

Getting the Most Out of Railways

Railways in Japan, which provide the indispensable means of transportation for shopping and errands as well as commuting to school and work, extend into every corner of the country. They are an intimate part of daily life for most people. Railways are frequently the means of transport, moreover, when people travel, are transferred to work in other parts of the country, or move house, so they are often associated with poignant memories and turning points in people's lives. Railways are the object of special attachment and nostalgic feelings for many enthusiasts.

Today Japan is in the midst of a boom among railway enthusiasts that transcends age and gender. In this issue, we introduce the many ways people enjoy railways that has set off this boom.



This mark indicates that more related information is included on the "Click Japan" website. <http://www.tjf.or.jp/clicknippon/>

"The Railway Boom"

The first railway enthusiasts' boom (*tetsudo bumu* 鉄道ブーム) arrived in the 1970s, approximately 100 years after the opening of Japan's first railroad in 1872. Well before then the electric locomotive had become the standard engine to pull trains, and the old steam locomotives that had been a familiar part of the landscape were being taken out of service one after another. Train lovers lamenting the disappearance of the old trains would gather at stations and along the railroad tracks all over the country to photograph them. Later, however, the railway boom subsided.

In the 2000s, there was a second boom among railway enthusiasts. The spread of Internet use and new technologies such as the digital camera, which made it easier to photograph trains and obtain information quickly online, have helped to create many more opportunities for people to enjoy the appeal of trains. The population of railway enthusiasts today is said to be about 1.5 to 2 million, of whom 20,000 are serious fans.

One characteristic of the current railway boom is the increase of interest among girls and women. The image of the railroad enthusiast was once associated with boys and men who tended to be of the *otaku* type. That image has changed, thanks to *Tetsuko no tabi* (Tetsuko's Train Journeys), a manga series (starting in 2002), and the 2007 TV drama *Tokkyu Tanaka sango* (Special Express Tanaka Number 3), and today female railroad enthusiasts are referred to as *tetsuko* 鉄子. There has also been a surge of railroad-related goods, events, and publications, especially those designed to appeal to children who love trains—called *kotetsu* 子鉄—and mothers who enjoy the hobby with their children—called *mamatetsu* ママ鉄.



Tetsuko no tabi

This is a travel manga about a female manga artist with no particular interest in trains, who travels around Japan by train with a travel-writer who is a railway enthusiast.



Watching ^み見る

The basic way railroad fans indulge their love of trains is by watching them. Many people visit spots where many trains can be seen at once.

Train-Watching from "Train-View" Rooms

Hotels that have picked up on the railway boom began featuring "train-view" rooms from which guests can get a good view of rails, trains, stations, or depots. Some hotels try to make these train-view rooms appealing to fans by decorating them with model trains or offering special railway giveaways to guests. Railway enthusiasts will travel from afar just to stay in such rooms, which are reserved much more often than ordinary rooms. These train-view rooms are also special because they allow guests an overhead view of trains, which generally can only be viewed from the side. Such accommodations afford a view from which the city and trains look like skillfully made models.

Train-Watching for *Mamatetsu* and *Kotetsu*

Written from the point of view of a railway-loving mother, the *Train-Watching Guide for Kotetsu and Mamatetsu* (by Tanazawa Akiko) introduces a selection of locations where mothers and children can go to enjoy watching trains together. It also introduces restaurants where families can watch trains while they eat, or other train-related places that are relaxing and fun for both mothers and children. Thanks to this guide, train-watching has become an even more accessible hobby for mothers and children, further accelerating the growth of the *mamatetsu* and *kotetsu* population.



This park is popular among *mamatetsu* and *kotetsu*. The Shinkansen superexpress train can be seen from this spot.



Riding 乗る

In recent years, many people ride trains just for the fun and experience.

Tours to Tickle Fans' Fancy

In the last few years, special tours for railway enthusiasts have become popular. For example, there are tours combining rides in different models of the Shinkansen superexpress trains and on its different lines, rides on trains about to be taken out of service, or featuring visits to train depots. These tours are popular because they allow participants to ride on many trains on a single tour or visit places not normally open to the public. Many of these tours also provide participants with special memorabilia, such as commemorative tickets and key chains. Many railway enthusiasts avidly collect these items.



A pamphlet about a tour organized to ride a train about to go out of service.

Railway Stamp Rallies for Fond Summer Memories

In recent years, the railway stamp rally has become an annual summer event for many *mamatetsu* and *kotetsu*. Railway stamp rallies are events for which participants ride on sponsoring railway lines and collect stamps set up at different stations. Participants receive various prizes depending on how many stamps they have collected. Railway companies around the country organize a variety of stamp rallies timed to coincide with children's school summer holiday.

For example, every summer the East Japan Railway Company organizes the Pokemon Stamp Rally. An extremely popular event, it attracts over 200,000 participants yearly. Stamps of various characters of the Pocket Monster ポケットモンスター (Pokemon) anime are set up at 95 stations around Tokyo, and participating children go from station to station to collect the stamps in a special booklet.



A *mamatetsu* and *kotetsu* participating in the Pokemon Stamp Rally. Placing a stamp in the special booklet for the rally.



Read an article on "Riding Every Train in the Country."



Photographing 撮る

Photographing trains has become an easier and more accessible hobby for everyone with the spread of the digital camera.

Enjoying Railway Photography

Many railway enthusiasts enjoy not only photographing trains that run near where they live, but also travel long distances to photograph special trains that run only once a day, freight trains, or interesting-looking trains. They can upload photos of these trains on the Internet and share them with other fans.

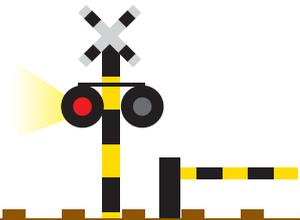
Especially important events for fans are the "last run" of trains that are about to be taken out of service. The platform and station from which the train departs is often thronged with railroad enthusiasts from all over the country mourning the retirement of the train and people who have special memories or associations connected with it. On the day of the last run, the retiring train is decorated to commemorate its final trip. There are also special ceremonies, sales of special goods, and exhibitions of photographs, history, and even train apparatus.

Poor Train-Watching Manners

As the number of railway enthusiasts increases, ill-considered behavior by a small number of fans has surfaced. Causing a commotion, taking photos without consideration for others, trespassing in prohibited areas to take pictures, and disturbing train drivers on the job are some of the kinds of bad manners that have recently come to public attention. Such poor train-watching manners not only mar the general reputation of railway fans, but also could lead to serious accidents.



The March 21, 2010. The last run of the 7700 series train from Motojuku station in Aichi prefecture.



Building 作る

Model trains, which come in many different varieties, are popular among children and adults.

Model Trains for Serious Fans

Precision-made model railways for serious enthusiasts feature artfully designed tracks winding through miniature cityscapes and landscapes. These models are popular because you can run a model of your favorite train through an ideal landscape you create yourself. Such models are usually quite expensive, however, so most are purchased by adults.



The world of the model railway can be very realistic.

© TOMYTEC Co., Ltd.

Some model railways are much simpler, but are more accessible to collectors. Plarail, a line of railway toys, is one of the leading brands in such simple toy trains made to run on plastic rails. Many types of trains from Shinkansen to subways are available. This line of toy trains was released 50 years ago, but with the recent railway boom, it is even more popular today. Plarail exhibitions, with exhibits of a variety of Plarail products, have recently been held around the country.



A Plarail.

© TOMY



© Kodansha LTD.

The toy company has also collaborated with a major publishing company to release a booklet on the history of Plarail. The book, along with a special model train, is being sold in bookstores.



Learning 学ぶ

Many museums around Japan include exhibits where both children and adults can have fun while learning about railways.

Learning about Railways in an Interactive Museum

The Railway Museum, which opened in Saitama prefecture in 2007, is currently a big attraction not only among railway enthusiasts but the general public. It is particularly popular because unlike other museums that focus on visual exhibits, it is equipped with many features to allow visitors to experience the feel of trains on the move. On tracks outside the museum, for example, there is a miniature model train that visitors can operate as if they are the driver themselves. The museum also houses the world's first steam locomotive operation simulator. In addition, it has the largest railway diorama in Japan with tracks covering approximately 1,400 meters. With these facilities, visitors can have fun while learning about the theory, mechanism, techniques, and systems of railways. Two and a half years since its opening, the museum has already welcomed 2.3 million visitors.



The Railway Museum. The steam whistle of the locomotive seen here on the turntable sounds off several times a day.

© Kanegen



Collecting 集める

Tickets and railway car parts have been popular collector's items in the past, but recently, many fans have been collecting toys and other items with train motifs produced by different railway companies.

Railway Souvenir Goods

Railway companies produce a variety of souvenir goods featuring their own trains. Stationery, snacks, and miscellaneous household items with train motifs, as well as original character figurines can be purchased at railway souvenir goods shops, online stores, and a variety of other locations.

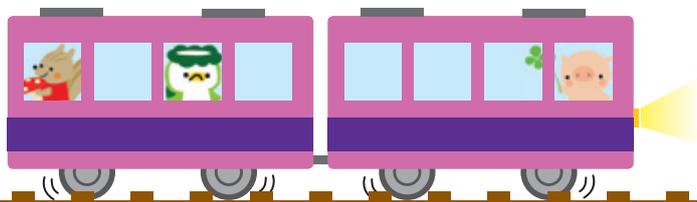


(Clockwise) Figurine, prepaid ticket card case, keychain warning alarm buzzer, tissue box cover, message board.

© SEIBU RAILWAY Co., Ltd.



Read an article on "Traditional Collector's Items."



More Ways to Enjoy Railways

Famous Feline Stationmaster

Kishi station is home of a famous stationmaster, たま (Tama) the cat. Tama lived in a shop next door to the station until 2007, when the shop closed down. Realizing that she would have nowhere to go, the president of the railway company named her stationmaster and allowed her to live in the station. Since then, tourists and media reporters flock to the station to get a glimpse of the famous feline stationmaster. Her popularity is said to have contributed 1.1 billion yen to the local economy.



The famous stationmaster.

© WAKAYAMA ELECTRIC RAILWAY CO., LTD.



Read an article on "Railway Games."

Railway Restaurants

Recently, "railway cafés" and "railway restaurants" have become popular spots among railway enthusiasts. These are special restaurants decorated with model trains, have items on the menu named after trains, or where the interiors look like the inside of a railway carriage.

At Curry Station Niagara a miniature train delivers plates of curry to the guests. The restaurant is fitted with carriage seats, locomotive license plates, destination placards, and other train-related interior decorations.



The Curry Station Niagara restaurant attracts railway fans from all around Japan and overseas as well.

© TjF

Eco-Friendly Transportation of the Future

Railways use energy more efficiently compared to airplanes, automobiles, and other methods of mass transport. Per-person/per-kilometer carbon dioxide emissions for a train is calculated to be one-ninth that of a private car and one-sixth that of an airplane. Therefore, around the world, the railway is considered to be the key transportation method of the future. Even in the United States, where people predominantly use automobiles, plans for the large-scale construction of high-speed railways have been announced. Railways are being constructed in metropolitan areas of China as well. In the United Kingdom, Brazil, Russia, and around the world, high-speed railways are to be introduced as the transportation method of the coming generation.



© JR Central

The Secret of the Shinkansen Design

The Shinkansen superexpress trains are popular in Japan and abroad. They are aerodynamically designed to achieve greater speed. The inspiration for the design of the 500 series Shinkansen trains, you may be surprised to know, comes from the world of nature.



A kingfisher.
© photolibary

The front car of this Shinkansen is modeled after the kingfisher, a bird that dives into the water without a sound to catch fish with its' beak. Based on the shape of kingfisher's beak, engineers succeeded in reducing the "tunnel boom" effect set off when a high-speed train enters a tunnel. It is fascinating that ideas for cutting-edge technology can often be found in nature.



500 series Shinkansen trains.

© BONGURI

Let's Try!

What is the word that describes railway fans' ways of enjoying trains? Match the numbered lines with the words, a through e below.

1. Railway fans who love riding trains.
2. Railway fans devoted to taking photos of trains.
3. Railway fans fascinated by the sounds of moving trains, station and platform announcements, and other train-related sounds.
4. Railway fans who build model trains and collect models
5. Railway fans who enjoy collecting train-related goods.

a. 音鉄 b. 収集鉄 c. 乗り鉄 d. 模型鉄 e. 撮り鉄

The answers can be found at

<http://www.tjf.or.jp/takarabako/bi02.htm>



Read an article on "Prepaid Ticket Cards."