**Crossword Passage**

At first glance, visitors arriving by bullet train to Hiroshima’s main railway station might have little inkling of the city’s singularly tragic past. On a warm spring evening, groups of European tourists pause outside restaurants offering special deals on oysters – a local delicacy – and board pleasure boats to [Miyajima](http://www.miyajima.or.jp/english/spot/spot01.html), an island famous for its wild deer and “floating” Shinto shrine. But reminders of history’s antithesis to these quotidian pleasures are never far away.

South-west of the station, visitors to the city’s Peace Memorial Museum fall silent in front of steps retrieved from the ruins of Sumitomo Bank, the [“shadow” of a human](http://worldwar2database.com/gallery/wwii1439) etched into the stone. Display cases show the shredded remains of a junior high-school uniform, the irradiated contents of a lunchbox and the frame of a tricycle – the small boy riding it was incinerated by the blast.

These harrowing exhibits are among the few physical reminders of the devastation that greeted survivors after the US B-29 bomber Enola Gay released Little Boy, a 16-kilotonne atomic bomb, over [Hiroshima at 8.15am on 6 August 1945](https://www.theguardian.com/world/from-the-archive-blog/2015/aug/06/hiroshima-atomic-bomb-guardian-1945-archive).

Less than a minute later, the bomb exploded 600 metres above Shima Hospital, creating a wave of heat that momentarily reached 3,000-4,000 degrees centigrade on the ground. Winds of up to 440 metres per second roared through the entire city. Within half an hour, almost every building within a two-kilometre radius of the hypocentre was in flames. About 90% of the city’s 76,000 buildings were partially or totally incinerated, or reduced to rubble. Of the 33m square metres of land considered usable before the attack, 40% was reduced to ashes.

It was inevitable, given the scale of destruction, that early attempts to re-establish a semblance of civic life on the scorched earth of ground zero were marked by chaos and confusion. The mayor, Senkichi Awaya, was among the dead, leaving the city without a leader; thousands of public servants, teachers and health professionals were also among the victims. It was only after the strained tones of Emperor Hirohito [confirmed Japan’s surrender](https://www.theguardian.com/world/1945/aug/15/japan.secondworldwar) in a radio broadcast on 15 August 1945 that reconstruction replaced war as the nation’s clarion call. The idea of transforming a large area of Hiroshima into a memorial to the A-bomb dead gained traction in 1946, when the local Chugoku Shimbun newspaper ran a competition soliciting readers’ visions for the city. First prize was awarded to [Sankichi Tōge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sankichi_T%C5%8Dge), a poet, peace activist and A-bomb survivor, who envisioned a peace plaza memorial, a library, museum and a place where visitors from around the world could come together to dedicate themselves to peace. About 40% of the city should be covered in greenery, he said.

As Tōge had envisaged, [Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park](https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2012/feb/03/hiroshima-peace-memorial-park-japan) occupies prime real estate south-west of the main railway station, with the 100m-wide peace boulevard, which traverses the city centre, running along the park’s southern boundary. Designed by the Japanese architect [Kenzō Tange](http://www.pritzkerprize.com/1987/bio) and completed in the late 1950s, the three-acre site now houses a museum, a conference hall and a cenotaph honouring the victims of the bombing and every survivor who has since died. As of last August that number had reached 297,684.