

There are extravagant representations of crustaceans above shops and restaurants.



Over a tea ceremony I ask Kohara his definition of happiness, that most elusive of 21st-century concerns.

He pauses for a while, then answers:

"In order to become happy," he says, "you have to experience true despair."

He goes on to explain that for him, the long periods of meditation he undertook as a monk were sometimes extremely painful but that he came to see that the body was "merely the vessel for the human spirit".

He therefore understood that he had to accept the pain to work towards being in the best condition to accept death.

Back in Kinosaki, I transfer next door to a more modern ryokan, Enn, and head out to dinner with my guide, remembering the monk's words as I struggle to get comfortable kneeling Japanese-style at the table.

Later we spend an hour in a tiny karaoke bar, where Katsuko Habuchi, the sweet old lady serving us, sings us a Japanese love song and gifts me a hand-fashioned origami stork.

My winter visit to Kinosaki has been timely, allowing me, like that mythical stork of way-back-when, to begin healing the emotional wounds inflicted by multiple losses and separation, and to recognise that sometimes, happiness can be as simple as a warm bath. **T**

my bones warmed through by bathing, I'm more than happy to have a traditional kaiseki dinner served to me in my room (crab and beef included) and avail myself of the free Wi-Fi to Facetime my wide-eyed daughters.

The next morning I start the day at a second bathhouse, Jizouyu, just down the street, one of four that open at 7am. No sotoyu is further than 400 metres from the next and if you're staying at any Kinosaki ryokan, you're entitled to free entry to all seven.

Jizouyu is already busy in the early morning and while my body rhythms are better suited to a long afternoon soak, my visit prepares me well for a day visiting nearby

Traditional: (Above, from left) Japanese style room; the town of Kinosaki.

Izushi, a castle town that prospered during the Edo period, between 1603 and 1868.

After taking in the ruins of the samurai-built castle in the foothills above Izushi, and getting a behind-the-scenes tour of the town's restored Eirakukan kabuki theatre, our next stop is one of its 50 noodle shops.

Izushi's Sara Soba noodles are distinct from the heartier type served elsewhere. They are served on small, fine white porcelain plates and require a delicate hand in the making.

I find this out during a soba noodle making experience under the tutelage of master practitioner Amemori. While Amemori and my

guide Randria make light work of the dough created from 300 grams of buckwheat flour and 150ml of water, my efforts are laughably lumpy.

I'm not much better at Zazen meditation, which I try next, at Sukyoji Temple. Led by Buddhist monk Udo Kohara, I try hard to adopt the correct seated and cross-legged posture and even harder to concentrate on the sounds of nature outside. But I get too fixated on my aching knees and racing thoughts to succeed.

Yet the half-hour meditation does leave me in a contemplative mood and I'm drawn to the monk's gentle spirit and selfless dedication.



COLLETTE'S europe TOURS

book early + SAVE 10% on 2018-2019 Europe tours



Collette's new 2018-2019 Europe brochure has just been released!

From snow-capped mountains to lively cities and beyond, the keys to this vast, diverse and fascinating land can all be held in your hands. Turn the pages of Collette's new Europe brochure and start planning your holiday!

— the collette *difference* —

- Collette Chauffeur return airport transfers
- Award-winning tour managers
- Perfectly located hotels 4-star & above

SHADES OF IRELAND WITH NORTHERN IRELAND

12 Days • 17 Meals **SAVE \$300 PP**

Experience all of the charms of the Emerald Isle. Enjoy 2 nights in rollicking Dublin, be awe-inspired at Belfast's famed Titanic Experience, and live like royalty on an overnight on the grounds of a castle.

NOW FROM \$2,995 PP

NORWEGIAN COASTAL VOYAGE & SCANDINAVIAN CAPITALS

14 Days • 27 Meals **SAVE \$900 PP**

Packed with value, we see the best of Stockholm, Copenhagen & Oslo before joining a spectacular rail journey via Flam to Bergen. Embark on the traditional Hurtigruten coastal voyage north across the Arctic Circle.

NOW FROM \$9,264 PP

SOUTHERN ITALY & SICILY

11 Days • 16 Meals **SAVE \$315 PP**

This journey will take you through a crossroads of civilisations in the beautiful surrounds of Southern Italy. Spend 5 nights exploring Sicily, including Mt Etna, before heading to the Sorrento and Amalfi coast via Pompeii.

NOW FROM \$2,800 PP

ORDER YOUR BROCHURE TODAY! 1300 792 195 | AUsales@collette.com | gocollette.com.au

THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW: Save 10% on Collette's Europe tours applicable for bookings made by 31 October 2017 on tours departing 1 January 2018 until 30 April 2019. Prices are per person based on twin share and are valid for new bookings. Offer not valid on Iceland or Finland tours. Offer excludes on-tour air. Not valid with any other offer. The Collette Chauffeur is included within 40km of your departure international airport. Up to 70km for a supplement of \$75pp. ABN 32 600 161 671