



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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Creative Cities Network

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Kobe

UNESCO City of Design



In the 1860s, Japan opened its five ports to other countries after its long period of “national isolation” that had lasted for over 200 years. The port of Kobe, one of the five ports, has actively introduced foreign cultures since its opening in 1868, aiming to become a gateway to Japan, with its enterprising spirit. This event has led to the current cultural diversity and a creative and open-minded lifestyle unique to Kobe. In 1995, Kobe sustained unprecedented damage in the Great Hanshin-Awaji earthquake. With the cooperation and participation of its citizens, the city has conducted the restoration process with a creative approach, to build a disaster-resistant city.

Fast facts

- Kobe is located on the central south coast of Japan. It is the 6th largest city in the country with a population of 1.5 million, an area of 550 square kilometers and a gross product of approximately 60 billion USD.
- Kobe is one of Japan’s leading centers of the fashion and apparel industries.

Community Designs

- Kobe enacted the “Kobe City landscape Ordinance” in 1978, the first of its kind in Japan, in order to protect one of its landscape’s main charms, the Rokko Mountains and the Seto inland sea. Since then, Kobe has created community designs with the aim to protect, develop and create attractive landscapes and townscapes in cooperation with its citizens. While restoring the city from the damage caused by the great earthquake, the city implemented design-conscious community recovery projects.

Daily Life Designs

- Since the port's opening, Kobe has actively introduced western cultures and superior technologies into the daily lives of its citizens through their enterprising spirit. As a result, aspects of the culture unique to Kobe, including jazz music, cinemas, golf and food. In order to make Kobe a city that can offer a lifestyle suitable for each resident's unique personality, while acknowledging the diversity of its culture, Kobe has established many opportunities for its citizens to interact with excellent designs for their spiritual enrichment.

Manufacturing Designs

- The city has capitalized on its fashionable culture-related industries including apparel, western style confectioneries, Kobe/western style furniture, pearls and non-leather shoes by embracing western lifestyles from other countries. These industries have continued to manufacture design-conscious, high value-added goods and products.

Design Events

- **Kobe Fashion Week**
Kobe organizes fashion design-related events in each urban area intensively before and after "Kobe Collection", Japan's greatest fashion show that attracts 10,000 attendees in total.
- **Kobe Design Festa**
To help its citizens to understand that design is close to their lives and to enjoy these designs, Kobe has organized a wide spectrum of design-related events. The Festa also acts as a hub for disseminating designers' daily activities in Kobe.
- **Green Design Contest**
In Kobe, civil activities to bring color to cityscapes and to the exterior of citizens' homes with flowers have long been popular, creating a beautiful cityscape. The city annually grants awards for excellent designs by holding the "Citizen's Flower Bed Contest" and "Kobe Cityscape Tree-planting Contest."





- **Design Renaissance Kobe Project**
This project is intended to conduct training in the form of manufacturing seminars by famous designers from Kobe's culture-related industries, aiming at the creation and dissemination of new Kobe designs.
- **Kobe Biennial**
This art festival is held in a very unique setting: shipping containers are used as an exhibition site, with each container transformed into an art gallery. This event is a good opportunity to share works of art and foster the artistic minds of the citizens of Kobe.

Major Design Institutions and Museums

- **Kobe Design University**
This university houses a wide array of departments such as Graphics, Fashion, Products, and Architecture. In spring 2008, a creative centre with a large atelier space and state-of-the-art equipment was completed.
- **NPO Kobe Design Association**
This association was inaugurated in November 2005. It has conducted activities that call upon a great amount of expertise and enthusiasm regarding the role of design for local communities, and proposes designs for the promotion of culture and economy.
- **Kobe Fashion Museum**
Opened in 1997, it is Japan's first public museum specialized in fashion. The museum is equipped with a library of 28,000 fashion-related books, an exhibition room designed to introduce clothing from various perspectives, a circular hall shaped like a UFO and a designer-participatory museum shop.
- **Kobe City Museum**
This facility opened as a museum in 1982, by renovating a bank constructed in 1935. The museum has since developed activities under the basic theme of "International Cultural Exchange - Cultural Contact and Change between East and West," annually attracting 400,000 visitors.
- **Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art**
This museum, established in the Kobe New Eastern City Centre "HAT Kobe" in 2002, houses more than 7,000 works of art. The facility was designed by Tadao Ando, one of Japan's finest architects.