

The Railway Museum

Japan's first rail service began on June 12, 1872, running 29km from Yokohama to Tokyo. There are now almost 29,000km of rails in Japan; the Tokyo commuter rail system has been called the eighth wonder of the world.

All of this and more are celebrated at the Railway Museum in Saitama. Opened in October 2007, this museum is the successor to the Transportation Museum operated in Kanda until mid-2006. The museum has features that will appeal to children and adults alike, railway buffs, as well as those seeking to while away a rainy day.

One fun aspect to the museum is the train simulators located just to the left as you enter. Wait your turn to drive a Yamanote Line and a Tokkaido Line train, or a Shinkansen. The very popular steam locomotive simulator is a unique experience available only by reservation. Sign up upon arrival, and then enjoy the other displays until your appointed time.

One could spend an entire day just exploring the museum's "History Zone." The dozen locomotives range from the very first steam locomotive to run in Japan,



More than a museum: simulators, interactive displays and steam locos in Saitama.

to a Class 9850 Mallet Steam Locomotive that has been cut away to reveal the internal workings, to a Series 200 bullet train. Sitting on a working turntable in the center of the hall is a C57, one of the most successful steam locomotives of the mid-20th century.

Among the 24 railcars on display are imperial carriages, freight cars, commuter trains, sleeper cars and inter-city passenger cars. Visitors are permitted to enter some of the latter models; it's not unusual to see "passengers" sit and eat a box lunch, or take a nap, just as one would when actually traveling.

There are interactive displays, as well as documentary film clips, interspersed throughout the zone. Signs are multilingual and the film clips are available in both Japanese and English. In the gallery above, an illustrated timeline in Japanese traces the development of rail travel in Japan and elsewhere.

Also on the gallery level is an expansive railway diorama model, a reference library and a collections gallery.

Facilities designed with children in mind include a kids' space full of train toys and two interactive learning halls—one on how train engines work and the other on the tasks of rail workers. Outside, on the museum grounds, are miniature operating trains.

There are two restaurants, two museum shops, and viewing decks for watching real trains, including the Shinkansen, as they pass by.

The Railway Museum is located at Tetsudo Hakubutsukan Station, a 3-min ride on the New Shuttle from Omiya Station. The museum operates from 10:00-18:00, and is closed on Tuesdays (unless a national holiday).



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