

events & information

Temple lodge wins inbound travel award

Kakurinbo, a *shukubo* (temple lodge) in Yamanashi Prefecture, was named best inbound travel destination at the Japan Travel Awards this March. Kakurinbo was praised for providing a warm, multilingual introduction to traditional Japanese culture to visitors from overseas.

The awards recognize destinations that promote diversity and sustainability in the tourism industry. The judges said Kakurinbo excelled at balancing the needs of its community with its efforts to provide diverse cultural programs and dining experiences for its guests.

But for Kakurinbo's Junko Higuchi, hosting guests in the serene mountains — covering everything from kimono rentals to arranging craftwork experiences for *kintsugi* (mending pottery with gold) and *washi* (traditional Japanese paper) — is not unusual.

"There's nothing glamorous about the things that we do, but it does feel good to be awarded for carrying out our duties every day and responding to the queries and needs of each and every one of our

customers," Higuchi said.

Kakurinbo is a 500-year-old satellite temple of Kuonji, a temple on Mount Minobu — one of three great sacred mountains of Japanese Buddhism.

In 2017, operating on a shoestring budget, Kakurinbo started out with the simple goal of planting Mount Minobu in the minds of tourists. Last year, about 65% of Kakurinbo's visitors were from overseas. It was a welcome rebound after the pandemic, and Higuchi is looking forward to even better numbers this year.

"We are only a small shukubo, so we can get full in the blink of an eye. We want that overflow of guests to spill over into the community. It is important to promote all of Mount Minobu as a destination," Higuchi said. A Buddhist enclave, the area remains the least known of the religion's sacred mountains in Japan.

While she hopes it does not remain hidden much longer, Higuchi agrees with the assessment of many travelers that Mount Minobu is a gem. Home to unspoiled beauty



Junko Higuchi (center), manager of Kakurinbo, is recognized at the Japan Travel Awards ceremony on March 7 in Tokyo.

SHIITAKE CREATIVE / JAPAN TRAVEL AWARDS

and traditional artisans steadily carrying on their crafts, it is opening its doors while ensuring its preservation for years to come.

Kakurinbo has 13 rooms at the temple plus a villa, Ebisuya, originally built in the 1930s. Meals are predominantly vegetarian, and the lodge accepts halal, vegan and gluten-free requests. Kakurinbo is about three hours by car, bus or train from Tokyo.

URL: <https://kakurinbo.jp/english/>