



Traveling South

[Érica Tanaka]

Minobu Station

The Grapevine staff highly recommends the station which carries the train line's namesake. The main attraction is Kuonji Temple which is located 15 minutes by bus from Minobu Station. By climbing up the stairs of this famous temple, one can enjoy the beauty of the Japanese natural landscape and understand why the Buddhist monk Nichiren had chosen this picturesque area to live and meditate during the Kamakura Period. Minobu draws its name from the famous mountain which was chosen by Nichiren to spend his voluntary exile. It is where he found the tranquility and calmness to write, build Kuonji Temple, and instruct his disciples.

Utsubuna Station

Utsubuna Station is the third to last station from the border of Yamanashi and Shizuoka Prefectures. Following our instincts and asking locals for advice as to what a casual visitor to the area can enjoy, we found that many would point towards the mountains: Mt. Shishinzan, Mt. Jumaizan, and Mt. Choujagatake. The locals also recommended the famous *Nanbu-no-yu* hot spring, which is only a 5-minute walk from the station.

As a Japanese culture lover, my attention was drawn to the Utsubuna Kabuki - a traditional Japanese theatrical production performed by an all-male troupe - and its two hundred year tradition in the local area. It is believed that during the Edo Period, traveling artists who were on their way to Minobu Temple introduced the tradition to the region. The Utsubuna Kabuki performance occurs only once a year and interested visitors can find information about the show at the Nanbu Town Hall.

Shimobe-onsen Station

When you get off at the station, the vacation spirit hits you at once. This area is known as the famous warlord, Takeda Shingen's hidden hot spring where he would visit, along with his soldiers, in order to recover from battle injuries. The onsen hot spring district is about 10 minutes walking distance from the station.

In Japan, whenever there is an onsen district, you can always



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sen Station

find a river. Shimobe is no different. After talking with a local resident, we followed the stream, walking on an uphill path through the mountains until reaching a sun-dappled, antique shrine. Standing inside the shrine grounds, visitors can experience nature and the energy flowing through the leaves, the trees, the stones and silence.

It can also be said that the natural water of the area enhances the flavor of local cuisine. The special taste of Shimobe's soba (Japanese buckwheat noodle) might very well be attributed to the pure quality of this mountain water. It was quite difficult to find a shop open, but the one we were introduced to by the locals was a small restaurant run by a kind *obaa-chan* (grandmother) who welcomes you with such a warm heart and tasty meal that they fill both your spirit and stomach.

