

Mountains and UNESCO Biosphere Reserves in Japan

I was fortunate to visit Japan over Easter 2018, during sakura (cherry-blossom) season, a very special time for Japanese people – and their visitors. The focus of my visit was on Japan's mountains and their biosphere reserves (designated by UNESCO), which aim to be models for sustainable development. My host was Ken Ueno from the University of Tsukuba, a mountain climatologist who, with another colleague, had recently translated my book 'Mountains: A very short introduction' into Japanese.

During my time in Japan, I visited two biosphere reserves - Mount Hakusan and Minami-Alps – in order to get an initial understanding of key issues for Japan's mountains, and the extent to which they are comparable to those in Europe, and also to see how the biosphere reserve concept is being implemented in Japan. My travels and discussions showed that there are many opportunities for meaningful comparative research.

I also gave four lectures. Two were on global mountain issues, to a large public audience in Nagano, and to students in Shizuoka – on Masters courses in mountain science from four universities (Shinsyu, Shizuoka, Tsukuba, Yamanashi), which had been developed with some input from me in the context of my UNESCO Chair in Sustainable Mountain Development. The other lectures were on British biosphere reserves, to scientists and practitioners working on biosphere reserves in Tokyo and Shiramine (in Mount Hakusan Biosphere Reserve). I did get some questions, especially when they could be translated into English; but my impression is that the proportion of Japanese people who speak English is smaller than for their counterparts in many European countries.

Where the shinkansen runs, travelling in the relatively small part of Japan I visited was easy. Beyond those places, I was very glad that Ken Ueno drove us in his car, as navigation is not easy when only some place names are in English (though I believe that it is possible to get a satnav that will help). Everywhere we stayed, from hotel rooms to streets, was remarkably clean (and it was often not easy to find a dustbin), and people were very hospitable (even when I ran out of the essential business cards, a colleague copied some more for me: take many more than you would expect to give out!). As I am willing to eat almost anything, I very much enjoyed the wonderful range of foods, even though the choice was often similar at all mealtimes, and meals are not really divided into courses.

I very much hope to return to Japan, and see more of this very diverse country. I am not sure whether I can provide many insights, but would be glad to be contacted at martin.price@perth.uhi.ac.uk

