things are shortened and resyllabled and katakana is used for ALL foreign language words, so don't always assume that it should sound like an English word when you sound things out

DOMO ARIGATO ADDIE!