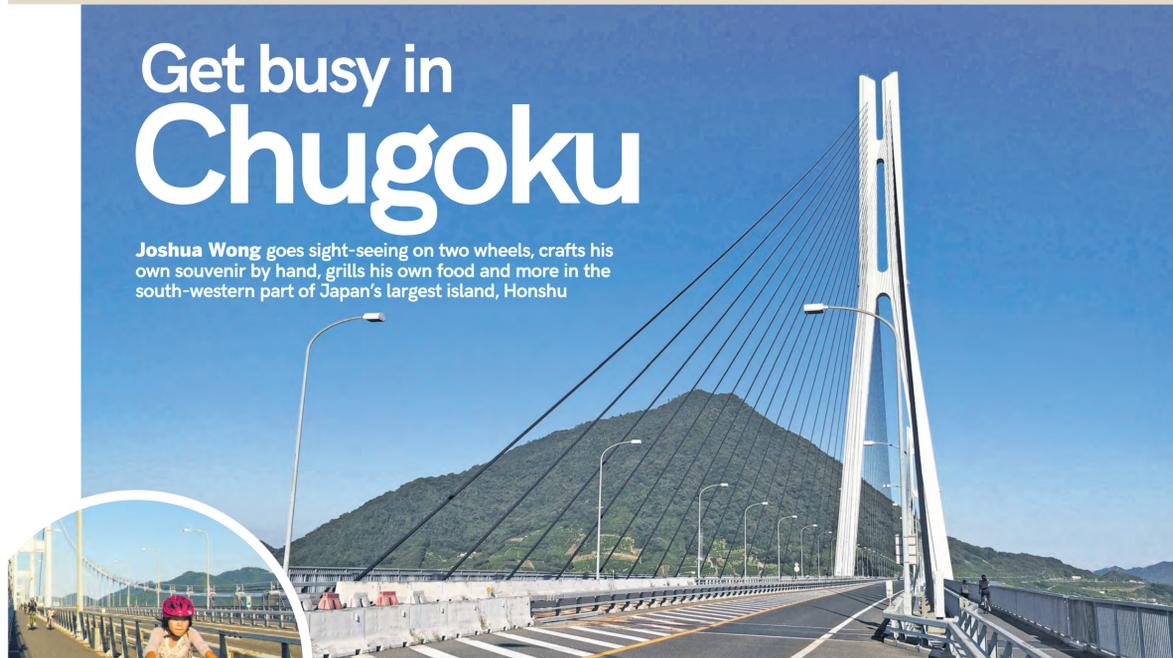


BON VOYAGE



# Get busy in Chugoku

Joshua Wong goes sight-seeing on two wheels, crafts his own souvenir by hand, grills his own food and more in the south-western part of Japan's largest island, Honshu



Bike on the Tatarata Bridge, which is part of the Shimanami Kaido. PHOTOS: JOSHUA WONG, ISTOCK

## 1 Cycle across the Tatarata Bridge

Shimanami Kaido is a 60km-long expressway that links the main Japanese islands of Honshu and Shikoku. Part of it is the Tatarata Bridge that offers dazzling views of the Seto Inland Sea. You can rent a bicycle at regular stations along the Shimanami Kaido and return it at any other station along the route. A day's rental costs ¥2,000 (\$25). At the middle of the Tatarata Bridge, clap your hands or give a yell to hear a rippling echo that reverberates up the whole structure of the bridge.

While it is possible to cycle the entire length of the Shimanami Kaido, a shorter itinerary for the time- or energy-strapped is to begin at Omishima Island and cycle across the Tatarata Bridge to Kuchijima Island. Then head off the expressway and pedal along the shoreline for another 2.5km to arrive at Setoda Sunset Beach, where you can return your bike. I only had time for the shorter route and the ride was an easy one, suitable for people of all fitness levels. Taking in beautiful scenery and having the crisp wind whip through my hair as my muscles pumped was the perfect antidote to hours spent on a tour bus.

## 2 Pick your own fruit



Okayama is a beautiful prefecture known as the Land of Sunshine. It is the largest producer of grapes in Japan, and is also famed for its strawberries and white peaches. Okayama city, its capital, is located an hour from Kyoto or 35 minutes from Hiroshima city by Shinkansen. During fruit-picking season, various farms offer tourists the opportunity to pick their own fruit and host all-you-can-eat events. Strawberries are in season from December to May; grapes from late August to mid-October; and white peaches from early July to late August. Kubo Farm is one of the region's largest grape-picking farms for tourists. Set in beautiful country-

side beside a mountain stream, it offers an all-you-can-eat grape buffet for ¥2,300. You can also pick a bunch of grapes with you to take home. The particular variety we picked was Muscat of Alexandria — a grape originating in North Africa used to make white wine, but which is also delicious on its own. It was brought into Japan during the Meiji era and cultivated in Okayama due to the region's sunshine and good climate. We learnt some tips from the friendly farm manager, Mr Kawasaki: grapes that have a more yellowish hue are sweeter, as are those further away from the grapevine trunk.



## 4 Craft paper postcards

Try your hand at making traditional Japanese washi paper — a craft listed as a Unesco Intangible Cultural Heritage. At Tsubano, a small beautiful town nestled in the mountains of Shimane Prefecture, you can find a paper-making craftsman who will guide you through the process. Mulberry bark is steamed, then boiled, transforming it into pulp. After which, it is mixed with water and glue to make a solution, then scooped onto bamboo mesh screens and left to dry. You can participate in the final step by scooping layers of pulp and embellishing them with sprinkles of gold foil and small leaves to form a beautiful postcard-sized piece of washi.



## 5 Grill up some sizzling oysters and okonomiyaki

No good trip is complete without food — and the best food is food you have cooked yourself. Hiroshima is famous for its oysters, caught fresh from the Seto Inland Sea. At Shimada Suisan Oyster Hut, where you can get dazzling views of Hiroshima Bay, enjoy a delicious meal of rice, oyster karaage, marinated oysters, miso soup and 1kg of fresh oysters that you can barbecue yourself — all for little over ¥2,000. Paired with ponzu (soya sauce with citrus) or garlic butter, the freshly barbecued oysters are a delight. Though the meal consisted of little other than oysters cooked in a variety of ways, the various flavours worked together so well that I could easily have eaten more. Also, be sure to visit Okonomiyaki-mura, a "food theme park" of 24 Hiroshima-style okonomiyaki restaurants located a stone's throw away from the city's main Hondori shopping arcade.



The writer's trip was sponsored by SilkAir and Hiroshima, Okayama, Shimane and Yamaguchi Prefectures.

## 3 Make washi tape souvenirs



Okayama is also home to many cultural hotspots, such as Kurashiki city famed among other things for being the home of washi tape. The simple yet ingenious combination of Japanese washi paper and masking tape to create a versatile, colourful and unique product used by art and craft enthusiasts worldwide was first conceived in Kurashiki in 2006 by Kamoi Kakoshi. The company, which makes MT-brand washi tape, remains headquartered in the city. At Nyochikudo store — which sells hundreds of varieties of MT tape — you can expect to be spoilt for choice. The store has a special souvenir counter where you can spend time decorating a product using washi tape, for free. Friendly clerks will provide you with your choice of a paper bag, fan or badge, which you can customise with a wide selection of washi tape to make a colourful souvenir. Although I am not artistic by nature, I did enjoy the many designs of washi tape that gave me creative options in decorating a badge.

DREAM CRUISES ROADSHOW. Venue: Tampines Mall (outside Charles & Keith) Date: 16 Jan 2019 to 22 Jan 2019 Time: 11am to 8pm. Includes table with various cruise packages for Asia, China, and Japan.

NAM HO TRAVEL CELEBRATING LUNAR NEW YEAR. Includes table with various travel packages for Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia, and Korea.

UNI WORLD EUROPE RIVER CRUISE. Includes table with various river cruise packages for Eastern Europe, Castles Along The Rhine, and other European destinations.

CTC TRAVEL. Includes table with various cruise packages for Malaysia, Japan, and other international destinations.

travel DEALS. Includes table with various travel deals for Europe, Spain, and Korea.

DREAM CRUISES. Includes advertisement for MONOPOLY fun on Genting Dream cruise ship.