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AIZU-WAKAMATSU 会津若松

Aizu Day Plan (Monday 21st)

Starting point: **Akihabara station**

Train

Akihabara Station to Ueno station

JR Yamanote Line direction IKEBUKURO, free with JR Pass

Ueno Station to Koriyama station

Tohoku Shinkansen direction SENDAI, free with JR Pass

Koriyama Station to Aizu-Wakamatsu station

JR Banetsu Line direction AIZU-WAKAMATSU, free with JR Pass

Please see train schedule on the next page

Aizu-Wakamatsu station

Once in Aizu-Wakamatsu, you can use the loop bus to get around. See the following pages for more information.

Lunch: Takino

Tsuruga castle & Rinkaku tea house

Aizu Bukeyashiki

Higashiyama onsen

After visiting the castle, you can see what else you want to do along the bus route. Allison likely won't have too much time before her reservation so will probably want to stick to the onsen + bukeyashiki area.

The boys

Mt.Iimori

Allison

Geisha make-up visit

See the reservation pdf for reservation details, the meet-up time is 4:30pm at the ryokan.

Dinner at ryokan with geisha performance 7pm

Train timetable

Trains between Akihabara-Ueno pass by every few minutes.

DEPARTURE UENO st.	ARRIVAL KORIYAMA	DEPARTURE KORIYAMA (JR Ban-etsu West Line)	ARRIVAL AIZU-WAKAMATSU
06:46	08:19	08:29	09:40
07:50	09:22	-	-
08:14	09:31	09:38	10:55
08:54	10:06	-	-
09:02	10:12	10:41	11:50
09:46	10:58	-	-
10:06	11:18	11:39	13:00
10:42	11:57	-	-
11:06	12:17	12:52	13:57

Aizu Loop Bus

In front of Aizu-Wakamatsu station, find bus stop number 6. Here is the departure point for the Aizu Loop Bus which will take you to the different sites around the city. You can buy a one day pass (¥600) at the small bus booth in front of Aizu-Wakamatsu Station.

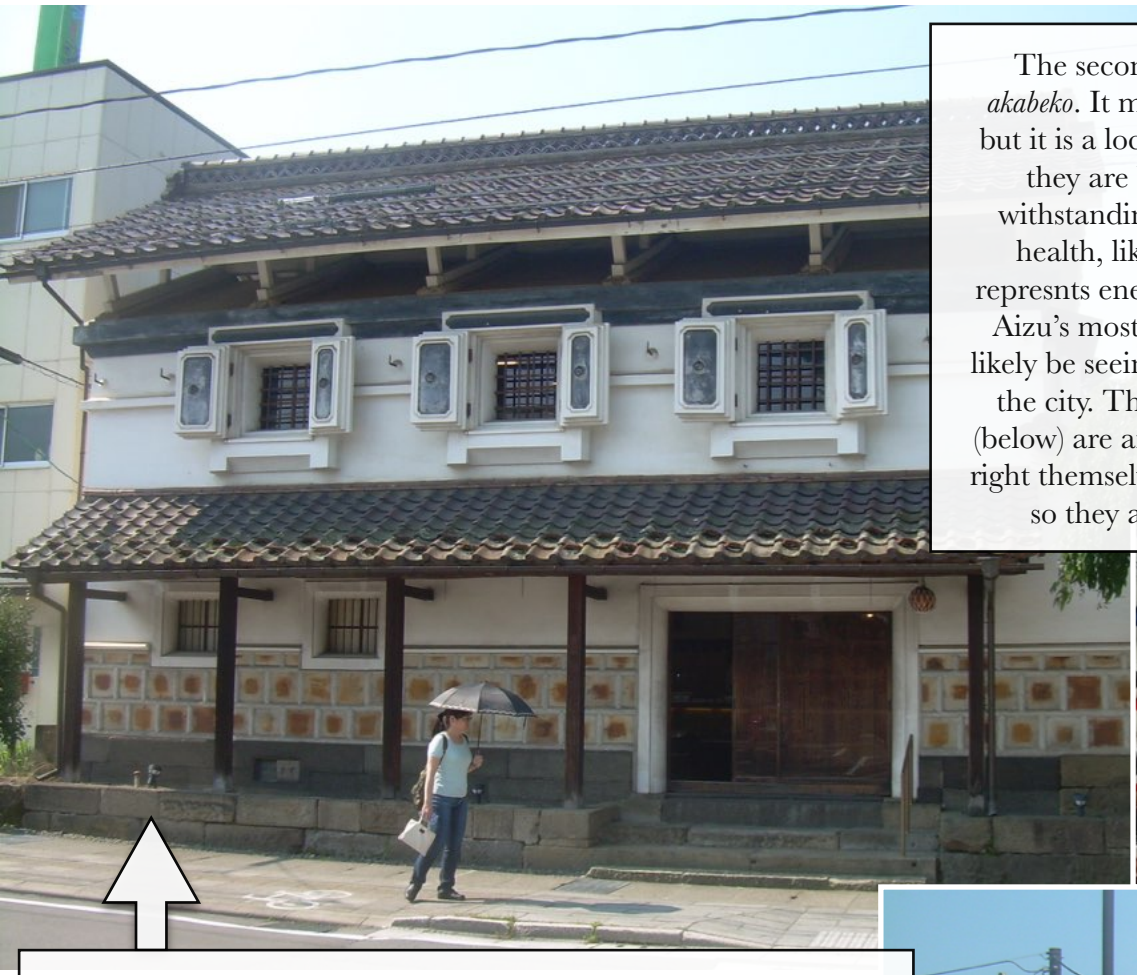
One of the Byakkotai soldiers looking at Tsuruga Castle in the distance from Mt.Iimori

AIZU-WAKAMATSU

City of samurai

Upon exiting Aizu-Wakamatsu station, you will see two statues that symbolise Aizu. The first, two stone boys, represent two of the Byakkotai boys who committed *seppuku*, ritual suicide. More on them later.

The second is a giant red cow called *akabeko*. It may not look much like a cow, but it is a local toy given to children when they are born to wish them luck in withstanding heavy burdons with good health, like cows do. The red colour represnts energy and warding off evil. It is Aizu's most popular souvenir and you'll likely be seeing him in many places around the city. These little *okiagari koboshi* dolls (below) are another famous souvenir. They right themselves after being knocked down, so they are a symbol of resilience.



During the bus ride to Tsuruga castle, you will drive past a few *kura* buildings. This is a traditional architecture style which started to appear as early as the Yayoi Period (prehistory). *Kura* storehouses used to store precious items, like rice or buddhist sutras, and were covered in clay and coated with plaster to be especially resistent to fire. Since most traditional Japanese buildings were made of wood, fires used to be a big danger and could destroy entire towns. These buildings often have a layer of tiles around the bottom, but the windows are also very distinctive (the thick zig-zag window panes were also to keep fire and humidity out).

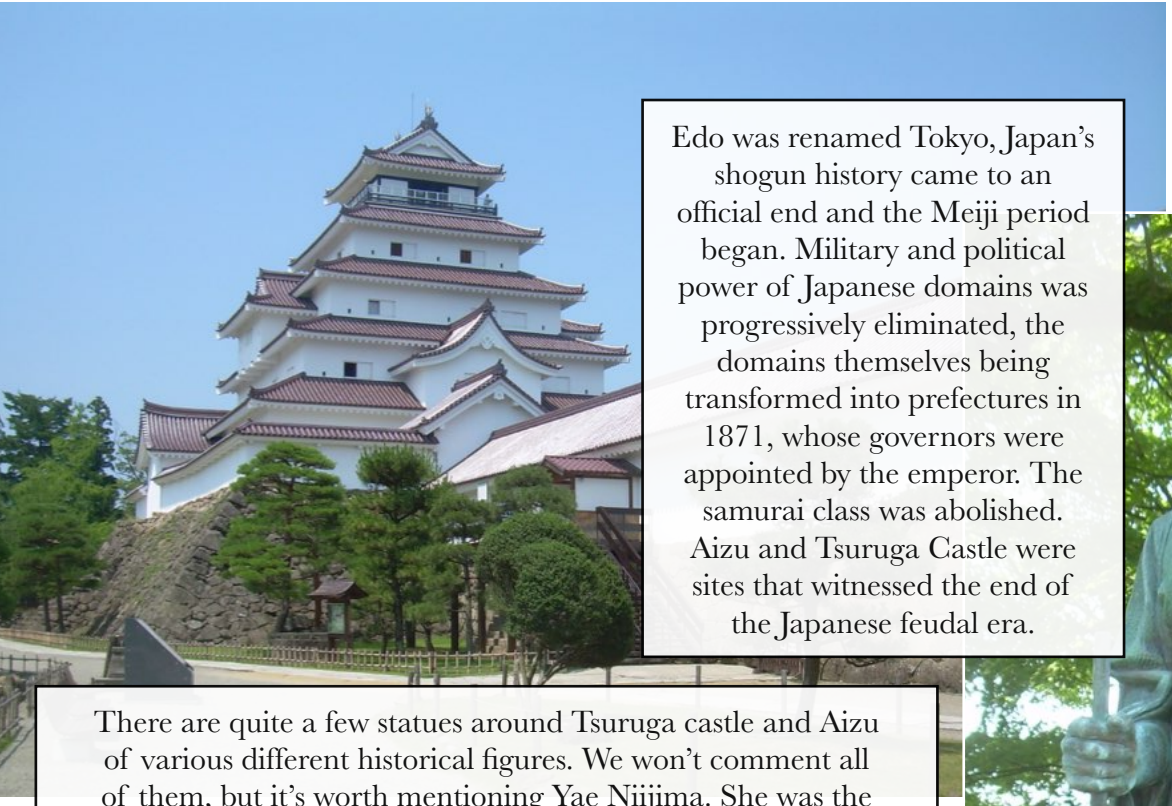
Aizu-Wakamatsu has been populated since the prehistoric era. The castle, built in 1384, has changed hands so many times (for example by the Uesugi clan, inspiration of the manga Kenshin) that if I tried to explain all its history you wouldn't have any time left to enjoy the castle. The most relevant piece of history is that of 1868, the Japanese Civil War (Boshin War).

For two centuries, Japan had a strict policy of **isolationism**, restricting all foreign interactions (the exceptions were Korea, secretly China, and the Dutch at only one port in Nagasaki). In 1854, US Navy Commodore Perry's expedition opened Japan to global commerce through the implied threat of force, initiating rapid Westernization and development of foreign trade. Due to the humiliating terms of the unequal treaties, the Tokugawa shogunate soon faced internal dissent. Across Japan, many believed the shogunate was not handling the situation correctly and sought to return political power to the Imperial Court.

(Above) A famous photo of pro-imperial samurai from Choshu, (below) Emperor Meiji

The Satsuma and Choshu domains from southern Japan were the main forces in favour of the Emperor regaining power, they caused the first rebellions and coup d'états and formed the imperial forces. After years of tensions, military movements by imperial forces, partisan violence in Edo (Tokyo), an imperial decree abolishing the shogun House of Tokugawa and a series of battles culminating in the surrender of Edo, the shogun personally surrendered.

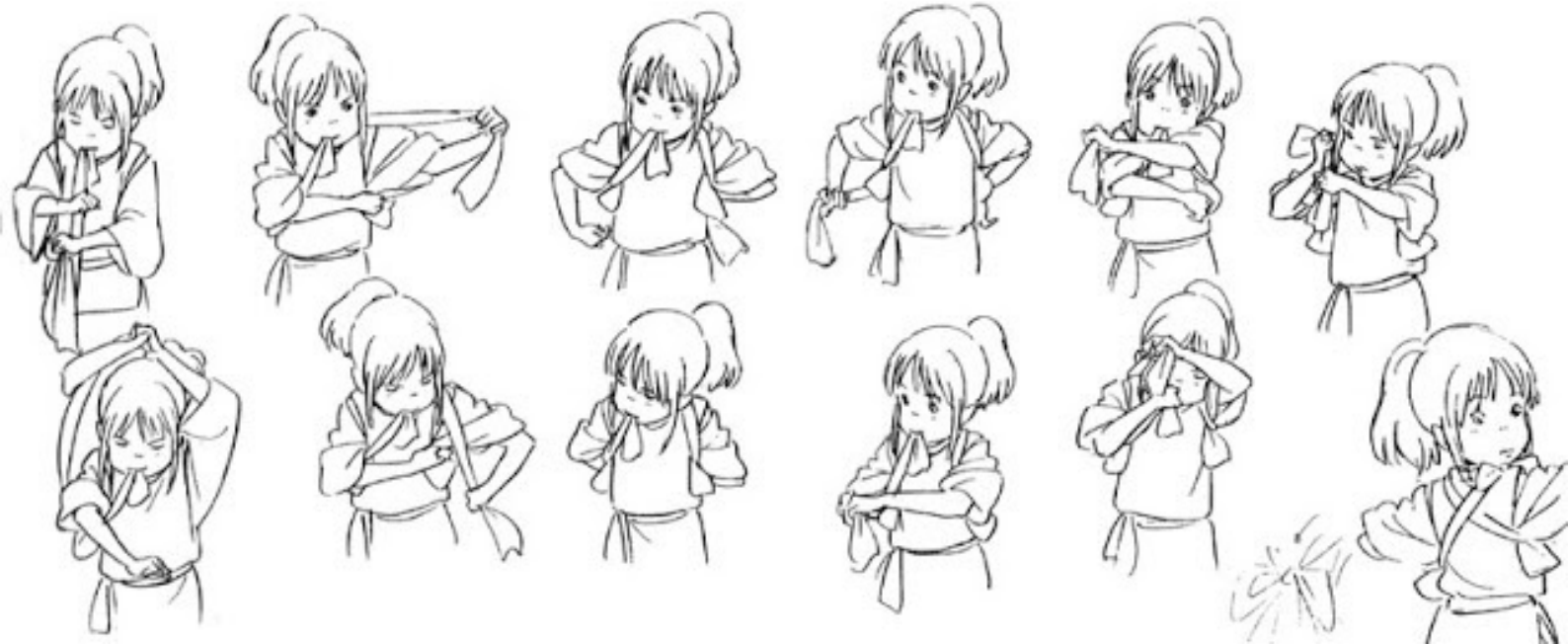
Most accepted this surrender, but some pro-shogunate forces continued the resistance and retreated to Northern Japan, forming a coalition of northern domains (including Aizu domain) alongside the fierce Shinsengumi troops. However, they were poorly equipped compared to the imperial forces and relied on traditional fighting methods, modern armament was scarce. Multiple battles were fought around Northern Japan: the battle of Aizu lasted a month before they were defeated.



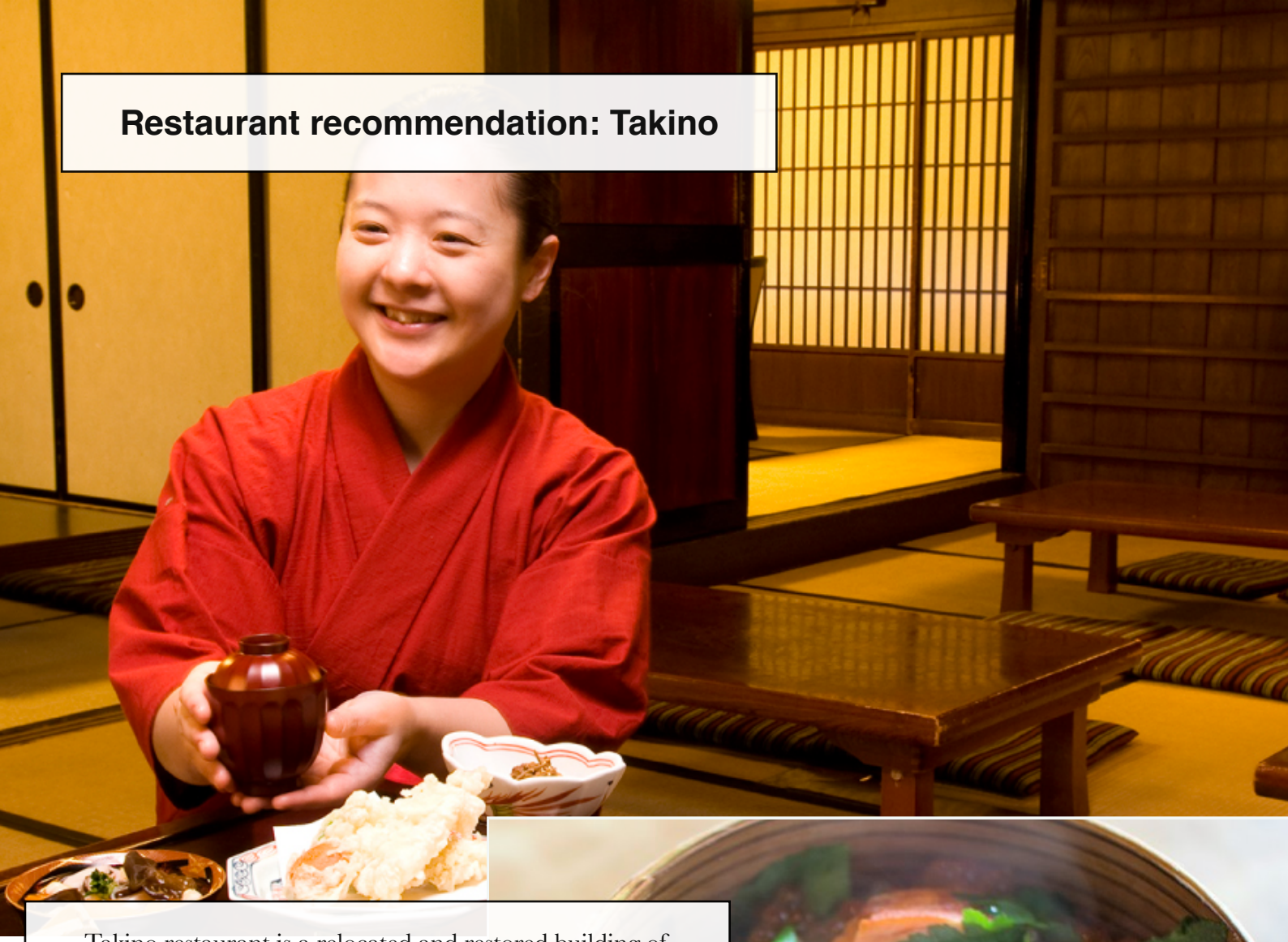
Edo was renamed Tokyo, Japan's shogun history came to an official end and the Meiji period began. Military and political power of Japanese domains was progressively eliminated, the domains themselves being transformed into prefectures in 1871, whose governors were appointed by the emperor. The samurai class was abolished. Aizu and Tsuruga Castle were sites that witnessed the end of the Japanese feudal era.

There are quite a few statues around Tsuruga castle and Aizu of various different historical figures. We won't comment all of them, but it's worth mentioning Yae Niijima. She was the daughter of a samurai and was one of the women who also fought in the battle of Tsuruga castle carrying a gun. After the Boshin Civil War she founded a university and later served as a nurse in World War II. She became the first woman outside of the Imperial House to be decorated for her service to the country. Here's a real photo of her:

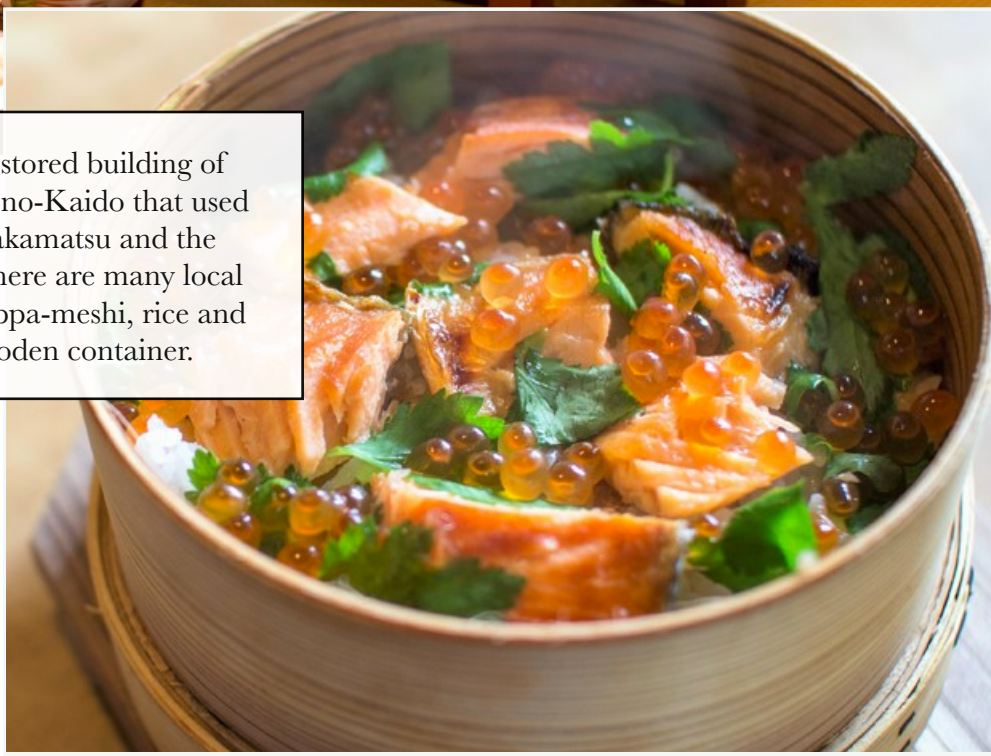
As an anecdote, the statue shows the typical way of tieing up kimono sleeves so that they won't get in the way when you need to use your hands. In the movie *Spirited Away* by Hayao Miyazaki, the character Chihiro also ties up her sleeves like that when she has to work.



Restaurant recommendation: Takino



Takino restaurant is a relocated and restored building of Itozawa Jinya town along the old Shimono-Kaido that used to connect the castle town of Aizu-wakamatsu and the shogun's mausoleum town of Nikko. There are many local Aizu dishes, the most popular being wappa-meshi, rice and other food steamed in a circular wooden container.



You can also try the kozuyu, a local speciality soup (left). Types of wappameshi (you can show this Japanese name to the waiter):

鮭輪箱 Salmon
きのこ輪箱 Mushrooms
いくら輪箱 Salmon roe

Higashiyama onsen area

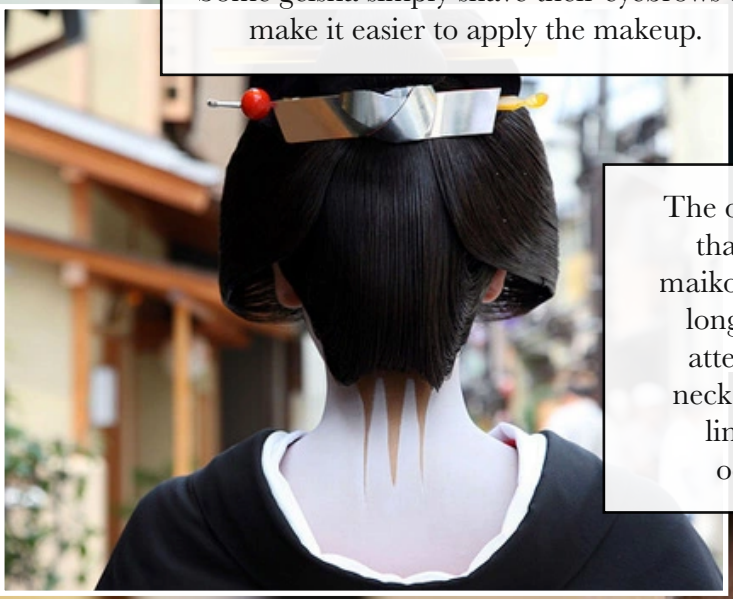
The **Aizu Bukeyashiki** is a samurai residence, it served as the quarters of the region's most important and highest rank samurai, as well as his family, employees, and servants. Because of the prestige of the samurai and the size of his retinue, the samurai residence is quite large. There are dozens of rooms and sections, including gardens, guest rooms, a tea house, an archery range and a rice mill.

From here on you will split up!
"**Ohidechaya**" is a restaurant next to Bukeyashiki, near your ryokan. Allison, if you have spare time before your reservation, you can stay here to wait and eat some dengaku. Dengaku was the staple food for samurai during a battle; skewers of food covered in miso and grilled.

GEISHA MAKE-UP VISIT
Meet-up at 4:30pm at the ryokan.

Geisha's iconic makeup goes back to the Heian Period (794-1185). When there was no electricity, artists had to perform lit only by dim candlelight… painting their faces white was a way of showing their emotions and facial expressions more clearly to the auditory. The white make-up (called oshiroi in Japanese) is not exclusive to geisha and maiko; kabuki actors and other dancers all adopted it as an essential part of their profession, and nobility also wore the white paste in front of the emperor so that their faces would stand out.

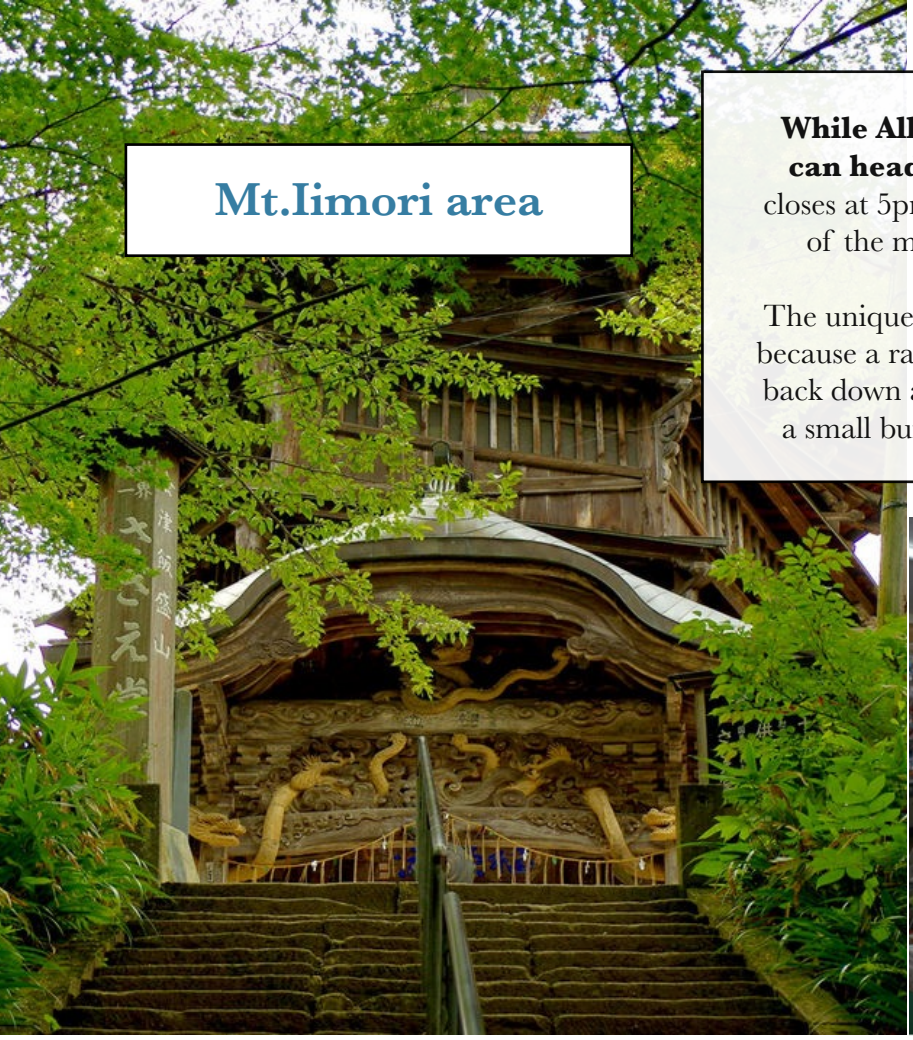
The first step of the shironuri makeup is applying a thick wax base (abura) onto the bare skin to smooth the pores and prevent sweating, it also makes it easier to take off the make-up at the end of the day. The eyebrows are layed down with special paste (tsubushi), as they have to be painted later. Some geisha simply shave their eyebrows to make it easier to apply the makeup.



The oshiroi white makeup can then be applied, it's a powder that becomes paste when mixed with water. Geisha and maiko paint lines on the back of their neck to make it appear longer and slimmer, the contrast is also a way of drawing attention to the skin (traditionally the nape of a woman's neck was considered sexy). For everyday performances, two lines are enough (as seen below); three lines for special occasions (left) are painted with the help of a stencil.

Red lipstick, beni, is applied around the eyes, eyebrows, and lips. Unlike Western make-up, beni is used for multiple areas of the face, which is more like a paste than a lipstick.
Finally, the eyes have black eyeliner and mascara (first-year maikos might not be allowed to do this yet) on top of the red colouring around the eyes.

Typically maiko will only paint their lower lip; both lips painted are for geisha or older maiko. Both eyebrows and lips are usually painted smaller than they actually are, believing this makes them look cuter and more proportional.



Mt.Iimori area

While Allison is visiting the geisha, the boys can head off to Mt.Iimori. Note that Sazaedo closes at 5pm, so that should be your priority. The rest of the mountain and graves can be visited later.

The unique Sazaedo Pagoda is particularly interesting because a ramp spirals up to the top of the pagoda and back down again through a different path. It looks like a small building but the two halls don't meet inside.

There are many souvenir shops around the bus stop, it is a good place to buy mochi or manjyuu and other snacks to try.

Look at the ceiling of Sazaedo when you reach the top. You will see many pieces of paper stuck to the ceiling, with something written in Japanese. They are called *senjafuda* and carry the name of the visitor who left it there. In the past, the pilgrims to the temples left such papers as a sort of proof of having been there (some say that the higher you manage to stick it, the better). Although today it has been banned in many temples because the glue destroys and dirties the wood, *senjafuda* dating back many years can still seen in many places.

Up the mountain are the tombs of a group of young Aizu soldiers. The 20 boys, aged 14 to 16, were from a unit called the Byakkotai (White Tiger Corps), fighting for the pro-shogun forces in the Boshin War. From Mt.Iimori they saw their castle engulfed in flames and decided to commit seppuku, ritual suicide. Unfortunately, they had made a grave error: the castle had not actually been taken, the flames they had seen were from outside the castle walls. Nevertheless, the story of their loyalty and devotion has become well known. Though there were 20 of them on the hill, one of the boys was not successful in his suicide attempt, so there are only 19 graves.

The Byakkotai boys on some vending machines

There are also two monuments from Japan's fascist allies during WWII, a column from Italy and a plaque from Germany. The column has a statue of an eagle on its top and was taken from Pompeii, while the plaque was given by a diplomat in 1935.

Japan Anecdotes

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