

Abandoned Japan

Jordy Meow

JONGLEZ



Nichitsu Village

ニッチツ鉱山村

I've visited Nichitsu ghost town several times. It's easily accessible from Tokyo by car for a one-day trip and a worthwhile experience. I never fail to take friends interested in *haikyo* to Nichitsu.

The abandoned tin-mining village, about 50 km from Chichibu in Saitama, can also be reached from Kofu in Yamanashi. Apart from the detritus of the mining industry, the gloomy tunnels are an interesting sight. The best time to visit is probably autumn, with its profusion of magnificently coloured foliage.

Nichitsu is the name of the mining company that owns the village. The workers had to live on site because of the distance from the main cities. So the village grew in size until in its heyday it had as many as 3,000 residents. There were two schools, a clinic, a post office and even a cinema. The bosses lived in pleasant houses with tiled roofs and good exposure to the sun, whereas the ordinary workers' apartments along the riverside or on the cliff slopes had no bathrooms.

Sometime in the '80s, the once prosperous village was abandoned. It seems that a few of the buildings were used again in the '90s by young men – in the rooms of the most modern ones we found karaoke machines, *manga* books, piles of pornography, Gundam robot models and even a giant Pikachu.





The design and architecture of this place was carefully thought out. There was even a swimming pool on the roof to make sure no comforts were lacking.



When the house was built in 1928 by Hachiro Hatsumi, a wealthy politician born in the city, this part of Ibaraki was mainly rice fields and there was no other place like it. He died two years later. Afterwards the house was supposed to be used for meetings of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement but it's difficult to be sure what happened.

There are many signs of family life and the house seems to have been inhabited until 1972, probably by members of the Hatsumi family as there's a photo of one of them in the dining room.

I went back a few years later only to discover that the house had been demolished and the site covered with solar panels. Hopefully this is for the best, but my heart is saddened.



Namezawa Elementary School

M小学校N分校

1873–1974

The route led me past Aokigahara forest, up a mountain road, then turned right up a narrow rocky path. I always rent basic cars and try my best to treat them gently. But sometimes the *haikyo* trips really demand a 4x4. I had to stop a few times on the way and shift fallen rocks to avoid damaging the car.

After a few kilometres along this forest path, I was beginning think I'd come to a dead end. Then a village came into view. A few houses, fields, everything wide open. At first I didn't see the school but eventually found it quietly surrounded by trees in a really pleasant site. There was only silence and all signs of life seemed so far away.

In front of the school is a statue of Ninomiya Sontoku, an eminent 19th-century philosopher and economist, who was born into a peasant family but studied on his own while working on the land. Then we entered the old shack, or maybe should I say time capsule.

Built in 1873, the wonderful smell of wood permeated everything. Old photos on the walls, the tables and chairs still lined up facing the blackboard. Everything was clean and tidy, ready for the students to get back to work. Only the spider webs and the thick layer of dust reminded us that there were no students in the playground.







Nara Dreamland

The Abandoned Disneyland

奈良ドリームランド
1961–2006

The last spirits are leaving this abandoned theme park on the outskirts of Nara. It closed in 2006, after the number of visitors dropped dramatically in the aftermath of the opening of the new Tokyo Disneyland and Osaka Universal Studio.

Nara Dreamland used to be quite famous. It was built in 1961, six years after the original Disneyland in California. The layout is entirely based on Disneyland and negotiations took place with Walt Disney himself. Despite all that it failed. Importing a Western concept to Japan is usually difficult with endless red tape, and the American company was unwilling to have its brand adulterated. But the end result is good for *haikyoists*: here we have an abandoned Disneyland, ideal for a romantic walk by day or by night.









Nearby is Block 65 (65棟), one of the most impressive buildings on the island. A digital version of it is featured in the James Bond movie *Skyfall*. This U-shaped building, nine storeys high, is seriously decayed. The concrete was mixed with seawater, so the salt and humidity have corroded the framework – the steel turns to dust when touched.

The first seven floors on the left were built in 1945, the only building constructed in Japan that year. In 1947 another two floors were added, and two years later the central section was built. Finally, in 1953, they added the building on the right and named it *The New 65*. It had nice apartments and even flush toilets.

There are 317 apartments in Block 65. We glance quickly into each, looking for something interesting. They all seem pretty similar, with tatami mats, sometimes in surprisingly good condition. There was very little privacy. Sakamoto-san mentions that he sometimes spotted his girlfriend on the other side of the building.



Abandoned Japan

Japan is often thought of as a place where the modern world and ancient traditions meet in surprising and fascinating ways. The rapid pace of technological, social and cultural change throughout the 20th century propelled the country forward but left countless establishments, industries and entire towns deserted.

Through his photography Jordy Meow explores these forgotten places and sheds light on a lost world that was thriving just a few decades ago.

Abandoned Japan documents famed ruins (*haikyo* in Japanese) such as Gunkanjima, the island featured in the Bond movie *Skyfall*, which once had a population of over 5,000 but is now completely abandoned, and the Disneyland-inspired Nara Dreamland theme park. Beyond these well-known sites, Jordy Meow also takes us on a journey through every aspect of a rapidly disappearing past: from schools and hospitals to industrial sites and nightlife, including strip clubs and love hotels.

The ruins captured here range from the quaint and serene to the dark and nightmarish. Some have an atmosphere reminiscent of the animation films of Studio Ghibli while others seem almost dystopian. These places show that people can leave a lasting mark on their environment but, given the chance, nature finds its way back.

JonGlez

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info@junglepublishing.com

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