

The colour of Kakegawa

EXOTIC BIRDS, LUSH PLANTS, SUPER VIEWS, A SPELL AWAY FROM IT ALL.

TEXT & PHOTOS: CAROLE GOLDSMITH



Exploring Kakegawa, was like a breath of fresh air after a hectic week in the city. The peaceful city is famous for its green tea fields, local fruit and vegetables, colourful birds and hanging flower baskets at the Kakegawa bird park, Kakegawa castle and its gardens in spring. Located in the Shizuoka region, Kakegawa is around 90km west of Mt Fuji and roughly half way between Osaka and Tokyo.

As I wandered into the Kakegawa Station concourse, I spotted a man out the front of the bakery proudly displaying a small model church. I introduced myself to Tokunaga-san, who was also promoting his own brand of coffee Tokunaga Kohi.

Proudly he said he had sculptured the church out of coffee beans himself. It certainly was a masterpiece, complete with spires, side wings, seating and a place for the sermon. Shining a tiny light inside, Tokunaga-san described the church in great detail then he offered me a sample of steaming hot coffee, very welcome on this chilly day. The station shops also sell colorful local arts and crafts and fresh produce from the region.

I checked into my hotel, the Toyoko Inn Kakegawa, around two-minute's walk, from the station's entrance. The hotel staff are very friendly and there is free use of internet in the foyer. At breakfast, I had seconds of the home made miso soup, thick with vegetables and tofu, complemented by the generously filled rice balls and the 24 hour coffee and tea machine.

The next day, I headed for the Kakegawa Kacho or Kakegawa Bird and Flower Park <http://www.kamoltd.co.jp/kkee/>. From the front of the station,



it is only a fifteen-minute walk down the main street and left at the busy roadway. To my delight, I was greeted by a friendly penguin at the ticket office. It could not quite collect the ¥1,050 entrance fee, so a staff member assisted. There is a bird feeding schedule near the park gate.

Once inside the park, penguins were swimming around the rock pool, ducks and other water birds wandered on the pavement in the enclosure. I bought some bird feed for ¥100 and within seconds, I was surrounded by quacking ducks all wanting some of the feed and the action.

Escaping the feeding frenzy, I entered the flower garden of around 5,000 square meters (according to the park's brochure) with hundreds of hanging baskets containing brightly coloured flowers, pink, blue, lilac, green and red, mainly begonias and geranium plants trailing down from the ceiling.

The restaurant buffet lunch was under the canopy of flowers. Tomato rice and chicken soup was my favourite, and then I dined on a selection of meat and fish dishes, with an array of hot vegetables and salad selection. The staff invited me to try the delicious freshly made tofu and finish up with the yellow and green cake.

In the tropical water lilies pool zone, 1,500 square meters in total, hundreds of multi-coloured parrots fly en masse across the enclosure, while toucans and other tropical birds walk freely around the edge of the pond. The pink, blue and lilac water lilies in full bloom, glistened in the water surrounded by enormous lily pads. As visitors selected the cups of bird food, parrots swooped down and landed on their heads, shoulders, hands, wherever they could find a

space. People squealed with laughter, pleasure or pain as the birds fed with great gusto. One lady dressed in red and black seemed to blend in with the parrots, but she looked petrified when they bombarded her for feed.

In the next pavilion, a lyrebird spread its spectacular tail of blue green and brown feathers. Then it was time to feed the penguins and for ¥200 we received a little bucket of fish. Staff lifted penguins out of the water one by one, to dine excitedly on the fish we fed them.

After a great night's sleep and some more of the hotel's miso and vegetable soup, I walked to the Tsumagoi bus stop, stand number five at the back of Kakegawa station. The very helpful lady at the station's city tourist stand provided me with timetables, maps and brochures of all tourist attractions including the Tsumagoi Resort in the mountains. She suggested I go to the Shinrinnoyo Onsen (hot springs) at Tsumagoi, located around 20 minutes by bus from Kakegawa. When we were almost there, I observed from the bus windows, row after row of beautifully manicured fields of green tea.

The Onsen is a two minute walk from the bus stop located at the entrance to the Tsumagoi Resort. Set in the mountains and beside a river, the fee for the Onsen is ¥1,000. As I climbed to the second floor spa and changing rooms, the sign for Dr Fish on the first floor caught my attention. There are hundreds of small grey fish swimming in a flat bath around 90cm square, so I took the challenge and paid ¥700 for ten minutes for Dr.

Fish to do their work.

As I placed my feet gently in the bath, most of the tiny fish swarmed towards my feet and legs. There was a boy of around four years old and his mother also testing out Dr Fish. Just a few of the fish were around their feet, but I seemed to have attracted the majority. I squealed initially as it felt like a combination of tickling, prickling and feeling ecstatic, as they nibbled my feet and lower legs. I looked at the small boy and his mother as we all laughed out loud at the weird sensation we were feeling. Soon the ten minutes was over and my legs and feet felt rejuvenated.

The hot springs baths were both inside and outdoors with varying temperatures and I tried them all. As I lay under the trickle of the warm spring water falling from the mountain above, I felt so relaxed that I fell asleep. One of the ladies nearby woke me up gently and suggested I might like to have a rest on the first floor mats, rather than drown in the spa. I rested later and enjoyed sandwiches, homemade cake, ice-cream and tea at the first floor restaurant.

Feeling invigorated, I headed back to town by bus. From the back of the station, I walked down the main street for around ten minutes to reach the Kakegawa Castle. Along the walk, I saw many colourful spring flower boxes in front of houses and on street corners.

Inside the castle gate, there was a multi-colored flower garden with daisies, orange marigold, and pansies near the steps leading up to the castle. Several families were enjoying an

afternoon tea picnic on the benches provided. A boy of around five years and his father were eating large ripe strawberries with toothpicks.

According to the Kakegawa City website, the castle was built by the Imagawa clan, and ruled by Yamauchi Kazutoyo, for ten years from 1590. During this time the castle tower was built and the castle town constructed. It is regarded as the finest castle in the Tokai area, and in 1994, it was the first Japanese castle to be restored to its original state using a wooden construction.

From the castle watchtower you can see a 360 degrees view of Kakegawa, the surrounding gardens and even Mt. Fuji on a clear day. I also saw children playing in the fields having fun running races with a tire tied around their waists.

The Ninomaru Museum of Art, to the right of the castle displays an interesting collection of purses and combs for ladies in kimonos. Behind the museum I enjoyed a tea ceremony and sweets at the Ninomaru tea rooms, overlooking beautiful gardens. The two other ladies at the tea ceremony had traveled from Hokaido, to visit the Kakegawa Shiseido Art Museum—a must see for my next visit to this colorful city.

GETTING THERE

From Kansai, Shinkansen to Kakegawa, changing at Hamamatsu.

ON THE WEB

Kakegawa City Website in English: http://lgportal.city.kakegawa.shizuoka.jp/kanko_gaikokujin/tagengo/en/index.html

