

Japan beyond college campuses

Japan is known worldwide for Ninja, electronic items with cutting edge technology, ramen and many more. Tea ceremony, flower arrangement (Akebana) and calligraphy are a few of the distinct elements of its rich culture. Upon arriving on the land of the rising sun, most of us strive to excel in our studies and witness these commonly known facts about Japan. But few of us dare to challenge ourselves and explore the awe-struck natural wonders and cultural profound heritage of Japan. These wonders include mountain trails, beautiful tropical beaches and stunning ridges and ripples of snow for skiing. This article introduces some of the memorable moments of IITH Alumni.

Mountain Hiking: Three Sacred Mountains

Japan has some of the most incredible eye-catching natural wonders in the world. Japanese Alps (Northern and Southern) have long been the object of veneration and pilgrimage. The Three Holy Mountains of Japan (三霊山, Sanreizan) are three mountains revered by tradition in Japan. They include (1) Mount Fuji, (2). Mount Tate and, (3). Mount Haku of height 3776m, 3015 and 2702 m, respectively.

Aside from being a famous landmark and symbol of the country, Mount Fuji is a natural wonder. According to UNESCO, Mount Fuji has "inspired artists and poets and been the object of pilgrimage for centuries".



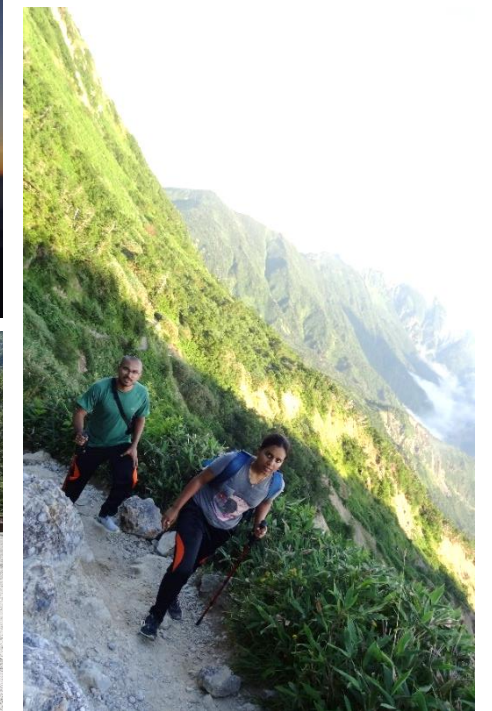
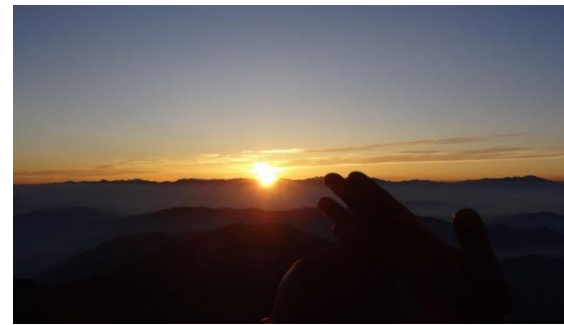
Mount Fuji (Photo Credit Dr. Sai Chandra Teja, Osaka University)

Mount Tate, commonly referred to as Tateyama, consists of three peaks: Ōnanjiyama (大汝山, 3,015m), Oyama (雄山, 3,003m), and Fuji-no-Oritateyama, (富士ノ折立, 2,999m) which run along a ridge.

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Mount Haku commonly known as Hakusan or White Mountain, is known for its diverse plant life namely *Primula cuneifolia* (Hakusan Kozakura), *Anemone narcissiflora* (Hakusan Ichige).



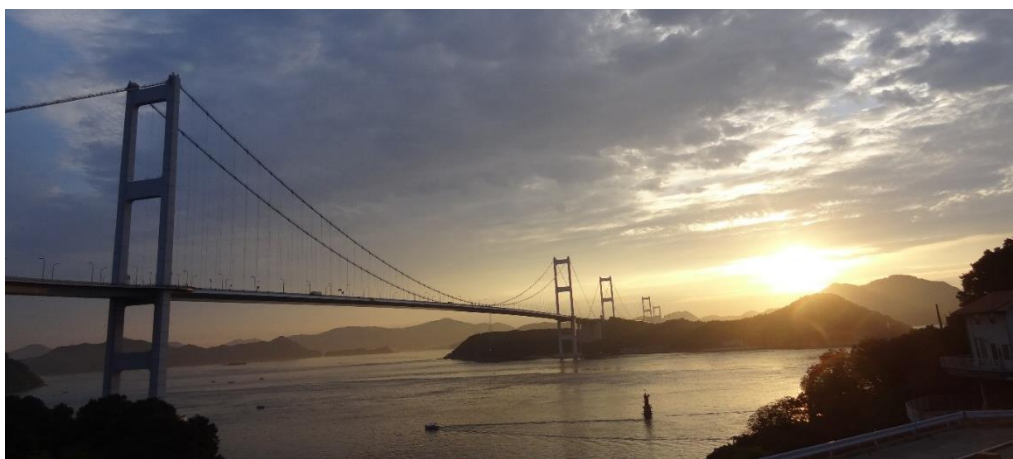
Mount Haku (Credit Dr. Swapnil Ghodke and Dr. Pravin Kadu of Nagoya University)

Mount Tate (Photo Credit: Dr. Mahendra Kumar Pal, University of Tokyo)

Cycling Around Japan

The 70-km stretch along the route connecting Hiroshima to Onomichi, commonly known as Shimanamikaido is the cyclist paradise. With 14-rent cycle terminals where you may rent or drop off the cycle, ShimanamiKaido passes through six small islands in the Seto Inland Sea. It is also known as the Nishiseto Expressway.

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Shimanamikaido (Photocredit: Dr. Mahendra Kumar Pal, University of Tokyo, Dr. R. Sai Chandra Teja, Osaka University)

The 2nd popular choice of cycling route is Awaji island, where you may enjoy the beautiful scenery from the island's coast-hugging roads. You must enjoy locally available Onion. It is a 150 Kms circuit in one-way and which can be covered in a two-days period with an overnight stay, preferably camping at tropical beaches. The Naruto whirlpools can be best seen from sightseeing cruises that run from Shikoku and Awaji Island.



Awaji Island (Photo Credit: Dr. Swapnil Ghodke and Mr. Upendar of Nagoya University)

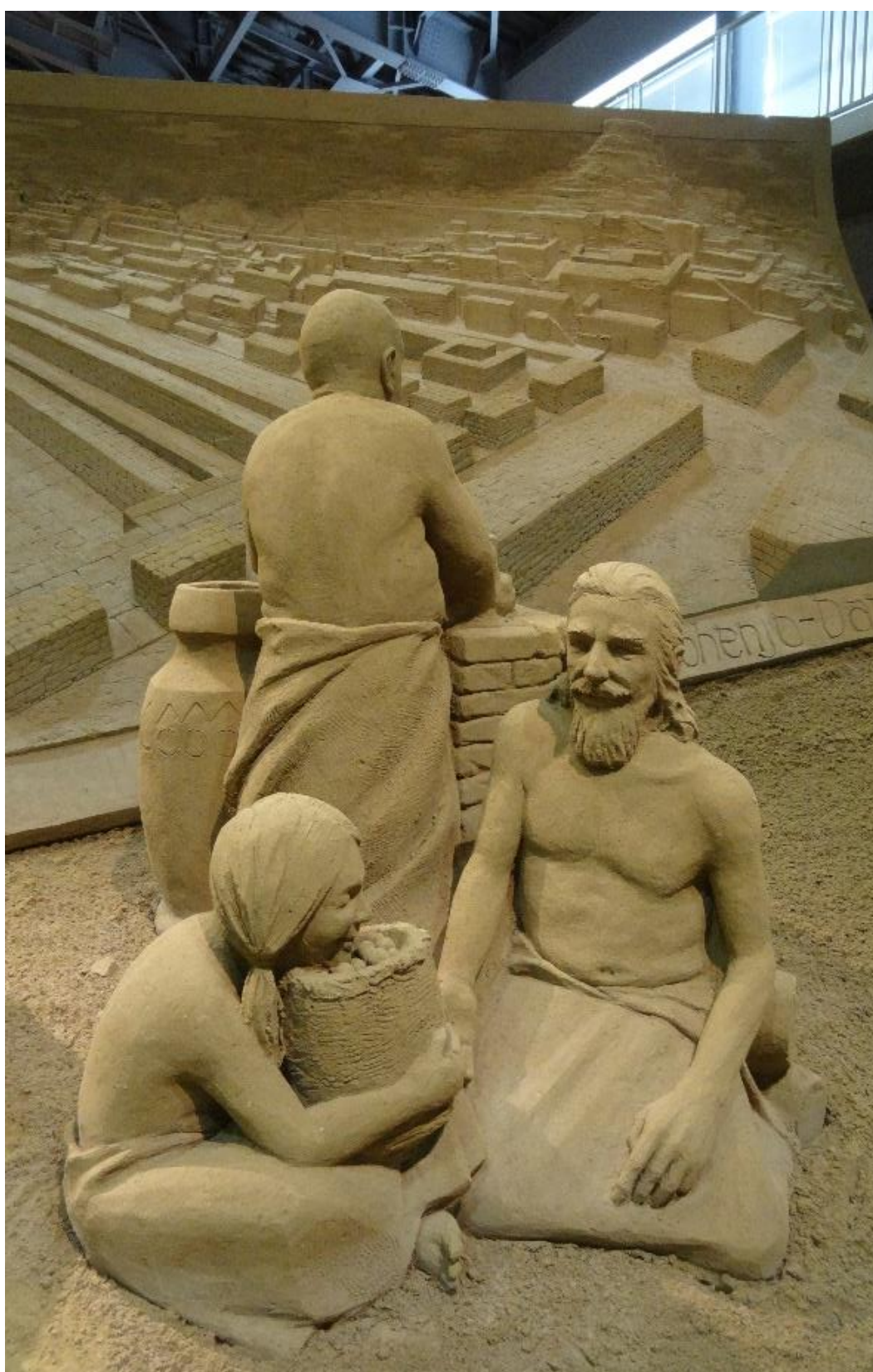
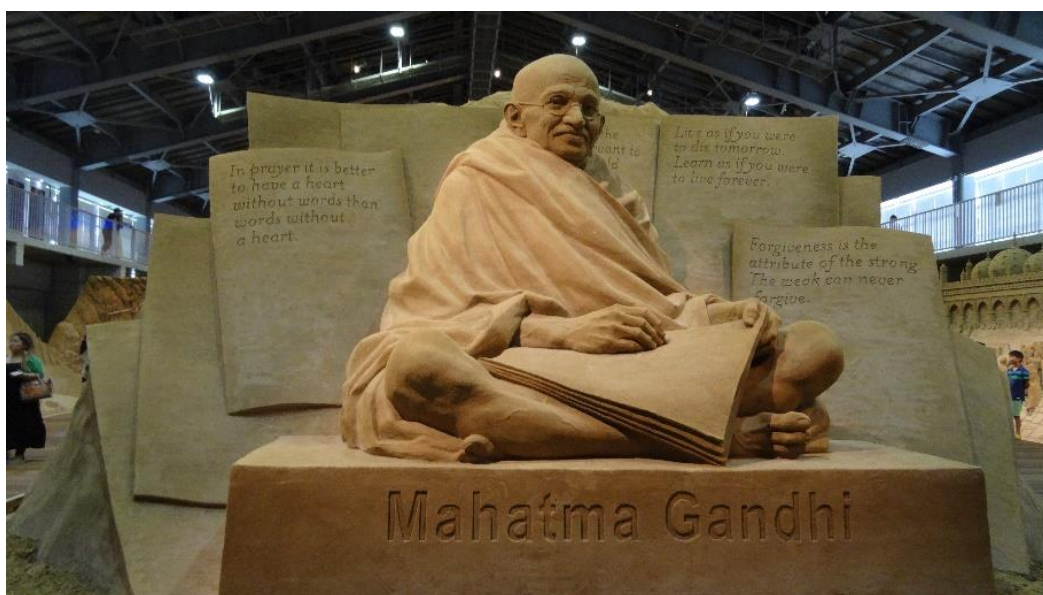
The sweeping sand dunes, and Tottori Sand Museum

As the result of 100,000 years of ocean winds blowing in from the Sea of Japan, the sand dunes are naturally formed which are stretched over 16 Kms in length and are 2 Kms width with incredible 40-meter-deep basins and towering hills.

At such a vast nature, the sand museum was opened in 2006 and it has been exhibiting sand scriptures using sand from dunes dedicated to some specific theme on yearly basis with an aim to learn the beauty and possibility of sand.

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Museum has dedicated its 12 exhibitions for "Travel around the World in Sand, South Asia - Religious Devotion, Diverse Cultures, and the Road to Peace". Museum exhibited 21 sculpture focusing on various cultural and religious in South Asia, such as the Taj Mahal, Mahatma Gandhi, and Mohenjo-Daro for a period of one-year from 2019/4/13~2020/1/5.



Tottori Sand Museum (Photo Credit: Dr. Mahendra Kumar Pal, University of Tokyo)

New Year Celebration

Evening parties, fireworks, illuminations, rave parties, and big-screen count-down are a few common ways to adieu to the last year and to welcome the new year. Japan is no indifferent in that celebration. Traditionally, Japan used to prepare for and welcome Toshigami (年神), the New Year's god. People clean their homes and prepare Kadomatsu or Shimenawa to welcome the god before New Year's Eve. Buddhist temples ring their bells 108 times as count-down, representing the 108 elements of bonō (煩惱), mental states that lead people to take unwholesome actions.

Alongside western culture influenced celebration, Japanese people celebrates their new year with friends and family and by visiting the shrine at midnight. Starting the new year by witnessing the first sunrise of the year is believed to be lucky. Every year, except in 2021 due to obvious reason, a million people visit Meiji Jingu Shrine located in western Tokyo; Meiji Jingu Shrine is a Shinto Shrine dedicated to the deified spirits of Emperor Meiji and his wife.

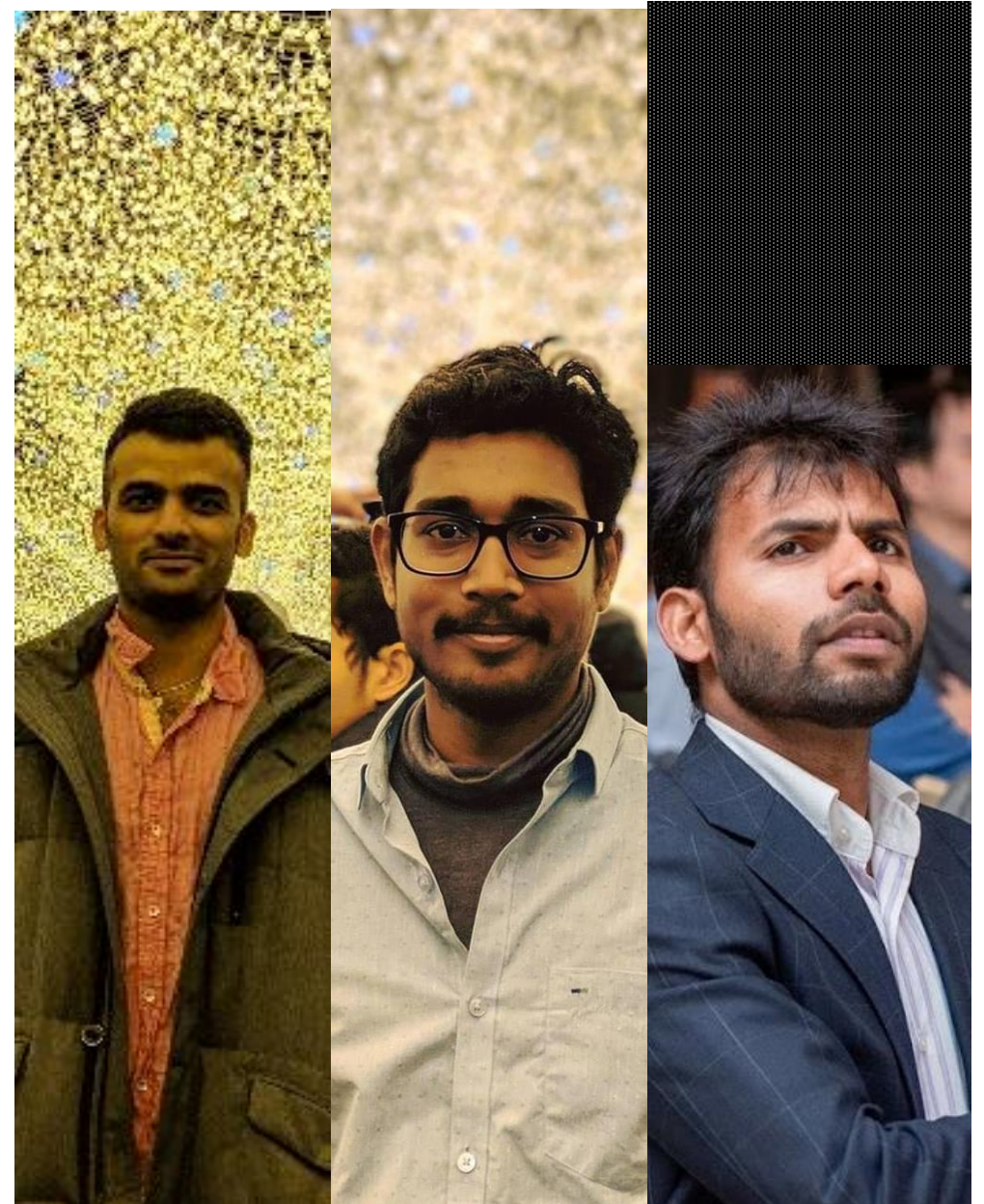
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Folks viewing sunrise at Katsurahama Beach, Kochi, Japan,



***Nabana no Sato New Year Winter Illumination
(Photo Credit: Dr. Mahendra Kumar Pal, Dr. Gaddam Pruthviraj, University of Tokyo, Dr. R. Sai Chandra Teja, Osaka University)***



***Dr. R. Sai Chandra Teja, Osaka University
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