

My Home

This is the home of my family. Please, come inside. But remember to take your shoes off in the front hall first.

Our home is not big but it has everything we need. Here is the kitchen where we eat. Tonight we're having soup, tea, and sushi. We're also having pickled plums. The area around Shingu is famous for pickled plums. Some people think they are too sour and salty. But I like them.

Let's go to the living room and watch TV. At night the living room becomes a sleeping room. When we want to sleep we take a **futon** out of the closet. A futon is a cotton mattress used for sleeping. We unroll the futon on the straw mat, or **tatami**, that covers the floor. During the day, the futons are rolled up and put away.



Shoes are left in the hall of a Japanese home



Children doing homework

Most of my toys and books are a lot like yours. Some of my dolls are special. In Japan dolls are often handed down from one generation to the next. These dolls are displayed each year on March 3, or Girl's Day. Girls all over Japan celebrate this festival. I bet you're wondering if there's a Boy's Day too. There is. We celebrate it on May 5.

Well, it's time to unroll our futons and go to bed.



Japanese dolls



CHAPTER 3

Around Shingu

Downtown

Shingu has very mild weather. Let's take a walk around town. We almost never have snow, but it does rain a lot. You might want to bring your umbrella.

There's a big downtown shopping area with lots of stores. Many of the shops are on a long street that has a roof over it to keep out the rain. Let's go to one of my favorite stores—the omocha shop. Omocha are toys. I love to look at all of the video games here.

See the vending machines everywhere! You can get all sorts of things in these machines, from soft drinks and snacks to movie tickets. Our money is called **yen**. There are coins from 1 to 500 yen. There is also paper money from 1,000 to 10,000 yen. A can of soda costs 120 yen. Snacks might cost from 20 to 150 yen. A movie ticket costs 1,200 yen.



Shingu is not a big city. But it is crowded. So a good way to get around is by bicycle.

A Helpful Visitor

See that beautiful Chinese-style gate near the train station. That is the entrance to Jofuku Park. Jofuku was a man who came here from China over 2,000 years ago. The emperor of China sent him to find a medicine that would help people live a long time. He found the medicine, but never went home to China. He stayed in Shingu and taught the people many skills, some of these skills were how to fish and make paper. His grave is in this park. As you know, we still fish in Shingu. We also still make paper. And people still use Jofuku's herb to help them stay healthy.

Gate of Jofuku Park



Our Floating Island

Have you ever heard of an island that moves? Let's go to Ukijima no Mori. It's right in the middle of town. Uki means "floating." Jima means "island." Mori means "forest." The island is floating on a **marsh**. The wind makes it move. We can walk through the area on a bridge. There are many different kinds of rare trees and plants there.

Two Exciting Festivals

On the west side of Shingu, you can see a huge **rock**. Beside the rock is a shrine. Each year on February 6, we hold our exciting Fire Festival there. At the end of the festival, hundreds of men run down steep stone steps of the shrine. They carry flaming torches to show their courage. Another exciting local festival is the annual boat race on the Kumano River each October 16. Nine boats representing different parts of Shingu race against other. Each team trains very hard for more than a month before the race.

The Fire Festival



Ukijima no Mori

Our Beliefs

Shingu is in a region called Kumano. This region is sacred because the **kami**, the Shinto gods or spirits, live in our forests. **Shinto** is the oldest religion in Japan. It is based on the worship of nature spirits and ancestors.

A Shinto Shrine

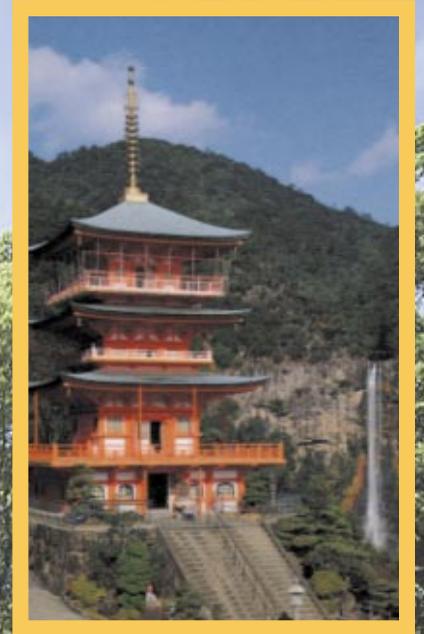
One of the most famous Shinto shrines is in Shingu. It's called the Kumano Hayatama shrine. Before you enter you must be clean. No, you don't have to take a bath! You rinse your hands and mouth with water. It is quiet and peaceful here, and no one is in a hurry. Watch! First you toss a coin into a box, then ring a bell and clap twice. That is to call the kami. Then you pray.

Nachi Falls

About an hour's drive from Shingu is Nachi Falls, the highest waterfall in Japan. Many kami are natural things like a beautiful mountain, a giant stone, or a waterfall. There is a Shinto shrine at the waterfall, and a Buddhist temple too. **Buddhism** is another important religion in Japan. Inside the temple you can see the great altar and hear the chanting of the Buddhist monks.

Kumano Hayatama shrine

Shrine at Nachi Falls



Our Leaders

Japan is an ancient country. Long ago, we were ruled by emperors. We still have an emperor today, but he no longer governs us. We elect many of our officials like you do in the United States. All Japanese who are 20 or older can vote.

In Shingu, we vote for the mayor and the members of the city council. They take care of many jobs. They have worked to make our downtown better. They have rebuilt our hospital. They prepare for emergencies, such as earthquakes or typhoons.

There is so much more to show you but you will have to come back another day. I hope that you enjoyed visiting Shingu.

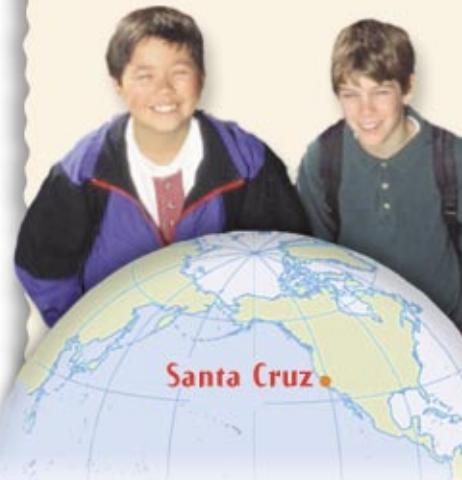
Good-bye for now, or "sayonara" (sy-oh-nah-rah), as we say in Japan.

Here and There



Sister City

One thing that local officials do is make links between Shingu and other cities. Shingu has a "sister city." It is Santa Cruz, California. Like Shingu, Santa Cruz is a small city on the coast between the sea and the mountains. People from Shingu and Santa Cruz make visits to each other's communities. It is a wonderful way to learn about how other people live.



Glossary

Buddhism a religion based on the teachings of Buddha

continent one of the seven great land masses of the Earth, including Africa, Antarctica, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, and South America

futon a cotton mattress used for sleeping

kami nature spirits in Shintoism

kanji characters used to write the Japanese language

logging cutting down trees for timber

marsh an area of wetland

resource something that is used by people or a nation

Ring of Fire a great ring of earthquake zones and volcanoes that circles the Pacific Ocean

Shinto an ancient Japanese religion based on the worship of nature spirits and ancestors

sushi cold boiled rice rolled up in seaweed or topped with raw fish



A crinum, the flower of Shingu

tatami a straw mat covering the floor in Japanese homes

typhoon a powerful storm that forms over the western Pacific Ocean

volcano a mountain formed by melted rock flowing through a crack in the earth's crust

yen Japanese money

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Girls at a summer festival in Shingu

