

months after the earthquake.

A total of more than 25 million people have visited the tower since its opening. However, in recent years the number of visitors has dropped to around 300,000 annually, less than half of what it was at its peak.

Kobe Waterfront Development, the managing organization of the tower, closed it in September 2021 and spent the next 2½ years renovating the aging tower.

The total renovation cost of ¥3.4 billion was paid by the municipal government. To make it more quake-resistant, the organization installed vibration absorption systems at two locations, one in the rooftop area and one in the mid-level floor.

A bird's eye view of Kobe Port Tower in Kobe

New rooftop deck

On the upper floors of the tower, which visitors must pay to enter, a new cafe bar situated on a slowly rotating floor has been opened. Lower levels, which are free to enter, have restaurants, shops selling limited-edition products, and other facilities.

The rooftop, which was previously closed, is now open to visitors. It sits about 100 meters above the ground and is encircled by glass panes, so visitors can feel the wind from the ocean as they take in 360-degree views of Kobe Port and Rokko Mountains.

At the tower's reopening ceremony

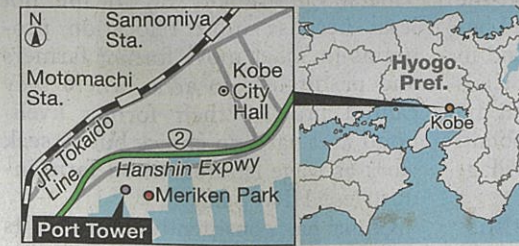
on April 26, Kobe Mayor Kizo Hisamoto said, "I hope many people visit the new facility even more full of love for Kobe, and feel the charm of this city."

The tower is open from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. To promote night tourism, the business hours have been extended by two hours from before the renovation. To enter the observation floor, which includes the rooftop deck, visitors need to buy tickets for a specific date and time. The admission fee for the observation and rooftop areas is ¥1,200 for adults and ¥500 for elementary and junior high school students. Admission is free for preschool children.

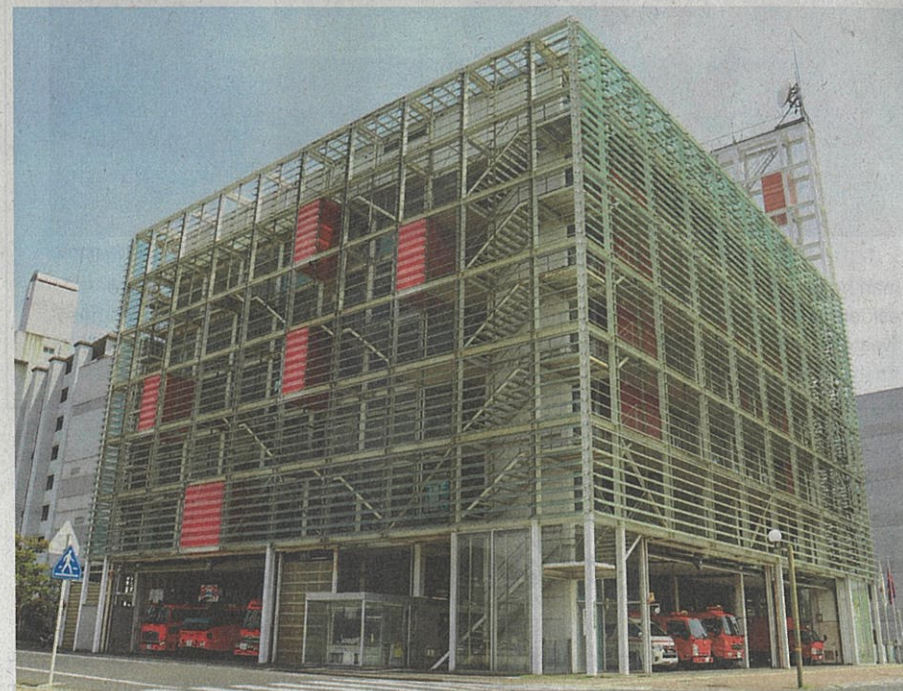
People look out at the Kobe cityscape from the rooftop deck.



People look up at the steel framework of Kobe Port Tower from a cafe on the lower level.



A ribbon-cutting ceremony is held at the foot of the reopened Kobe Port Tower on April 26.



The Hiroshima Nishi Fire Station in Nishi Ward, Hiroshima

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Visitors flock to uniquely designed Hiroshima fire station

The Yomiuri Shimbun

HIROSHIMA — A unique fire station with a glass exterior in Hiroshima is attracting the attention of tourists.

The Hiroshima Nishi Fire Station building was designed by renowned architect Riken Yamamoto.

Since the news broke this March that he had won the Pritzker Architecture Prize, widely regarded as the architectural equivalent of a Nobel Prize, an increasing number of people have been coming to see the building, according to officials.

The concept behind Yamamoto's design was "a firefighting facility that is approachable and open to the public." Accordingly, the exterior of the

fire station is covered with about 2,400 long and narrow glass louvers.

The building has one basement floor and eight stories above ground, and was completed in 2000. Even from outside, visitors can look in on the station's about 70 employees at work. Because it is a fire station, the lights never go out, even at night.

In addition to those requesting to tour the building, an increasing number of Japanese and foreign visitors have been seen pointing their smartphones at the station from the street and taking photos of its skeleton-like rectangular structure.

Perhaps the fact that the fire station is under constant watch will make the firefighters even more vigilant in keeping the city safe.

Short Selections



'Bus stop' helps dementia patients

The Yomiuri Shimbun

MEIWA, Mie — The town of Meiwa, Mie Prefecture, recently got a new bus stop, complete with sign and bench. But no bus has ever stopped there, and none ever will.

The "stop" was installed by Hideto Nakamura, who manages a nursing care office in the town, to prevent dementia patients from wandering off and getting lost.

The aim is to watch over such elderly people, namely, "If you see someone sitting on the bench, speak to them." Initiatives like this started in Europe and are beginning to attract attention in Japan as well.

A glance at the timetable makes it obvious that this is not a real bus stop: it states that "lunch" arrives at 12 p.m. and a "snack" at 3 p.m. It also includes the phrase, "Please have a seat and stay

as long as you like."

There are many cases of dementia patients boarding buses out of long-standing habit and going far away. Some people think that they have to go to work or that they want to visit their families at home, having forgotten that they already live with their families. It is also said that many of them, after departing, forget where they wanted to go or what they wanted to do.

The "no-bus stop" is expected to give people a chance to sit on the bench and relax. Nakamura said he hopes that, although no bus will ever come to this stop, such "gentle lies" will become more widespread to help dementia patients.

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Hideto Nakamura, left, talks with elderly people at a "no-bus stop" in Meiwa, Mie Prefecture, in April.



Armadillos stroll around aquarium to keep weight down

The Yomiuri Shimbun

OITA — A pair of armadillos kept at an aquarium in Oita regularly take walks inside the building, delighting visitors.

The six-banded armadillos are around 5 to 6 years old and walk around the Umitamago aquarium as a way to get some exercise. One is a female named Yashiko, and the other is a male named Yoichi. The

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Yashiko, one of two armadillos kept by Umitamago aquarium, walks inside the facility in Oita on May 9.

caretakers hope that they can maintain a weight of six kilograms.

Videos and pictures of them strolling by large water tanks and by the feet of visitors have become popular on social media.

Of the two, Yashiko is gentle and laid-back and does not mind if people touch her.

"The body was warm when I touched it," said a 27-year-old woman from Sasebo, Nagasaki Prefecture. "I was surprised that its skin felt like a tatami mat. It was a precious experience."

Caretaker Takashi Kozaki said, "I will be glad if they have children sometime in the future."