

# PEARL *of* JAPAN

Finding wellness in Ago Bay    Writer Daniel Scheffler

AGO BAY AT DUSK, MIE PREFECTURE, HONSHU, JAPAN, IMAGINE



Ago Bay is known for its pearls, and legend says it is the birthplace of the precious lustrous mollusc. Today the bay area, midway between Kyoto and Tokyo on the eastern side, emerges not only with shiny allure but also as a haven of wellness, a perfect escape from the city to rejuvenate.

Located in the Mie Prefecture, Ago Bay is situated in the city of Shima, with its great green islands surrounded by perfect blue ocean. Locals know the greater area, which forms part of the Ise-Shima region, because of its extreme natural beauty and a fast train (plus nearby airport) makes it all too easy to access from the country's three major cities. But the special event that took place in 1893 has brought fame to this little bay – Mikimoto Kokichi invented pearl cultivation here.

With an abundance of hot springs, a plethora of pearls (used in beauty treatments) and untouched natural beauty, the area prides itself on being as eco-conscious as possible, and fittingly the G7 summit will be hosted here in 2016.



#### AMANEMU

Located within the Ise-Shima National Park right on the Kii Peninsula, in the southwestern region of the island of Honshu perches Amanemu. From its perfect vantage point the resort overlooks Ago Bay, also known as the Bay of Pearls. From here it's

the bluest ocean plus little islets pockets of greenery, with an occasional scattering of oyster rafts throughout the bay. The name Amanemu derives from *aman*, the Sanskrit word for peace, and *nemu*, the Japanese word for sharing joy – and here there is an abundance of both.



THIS PAGE: Immerse yourself in nature at Amanemu. OPPOSITE PAGE: Take advantage of Amanemu's private onsen to enjoy the mineral-rich water

The spa takes a holistic approach and focuses on being as eco-friendly as possible. Well-being here consolidates relaxation, movement, nutrition and treatments. The natural hot springs nearby feeds the spa's two onsen (thermal spring) bathing pools – supplying readily available mineral-rich water. The water, known for its healing and relaxing properties, is used in all spa treatments. Their herb-based *kampo*, a principle that the body and mind are inseparable, combines local algae, known to be a powerful antioxidant, and locally

sourced pearl powder in their treatments. Besides the onsen, which is naturally heated and maintained at roughly 36–38 degrees Celsius, the spa also has dry saunas and steam rooms. Treatment rooms include the Watsu treatment room for aquatic bodywork therapy and a salon for beauty needs. After the water-based treatments, spend some time in the yoga studio which has an outside deck overlooking a peaceful garden with a Tabunoki tree in the centre, and take in the abundance of nature. [www.aman.com](http://www.aman.com)



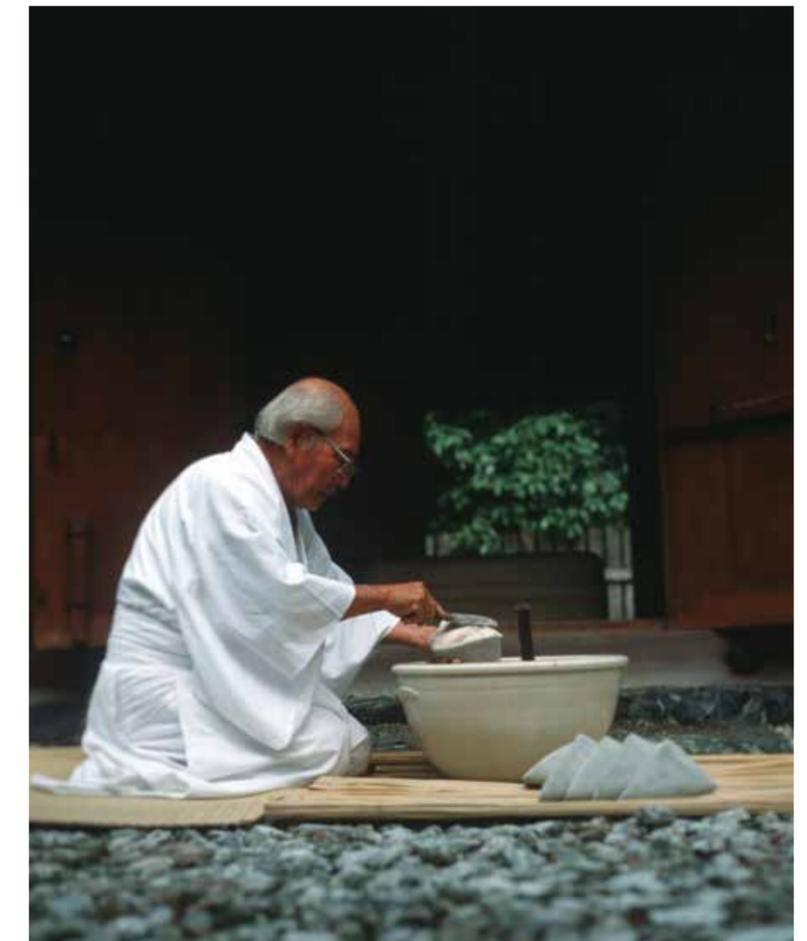
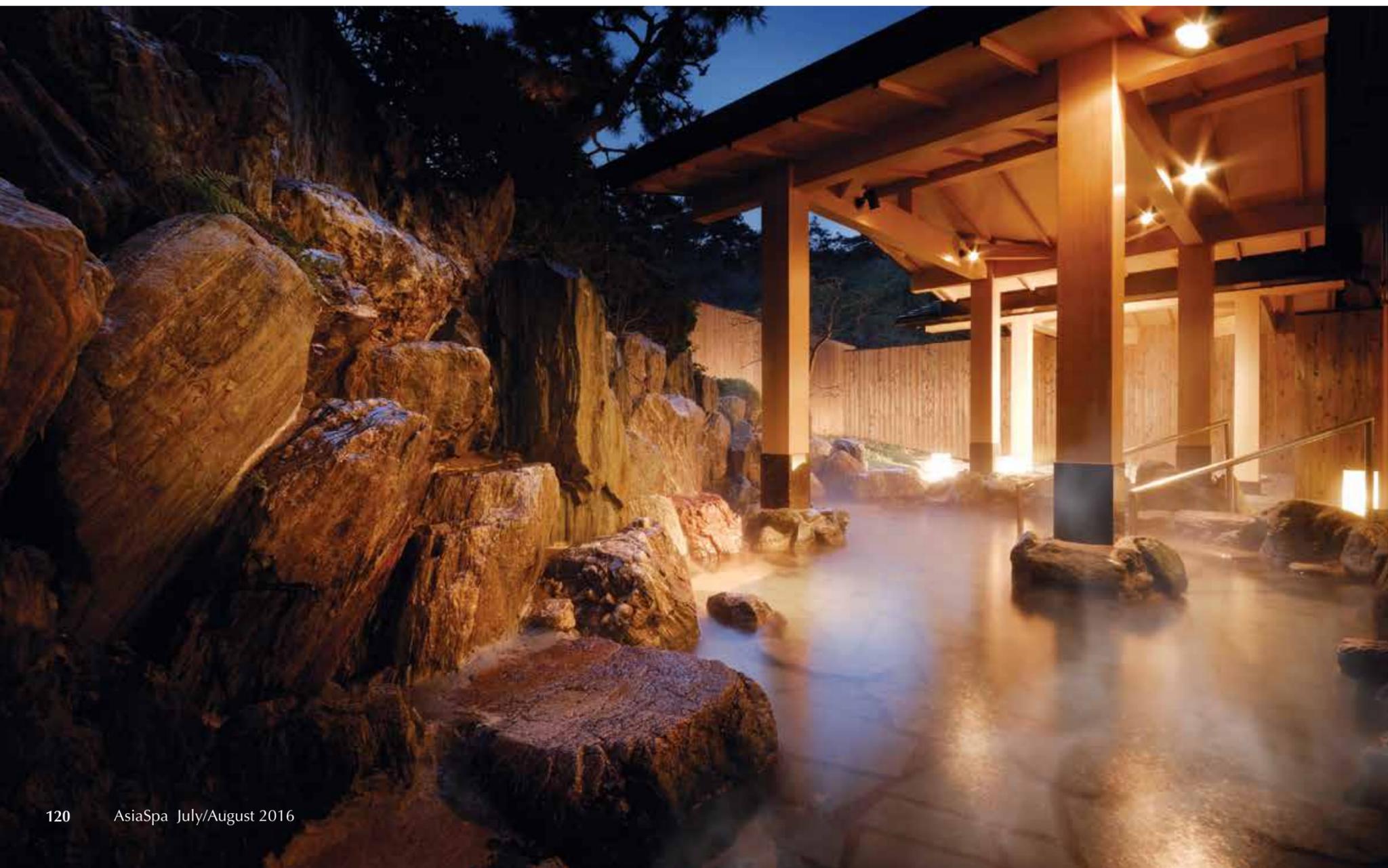
**TOBA HOTEL INTERNATIONAL SHIOJITEI**

On the northern side of Ago Bay is where the ryokan (Japanese style inn) Shiojitei is tucked into the forest right on the water's edge. The focus here is switching off communications and immersing oneself into the calm beauty of the natural surroundings and simple ritual of bathing.

Mikimoto Cosmetics established one of Japan's first authentic resort pearl spas in the area. After years of scientific research, the lustre of pearls is used in cosmetics but their essence in beauty regimens. Besides traditional massages and beauty regimens, the bathing routines encapsulates the experience.

The facilities include two baths. The first is with hot water of Tokowaka no Yu, a recuperation fountain which addresses fatigue, poor circulation, joint disease,

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW: Traditional salt making in Ise-Shima; the Tokowaka no Yu hot spring at Toba Hotel International Shiojitei addresses a range of ailments; emerge from the Pearl Aurora Bath smooth and shiny





and is excellent for muscle pain or healing everyday fatigue. The second bath is the open-air Pearl Aurora Bath created especially for the resort. Time is of the essence for the latter so spend an hour to enjoy the healing process. Pearl collagen from pearl and oyster extract moisturises and adds a lasting smooth shine to the skin.

After open-air bathing, it is time for recuperation Izumi (indoor bathing) where a scrub and chloride-rich hot thermal bath is meticulously undertaken as a form of meditation. The skin is slow brushed with a bristle and then soft soaped, followed by a vigorous rub down with a muslin cloth and a rinse – all while seated on a small wooden Japanese chair. The ritual finishes with a long dry sauna, and a final relax outside sipping red bean tea and listening to the birds sing. [www.shiojitei.jp](http://www.shiojitei.jp)

#### SHIMANE KANKO HOTEL BAY SUITES

Overlooking the bay, the hotel is located right next to the ocean and surrounded by verdant greenery. The Bay Suites part of the hotel was recently completely renovated and opens with a new lease on life. This side of the hotel is quieter and perfect to spend time surrounded by nature. The G7 summit will be held in this hotel and preparations have it spic and span.

This first Clarins resort spa to open in Japan is called eau Spa by Clarins. With the abundance of water nearby, the spa prides itself on using the natural spring water from hot springs in treatments and in the onsen, combined with the latest products from the brand. The facilities include two onsens as well as a steam room and endless spaces to lounge after pampering.

Treatments include massages and facials. Highlights include Rebalancing Massage using relaxing essential oils, which is a rhythmic full body massage that releases tension within the deeper muscle layers, using a bespoke sequence of slower movements and pressure point techniques. The relaxation is intensified with an essential oil blend of deeply

soothing basil, chamomile and petit grain. Another highlight is the Radiance Reviver Facial where tired skin is intensively detoxified and recharged with a cocktail of antioxidants and revitalising plant extracts which is supposed to restore health and radiance – what they call a ‘multivitamin for the skin’. [www.miyakohotels.ne.jp](http://www.miyakohotels.ne.jp)

## NEMU HOTEL AND RESORT

The resort is nestled right in the Ise-Shima National Park with views from every angle across Ago Bay. The nearby wildlife, abundance of water and greenery add to the quiet meditative pace set by the resort. As with so many Japanese traditions Nemu’s philosophy is in the power of the seasons – and this is where their eco-awareness comes in. During the warmer months, the ocean is where stillness can be found, while in colder times of the year the nearby forests are used for meditation and a place to enjoy solace.

Styled in a traditional and restraint aesthetic, the hotel and spa focuses on surrounding beauty. The spa facilities include a large outside onsen area as well as the *seno* area, or indoor bathhouse. The water, according to Japanese law, needs to contain one of the 19 designated chemicals including minerals like iron, sulfur and metabolic acid, and be heated to be at least 25 degrees Celsius. Nemu offers traditional treatments like Keihatsu massage, which incorporates traditional Japanese shiatsu methods that are designed to promote a healthy flow of chi.

The spa also offers a variety of facial treatments – one of the highlights is the ‘natural facelift’ called the Shin Bi Treatment which is based on traditional Japanese facial massage using anti-ageing techniques to stimulate blood flow, lymphatic circulation and release facial tension. After treatments, find a quiet spot in the hot spring and meditate as the sun goes down over the ocean.

[www.nemunosato.com](http://www.nemunosato.com)

THIS PAGE: Shimane Kanko Hotel Bay Suites is quiet and perfect to spend time surrounded by nature. OPPOSITE PAGE: Nemu Hotel and Resort is nestled in the Ise-Shima National Park

