

Surprises from SAKAI

Jay Houhlias

The rain was coming down not obtusely, but respectably. There was a large contingent of us all walking from Sakai Train Station, heading toward the port of Sakai, with all our luggage and nice respectable shines to our hair from the wet. I did not know anyone else from our contingent, but we were all headed toward the same place, the seemingly only place people went from Sakai Train Station.

Sakai is a city in the Osaka Prefecture about a 20-minute train ride from Central Osaka. It is one of Japan's most important seaports. Overlooking this seaport is Dorsett by Agora Osaka Sakai, a hotel which can be seen from every angle of the port.

The path winding around the port is well travelled, and you can find walkers and exercisers at all times during the day and night. I know this because from my window at the hotel, I could see everything, even at 2am when I woke for a sip of water.

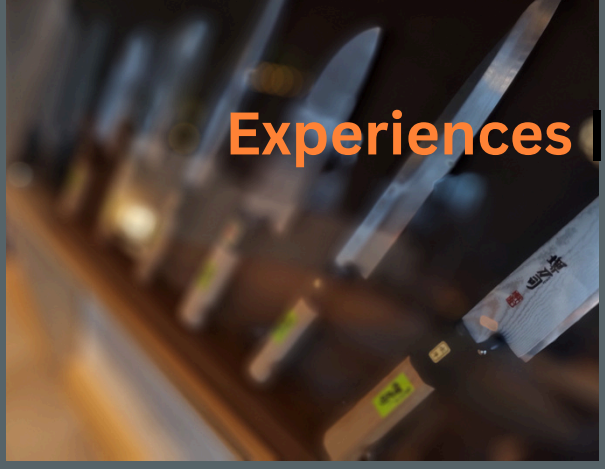
Sakai seemed fervently local. There were no buzzing streets with music and loud invitations, just quiet suburbia, families, a few hipsters, and of course other travellers. The hotel offers a buffet breakfast, and coming down to it on my first morning, I was surprised to see how many people were there not as guests of the hotel, but purely for the breakfast.

The adage is that you eat and shop where locals eat and shop, and if locals choose to spend a Sunday morning at Dorsett, you know the place is not only part of the community; Dorsett is a local spot.

Sakai used to be known for its swords, but now mostly for knives and cutlery. There are many blacksmiths and knife makers all in the district, and there is even a trail you can walk through the 'old city' which takes you through them. There is also a craft museum – *Sakai Traditional Crafts Museum and Knife Shop* or *Sakai Denshokan* – and if you don't get to visit any of the other blacksmiths or knife shops, this is a bit of a one-stop shop. You can learn, buy and browse here.







While I did the knife path, bought some knives and had trouble explaining to Japan Post the contents of my package to send back to Australia, I was also set for something else. Dorsett by Agora lined me up with something I did not expect.

Next door to their hotel is the Dolphin Dome, a dome for dolphins. While the Dolphin Dome offers experiences for those of all ages, I was in a group with about 10 kids all giggling and yelping excitedly. But then, after a few minutes, I realised too that I was also giggling and yelping excitedly, even more prominently than the kids because I have a deeper voice, probably. It seems I was among peers.

I will be frank and confess I cannot remember the names of the dolphins except one, Yuki, and maybe one more, Yumi. Or maybe they were the instructors' names. It was difficult to tell with all the kids calling their names. We got to do some tricks with the dolphins, pet them, and watch as they jumped and springboarded in the air fairly spectacularly. Dolphin skin feels like a squish ball, but a strong squish ball that can't actually be squished.

Then we got to take the dolphins 'for a spin', or, they took us for a spin. We held onto their fins and they swam us round the pool, quite quickly too. I felt like Aquaman, or Jason Momoa as Aquaman, or Aquaman as Jason Momoa (who knows who plays who really).

I was still giggling for a while after I left the dome, and walking back along the port walk I thought about what on Earth I had just experienced.

Take an intensely local city in Osaka, graffiti and small side streets, then put yourself in a grand sea view hotel, comfort and luxury and all. Visit the most renowned knife crafting region in the world, then go play with some dolphins. My few days in Sakai certainly had some surprises.

The author was a guest of the hotel. Book directly on https://www.agoradorsett-sakai.com/en/, and get up to 26 hours stay from check-in.

