

# TRAVEL

## Land of the brave

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If that was divine, "hell" was at Osorezan (Mount Fear), one of Japan's most sacred sites. With its unearthly landscape of craggy rocks and bubbling sulphur pits, it's said to be the gateway to hell, according to popular mythology.

While travel in the Fukushima prefecture has been certified safe outside an 80km radius of the Fukushima Dai-ichi



Onsen in Akita.

nuclear plant, it's still an area where hardly any dare to venture. But I found the town of Aizuwakamatsu extremely fascinating, especially with the reconstructed Tsurugajo Castle. Another stop worth checking out is Ouchi Jyuku, a once-important post station town whose traditional thatched buildings remain almost exactly as they were before the Meiji restoration.

And Fukushima's beauty has remained intact. Bandai-Asahi National Park is a delightful lake district formed around the stratovolcano of Mount Bandai. Surrounded by abundant woodlands, the entrance is fittingly dubbed "Tenkyo-ko" (Heaven's Mirror Lake) and a favourite of both migratory birds and their equally itinerant human counterparts. The serene, almost magical surroundings is an inspiring and moving sight in light of what has happened.

Travelling through the region can be an emotionally charged experience, but it's also hard to fight off a dawning realisation that Tohoku and its people are



Samurai house district in Kakunodate, Akita.

still standing bravely.

Rather than forget the events ever happened, Tohoku's inhabitants are determined to soldier on by being vibrantly alive and regaining what they've lost. As embodied by the myriad of local souvenirs proudly emblazoned with the words "Ganbare Tohoku!" ("Hang in there, Tohoku!"), that fierce will to keep going,

more than anything else, is likely to be the biggest keepsake one will take away from a sojourn in the region.

*This trip was made possible by the Japan National Tourism Organization Singapore (JNTO), Japanese Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Singapore (JCCI) and the Embassy of Japan in Singapore.*

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\*\*Selected tour packages  
\*Terms & conditions applies. All prices are subjected to associated taxes & surcharges correct at time of print & subject to change

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