

KATOLREC CORPORATION

Understanding that our present is built on the accumulation of time,
Shikokumura Museum is on a journey to regain something we lost...



Shikokumura Museum, located at the foot of Mt. Yashima

[Shikokumura Museum](#) is an open-air museum in Yashima District, Takamatsu City, Kagawa Prefecture. It is located at the foot of Mt. Yashima, which is also famous as a site of the Gempei War, with traditional houses and buildings of the Shikoku region restored and relocated on a vast site of about 50,000 square meters. In addition to the exhibition of buildings that people actually used in the past—such as houses, workshops, a Kabuki theater, rice storehouses, a soy sauce brewery built from the Edo period to the Taisho period, and related tools—the village includes facilities such as [Shikokumura Gallery](#), which is an art museum designed by the architect Tadao Ando; [Waterscape Garden](#); and Shikokumura Waraya udon restaurant, restored from a traditional Japanese house. [Waraya](#) is a popular dining spot where you can enjoy signature Sanuki udon noodles, with their chewy texture, and many people visit the village simply for this purpose.

Shikokumura Museum is managed by [Katolec Corporation](#), which was founded on shipping and land transportation and operates EMS (electronics manufacturing service) and processing services globally. Shikokumura was opened in 1976 with the extraordinary passion of Tatsuo Kato, who was the founder of Katolec Corporation (known as Kato Rikuun Co., Ltd. at the time).

If I explain the overview of Shikokumura briefly, many people may wonder: [“Why would a logistics company run a museum of a collection of traditional Japanese houses?”](#) When this interview was first confirmed, I myself was also very confused because I could not see the connection between Katolec and Shikokumura. The day of the interview, Eisuke Kato, who is the current President of Katolec Corporation (and Chairman of the Board of Public Interest Incorporated Foundation Shikoku Minka Museum “Shikokumura Museum”) as well as the son of Tatsuo Kato, welcomed me and explained to me how Shikokumura was created, as if answering a question I had yet voiced:

“A year before opening Shikokumura, my father opened an udon restaurant called Waraya as a secondary workplace for employees who had sustained back injuries while carrying heavy packages. When he relocated a traditional Japanese house from the Edo period in the Iya region of Tokushima to use it as the restaurant, he was completely fascinated by the beauty of the thatched roof of the house. From that point on, he started to focus on collecting and preserving traditional Japanese houses in the Shikoku region that were disappearing.”

On the second floor of [the entrance facility, Oyanesan](#), of Shikokumura Museum, are displayed the words Tatsuo Kato spoke before his death about why he started collecting traditional Japanese houses:

“I saw a fan painting of Korin Ogata at an antique shop. One valuable traditional Japanese house can be preserved for the same price. There are many art lovers so countless works of art may be passed down to future generations; but no one would try to preserve old wooden buildings. Isn’t it far more important to preserve houses bearing the marks of sweat and toil of our predecessors in Shikoku? With this epiphany, my mind was made up.”



Waraya, located in front of the entrance to Shikokumura Museum (we were treated to delicious udon noodles before the interview)

Having started in this way, Tatsuo Kato's preservation of traditional Japanese houses eventually led to the plan for the museum. He was granted land by the owner of the present Shikokumura site, who agreed with his philosophy, relocated and restored 16 buildings, and established Shikokumura as an open-air museum. As the number of buildings increased, the land of Shikokumura also expanded, leading to the museum we see today.

A walk around Shikokumura with President Kato

On the day of the interview, President Kato himself showed us around Shikokumura. It takes at least two hours to see all the facilities thoroughly, but time flew by as President Kato took us around and explained a variety of facilities in detail.

The key facilities and exhibits of Shikokumura Museum are outlined below.

Nagare-zaka Slope



The first thing you see after going through the entrance is the long Nagare-zaka Slope. This slope, which continues all the way to the center of Shikokumura, is a work of art created by Masayuki Nagare, a world-famous sculptor. Mr. Nagare has a studio in Aji, one of Japan's leading stone production areas, adjacent to the district of Yashima, and Nagare-zaka Slope features Aji Stone granite, which is only quarried from the towns of Aji and the adjacent Mure, arranged in a generous, dynamic fashion. You will feel the powerful presence of Aji Stone with every step you take.

The previous company president Tatsuo Kato and Mr. Nagare were the same age. As they were close friends who often drank together even before Shikokumura was founded, Mr. Nagare was closely involved in the design of Shikoku Mura, including Nagare-zaka Slope.

Somegataki Waterfall



[Somegataki Waterfall](#), located in the center of the village, is also a work by Mr. Nagare. Foundation stones from private homes of the Meiji and Taisho periods are arranged in a stepped form with a width of 12 meters, and the water flows down and drops like a waterfall. This place alone echoes with an impressive sound in what is otherwise a very quiet village. President Kato says that Mr. Nagare had a specific aim in mind here:

“Mr. Nagare suggested to my father that since the group of private houses with thatched roofs, which are the main exhibit of Shikokumura, gives a somewhat feminine and quiet impression, he should arrange something masculine and wild, something that makes a noise, to create a change of scenery in the village. That is why he positioned Somegataki Waterfall and Nagare-zaka Slope like this.”



In front of Somegataki Waterfall; from left: Eisuke Kato (President, Katolec Corporation), Sawada (Association for Corporate Support of the Arts), Takuya Honjo (CSR Advisor, Katolec Corporation)

Kazura Bashi (Vine Bridge)



If you walk up Nagare-zaka Slope, you will see a suspension bridge called Kazura Bashi on your left. This is a bridge seen in Iya district, Tokushima, with steep ravines, and is made from woven vines of hardy kiwi. According to documents from the Edo period, there used to be 7 or 13 Kazura Bashi bridges in Iya district, but only one remains today. Kazura Bashi bridge in Shikokumura is recreated by expert artisans brought in from Iya district and is replaced every three years.

Crossing the bridge is quite a thrill, as it sways from side to side. There is no set route in Shikokumura, but I recommend you cross Kazura Bashi bridge first. Japanese literature scholar Donald Keene, who visited the village when it first opened, said that it appeared as if he were setting foot in a world far removed from daily life and praised its design and location.



During the Edo period, kabuki theater stages were built throughout Japan for villagers to perform kabuki plays and other shows for local festivals, and rural kabuki was popular as a kind of entertainment for farmers. On the island of Shodoshima, rural kabuki developed uniquely, with more than 30 kabuki theaters located there during its heyday from the late Edo period to the early Showa period.

The theater in Shikokumura used to be owned by the Kobe district community on Shodoshima Island. The center of the stage is a manually operated revolving stage, and the venue is still used for plays, concerts and other events. In fact, it was even being used to display festival decorations on the day of the interview.

The audience seating, which uses tiered stonework, was created by stone carver Masatoshi Izumi, who supported the production work of Isamu Noguchi, one of the most important sculptors of the 20th century. Incidentally, Izumi was from the town of Mure, where Aji Stone is quarried. After the death of Isamu Noguchi, Izumi was also actively involved in creative activities as an artist in his own right. Noguchi had been fascinated by Aji Stone and had his atelier in the town of Mure, where he worked on his art while traveling back and forth between there and New York. Noguchi was also friends with Tatsuo Kato. A picture of Noguchi enjoying a barbecue at the Kato family home is displayed on the second floor of Shikokumura Museum's entrance facility, Oyanesan.



If you look under the kabuki stage, you can see the mechanism of the revolving stage...



Audience seating that evokes the ambience of ancient Greek theaters

Marugame Domain Official Rice Warehouse



This warehouse was primarily used to store rice, with the four doors in the front used to load and unload the rice, indicating that this building faced a waterway connecting to Marugame Port.

During the Edo period, Kōpira Mairi—the pilgrimage to Kotohira-gu Shrine—became a great aspiration among the common people, and there was a regular shipping service between Osaka and Marugame, which helped the Marugame Domain's finances to flourish. No doubt thanks to the domain's affluence, this warehouse is huge. It currently serves as Shikoku Mura Museum's information center.

The warehouse displays materials related to daily life from the past, such as explanations of traditional Japanese papermaking processes and sanukite, a type of stone found in Kagawa, as well as an explanation of how the buildings such as traditional Japanese houses in Shikokumura were relocated, along with videos introducing Shikokumura. If you are not sure where to start your tour of the vast Shikokumura site, this is a good place to begin.

Looking at the process of relocating the buildings, you will be amazed by the tremendous effort that went into creating Shikokumura. There are 33 buildings here now, the relocation of which must have been a huge undertaking. One can only respect the passion of Tatsuo Kato, who established Shikokumura.

Kono Family House



This is a farmer's house from the mid-Edo period. The floor plan is typical of average households from that era, consisting of an earthen floor, a living room, and a tatami room. While there are some other houses with a thatched roof like this in Shikokumura, each has a different floor plan and structure, which helps us to understand the differences in the residents' living standards.

One distinctive feature of the Kono Family House is a pot and big barrel, which was used to steam paper mulberry, the raw material for making traditional Japanese paper. After gathering many branches of paper mulberry and tying them into bundles, they are put in a pot, covered with a big barrel, and steamed for two hours. Then, before the steamed paper mulberry cools down, the skin of the branches is peeled. Farmers would oversee the process up to this point, before the peeled thin skin of paper mulberry is taken to artisans and turned into traditional Japanese paper through several additional steps. These steps of steaming paper mulberry were long carried out as secondary jobs for farmers during wintertime. With the steaming process performed inside the house, its beams and columns darkened. Also, as electric saws did not exist, the beams and columns are curvy, with clearly visible marks from handheld axes. These small details reveal the lifestyle and hard work of the people at that time.

In Kochi, a region famous for traditional Japanese paper, there are still farmers who steam paper mulberry in this way. You can watch a video of the process of steaming paper mulberry at the Kono Family House, giving an insight into the lives of the people who worked in this environment.



The pot and barrel used to steam paper mulberry



Wasanbon sugar is famous even today as the product of Kagawa Prefecture, but the area has been active in sugar production since the Edo period, and the Takamatsu Domain was the largest production area of white sugar at the peak of that era.

Sugarcane pressing, the first process of sugar production, was performed in conical huts like this one. The process involves squeezing sugarcane to extract the juice. The canes were placed between three stone mills called Shimeguruma, positioned at the center of the hut, and oxen pulled the wooden handle attached to the stone mills to turn them to press the sugarcane for juice. The building is conical because oxen were circling inside, and you can see signs of wear on the columns from the rubbing of the oxen's sides.

"No one makes sugar in this way anymore. The original owner of this hut used it as a storage room, but it had sustained significant damage over time, and it seems that the neighbors had complained that the thatch would be scattered in the wind. When the original owner was thinking about tearing it down, my father decided to take it in."

There is one other conical sugarcane pressing hut in Shikokumura, and these two are the only such structures remaining in Japan. When I heard this story, I was reminded once again that culture and history can be easily lost if no one preserves it.



Stone mills for pressing sugarcane; each cane is pressed four times, run through the stone mills twice.



This tool placed between the stone mills is called a Kitsune. Because sugarcane pressing was performed at night, there were many accidents where workers who accidentally fell asleep would get their fingers caught between the mills, so the Kitsune was developed as a finger guard to prevent such accidents.

Shikokumura Gallery/Waterscape Garden

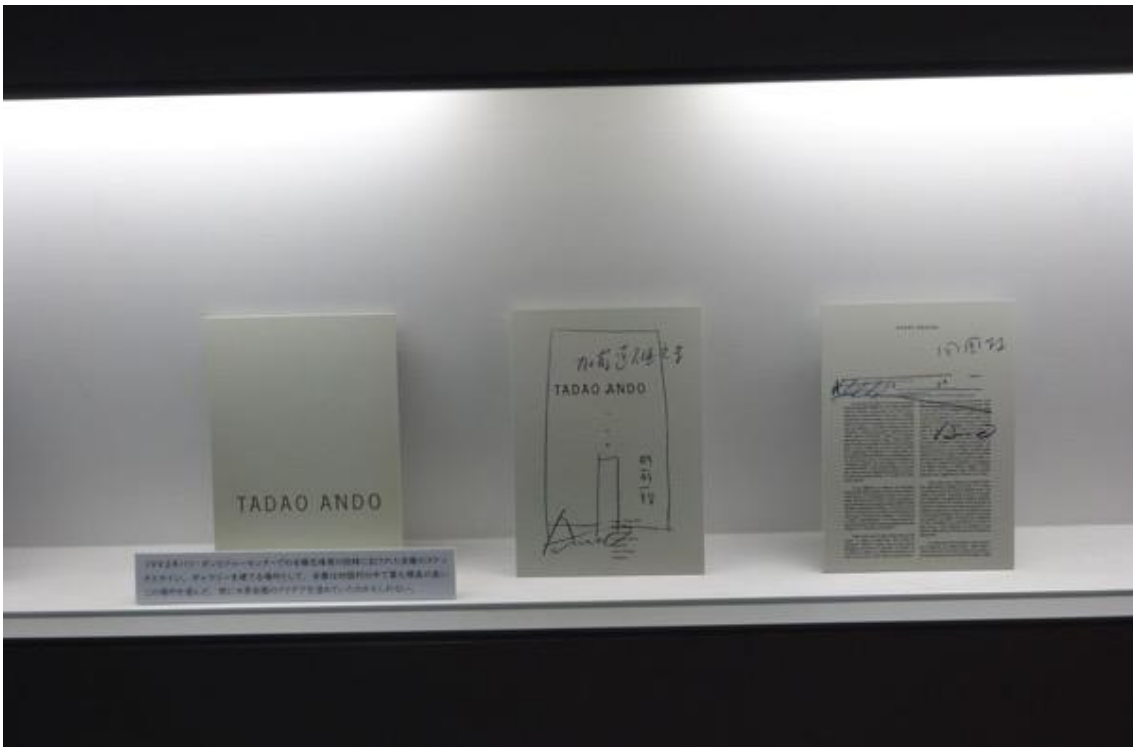


This museum, located on the upper grounds of Shikokumura, was designed by the architect Tadao Ando. Tatsuo Kato was also a passionate art collector, and the museum was opened in 2002 to display the artwork in his collection. Here you can appreciate a variety of artwork including French paintings, Chinese gilt bronze Buddhas and bronze vessels, and Persian ceramics. On the day of the interview, there was an exhibition of works by the photographer Kenshu Shintsubo.

Stepping out onto the balcony, you can overlook a magnificent waterscape garden, which was also designed by Ando. Sketches of his from the catalog of the Ando Tadao Exhibition held at the Pompidou Center in Paris in 1993 are displayed in the museum. These include a drawing of a water garden, and it seems that he chose the upland area of Shikokumura as a place to bring the idea to life.



Waterscape garden designed by Tadao Ando



Catalog with Tadao Ando's sketch and autograph

Lighthouse Area



Lighthouse Keeper's Residence from Nabeshima Island: Tatsuo Kato was charmed by this lighthouse keeper's residence seen from the Seto Ohashi Bridge and offered to take it over from the Japan Coast Guard in Hiroshima. Once it was understood that Shikokumura would take the form of an open-air museum, the relocation was decided.

Lighthouses long provided maritime safety in the Seto Inland Sea. Three such residences where the lighthouse keepers lived have been relocated to the Lighthouse Area, which also marks the most recent expansion of Shikokumura.

“When Commodore Perry arrived and trade with foreign countries began, there was demand for the construction of Western-style lighthouses along the coasts of Japan. Lighthouses were actually built only after the Meiji period began, but Japan did not have the skills to operate them yet, so they hired foreigners as lighthouse keepers. The keepers used these buildings as their residences, so they are constructed in a Western style.”

[Lighthouse Keeper's Residence from Esaki, Awajishima Island](#) and [Lighthouse Keeper's Residence from Nabeshima Island](#) (from the early Meiji period), designed by British engineer R. H. Brunton, are Western-style buildings, while the Lighthouse Keeper's Residence from Kudakoshima Island, built in the late Meiji period, has strong Japanese elements such as a tatami room with a oshiire closet. This is a valuable resource that shows the transition of lighthouse architecture.



This stone box next to the residence is a rainwater tank that was used to collect rainwater in the dry Seto Inland Sea area, where water was difficult to obtain.

Soy Sauce Brewery



In Kagawa, soy sauce production used to thrive just like sugar production. From the mid-Meiji period to the early 1940s, the area boasted one of the highest soy sauce production volumes in Japan. This soy sauce brewery was in the former town of Hiketa, which was a major production center in Kagawa. It was no longer used and was scheduled for demolition, but the Agency for Cultural Affairs made an inquiry and Tatsuo Kato subsequently took it over. Due to the modernization of soy sauce brewing, there are almost no breweries that produce soy sauce using the traditional methods. However, this brewery displays traditional tools to recreate the workplace of soy sauce production at that time.

There used to be about 400 soy sauce breweries in Kagawa alone, and everyone used to go to the soy sauce brewery of the village or town to buy their soy sauce. People who did not have a soy sauce brewery nearby placed an order by postcard, and the apprentices of the brewery delivered orders in a handcart. The postcards for ordering soy sauce and an apprentice's diary are also displayed here, providing a glimpse of the daily lives and way of thinking of people at that time. Ordering soy sauce by postcard may seem like quite an arduous task, but somehow I feel that the appearances and emotions of people written in such postcards and diaries were richer than people today.

The 5,577 tools related to soy sauce production that were acquired with the brewery are stored carefully in the storage room.

Yoshino Family House



This is a fisherman's house relocated from a village in the town of Minami, Kaifu, in Tokushima Prefecture, which faces the Pacific Ocean. It was built in the early Meiji period but could not be renovated due to the continued poor fishing season, resulting in preservation of its original state.

You can watch a video of the sisters who lived in this house when they were little visiting their home, relocated to Shikokumura, after a long time at the viewing room. I highly recommend watching this video when visiting Shikokumura, as we see the sisters talking about their memories of their family supporting each other while living in a small and inconvenient house, providing food for thought about the meaning of true happiness.

So far, I have covered the main exhibition facilities and the places where I was particularly moved when I saw the building, but there are many more valuable examples of architecture and exhibitions at Shikokumura Museum. I hope you will sharpen your senses and experience in Shikoku the times and places where people used to live.

Reopened in 2022 to convey the significance of this museum more clearly and specifically

Looking ahead to its 50th anniversary, Shikokumura reevaluated the significance of its existence as a museum, made some improvements, and reopened as Shikokumura Museum. President Eisuke Kato started the renovation project from around 2018 and had been leading a variety of reforms.

What led to the renovation? What exactly has been improved?

President Kato mentioned the following three key points of the renovation:

1. Continuity between the entrance of Shikokumura and Waraya
2. Creation of explanatory videos and audio guides that convey the lives of generations past in Shikoku
3. Opening of the cultural property storage to the public (previously closed to the public)

1. Continuity between the entrance of Shikokumura and Waraya

Since the opening of the village, the entrance facility of the Shikokumura open-air museum and Waraya have been located at the same place, but the fact that these two facilities are related was not immediately apparent to the visitors. Waraya is at the front, and the entrance facility is located a little further back, so the two previously existed as separate facilities.

“When I told the customers who came to eat udon at Waraya, ‘There is a museum called Shikokumura on the hill behind the restaurant,’ they would often be surprised and say, ‘I didn’t know that!’”

The reason was that Shikokumura’s entrance was difficult to find. Before the renovation, a high retaining wall blocked the view between Waraya and the entrance facility, and the space in front of the entrance facility, which was almost like a plateau, was used as a parking area. Also, the entrance of Waraya was on the opposite side to the entrance of Shikokumura, which was a small and simple building, so it was difficult for Waraya’s customers to notice that there was an open-air museum right nearby.

To improve the situation, President Kato started a project to organically connect the entrance of Shikokumura and the space where Waraya is located. First, he removed the old building and built a new entrance facility called Oyanesan in the entrance area. The building, designed by Yoshiyuki Kawazoe, Associate Professor at the University of Tokyo, has a very distinctive roof with smooth and flowing lines, as its name suggests. This two-story facility incorporates a variety of functions: there are the ticket counter, museum shop, restrooms, and lockers on the first floor, and the exhibition space looking back at the history of Shikokumura on the second floor. There is also a large Wooden Stained Glass installation next to the ticket counter. Together with the distinctive roof, this makes the entrance of Shikokumura instantly recognizable.



Oyanesan: The area where the stone walls and lawns are used to be a parking area. At the right in the background is Shikokumura Café.

The continuity between Waraya and the entrance facility was solved by reshaping the landscape between them. The plateau, which was a parking area, was leveled, and the elevation difference between the entrance facility and Waraya was joined with the circular driveway, green space, and gentle stone staircases. In addition, the entrance of Waraya was positioned to face Oyanesan so that the customers coming and going can see Oyanesan.

The area around Oyanesan and Waraya, which was beautifully organized by these renovations, was highly acclaimed for its integrated space design and Oyanesan's distinctive roof, leading it to win the 2023 Urban Landscape Award Grand Prize together with the Yashimaru observation deck and other facilities in Yashima district.

2. Creation of explanatory videos and audio guides that convey the lives of generations past in Shikoku

Shikokumura Museum mainly displays buildings and historic sites relocated and restored from the island of Shikoku. However, the actual displays were basic and minimal, and while there were Japanese information panels, it was difficult to visualize what kind of lives people led in these buildings at that time from the written explanation alone. Therefore, President Kato took the renovation as an opportunity and decided to create explanatory videos for the main buildings.

“For example, prior to the renovation, the three stone mills for sugarcane pressing were simply deposited in the middle of the Miyazaki Family Sugar Cane Press, which meant that visitors could not visualize how these tools were used. I realized that this was not enough, so I created explanatory videos for the main facilities to convey the lifestyle of the times and installed monitors inside the buildings to help visitors gain a deeper understanding.”

These explanatory videos are of a higher quality than I expected. The video played at Miyazaki Family Sugar Cane Press uses high-quality CG and sound to express how people at that time pressed sugarcane, making it very compelling.



Fukui Family Stone Storehouse, used as a viewing room for explanatory videos of various facilities

It is also remarkable that as well as explanatory videos that recreate the life of times gone by, highly factual documentaries have been produced. Since buildings that were constructed from the Edo to Taisho periods are preserved at Shikokumura, some of the people who lived in these buildings when they were little are still alive. Interview videos with people who lived in these buildings and those who had a similar lifestyle reflecting on their lives have been created for the facilities such as Yoshino Family House and Kono Family House.

Such interview videos are highly valuable, and recording the words of these people gives added weight, going beyond simple explanatory videos of a museum to provide great value as historical documents.

“People who know how life was in those days are becoming fewer and fewer,” explains Katolec Corporation President Kato, “so we need to interview them while we can.”

In fact, Kato worked for NHK after graduating from university, so he had a particular passion for this video production project. Thanks to his connections, all the videos shown in Shikokumura are produced by NHK Enterprises, with narration provided by former NHK reporters such as Tamio Miyake and Miyuki Morita. Each of the videos is a must-see and was produced with the full weight of NHK. “I gave quite detailed instructions regarding the videos,” Kato commented with a smile. These videos will surely deepen your understanding of each exhibition.



A free audio guide app available on smartphones has also been developed. Explanatory audio plays automatically as you approach each display based on smartphone location information.



Shikokumura also focuses on multilingual support. If you scan a QR code on the information panels of exhibits with your smartphone, the explanation of the exhibit will be shown in five languages: Japanese, Korean, Chinese, English, and French. The audio guide is also available in five languages.

3. Opening of the cultural property storage to the public (previously closed to the public)

Shikokumura Museum keeps more than 6,000 items used for sugar and soy sauce production in storage (937 sugar production tools and 5,577 soy sauce production tools), and all of them are designated as Nationally Important Tangible Folk Culture Property.

However, before the renovation, these cultural properties were not open to the public and were just kept inside the storage facility for about 30 years, following the guidelines of the Agency for Cultural Affairs. President Kato felt that it was a shame to handle cultural properties this way, so a monthly storage facility tour (reservation required) was introduced following the renovation.

Kagawa used to be one of the largest producers of soy sauce and sugar in Japan, but the industry has all but disappeared now, and even its history is not widely known. Sensing the culture and industry of past generations who truly existed through these tools that provided a living to the people of times gone by will be a valuable and meaningful experience.



Storage facility where tools related to sugar production are kept (the storage for sugar production tools extends to the second basement level)



Linen cloth used in the process of sugar production, reusing burlap used by an American flour milling company to export flour



Soy sauce barrels placed in the storage facility for soy sauce production tools – you can still catch a faint scent of soy sauce...

Three key points of renovation are not something that changes Shikokumura itself drastically, but the aim is to showcase the significance of its existence more clearly and specifically.

The background of this precise renovation involved Teiji Ito, a researcher and leading expert on traditional Japanese houses. President Kato says that Ito's words when Shikokumura was opened have stayed with him, and that memory resulted in this renovation.

“Mr. Ito said, ‘It is very meaningful that valuable houses from various places in Shikoku are all gathered here, but these should not become empty shells.’ I was still a student, but I remember that my father said, ‘That’s very important.’ This has stayed in my mind all this time, so this renovation reflects my desire to convey how these buildings and tools were used.”

Significance of visiting Shikokumura Museum

No one lives in Shikokumura, but it does not mean that the buildings themselves have become empty shells. Rather, the time and place that truly existed in the Shikoku region is kept alive, with the time that past generations who lived in those periods accumulated permeating the entire site.

Every day, I feel that there are so many places where time is consumed. There is just no moment or place where I feel the accumulation of time in my daily life. Especially living in Tokyo, I've been feeling this way more often lately.

Shikokumura shows the proof that our ancestors were alive: scratches and the colors of beams and columns in the traditional Japanese houses; well-used tools; carefully written postcards... In other words, the heritage of human wisdom. I want you to visit this place, which is permeated with the hardship, wisdom, and prayers of the people from times gone by, and feel that we are living in the extension of time that was accumulated by those who lived with all their might.

Time spent here will surely enrich your current way of life.

After the interview

For me, as someone who lives two stops away from Shibuya Station, Shibuya is the starting point of everything, and I have always felt a sense of familiarity since I moved to Tokyo.

Lately, though, I often find myself feeling terribly empty when I'm walking in Shibuya. It is a strange feeling that I cannot get into the city even though I am walking around the city; something like a fear that the sense of our individual lives and the feeling of being alive can be so easily erased if we are swallowed up by philosophy and convenience. Perhaps it is because Shibuya has gradually become a city that I am no longer familiar with amid the continuous urban redevelopment of recent years. This does not mean that I think today's Shibuya is not attractive, but it is as if it reminds me of the superficiality of time and history, making me feel a sense of fragility toward Shibuya.

It is also a feeling toward my own self, a feeling as if I'm constantly skimming the surface and my day just goes by while I'm reacting to a stream of information. I was also feeling emptiness toward my superficial self, with no sense of accumulation.

Then I visited Shikokumura Museum. As I saw and touched thatched-roof houses, wood hand-cut with an axe, and wooden barrels with a faint scent of soy sauce, I felt a sense of relief begin to take shape within me.

Shikokumura Museum will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2026. It was the kind of interview that made me want to pray that this village would endure beyond 50 years, and for another 100 or 200 years.

Mécénat Writer: Rihei Hiraki

[Katolec Corporation/Public Interest Incorporated Foundation Shikoku Minka Museum]

- Date of interview: Thursday February 8, 2024
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