



Catching Sakura: My 12 Days Self-Drive Itinerary through Sendai, Fukushima, Nikko, and Tokyo in Spring – Day 1

Description

The first 2 days would be spent in Sendai. We took a red eye flight and arrived via Narita airport in the early hours.

From Narita, we are taking the Keisei Skyliner to Ueno. The journey will take about 40-45 minutes.

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From the Keisei Ueno station, it's a short walk to JR Ueno station. The 2 stations are not connected but it is easy to navigate by following the signs.

We decided to do the transfer via Ueno versus Tokyo as we felt the crowd will be less (at least that's what I observed by researching online forums as well as watching various Youtube videos)

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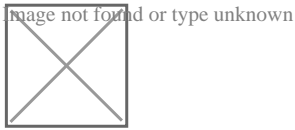
The Keisei Skyliner is reserved seats and is rather comfortable. If you are unsure about the purchase, you can do so via the counter instead of the self-help kiosk.

You can find out more about the timing and prices at their official website.

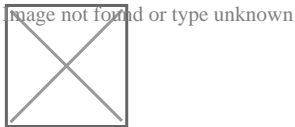
<https://www.keisei.co.jp/keisei/tetudou/skyliner/us/skyliner/index.php>

From Ueno to Sendai via Shinkansen will take about 1 hour and 30 minutes. It seems there are different type of train with slightly different speed. For the shortest trip, choose the one indicated as 'Hayabusa'.

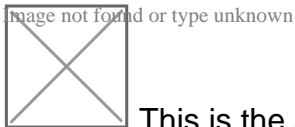
We opted for the green car which comes with more comfortable and spacious seats.



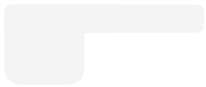
If you are travelling with big luggages, I highly recommend this option. With the luggage in front of me, I have little wiggle room left for my legs. But for 1.5 hours, it was still bearable.



This is my first time taking the Shinkansen and I looked forward to trying the train bento.



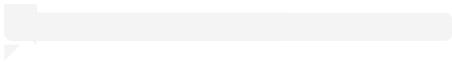
This is the self heating gyutan (ox tongue) rice that you will see often in many Youtube videos. It's taste was just okay. Not too bad but not crazy good. But I suppose it's an experience you should try at least once.



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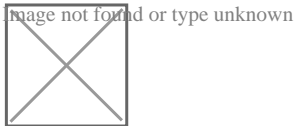
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There are actually plenty food kiosks prior to boarding so you can allow yourself a bit more time to shop around.



Once we arrive, we are headed straight to Toyota office to pick up our car. We did not loiter as we have lunch reservation. A lot of restaurants in Japan close after 2pm for afternoon break so I did not want to take any chance and miss my lunch.

Once exit from the train station, the Toyota shop banner is quite obvious so we just had to follow the sign.

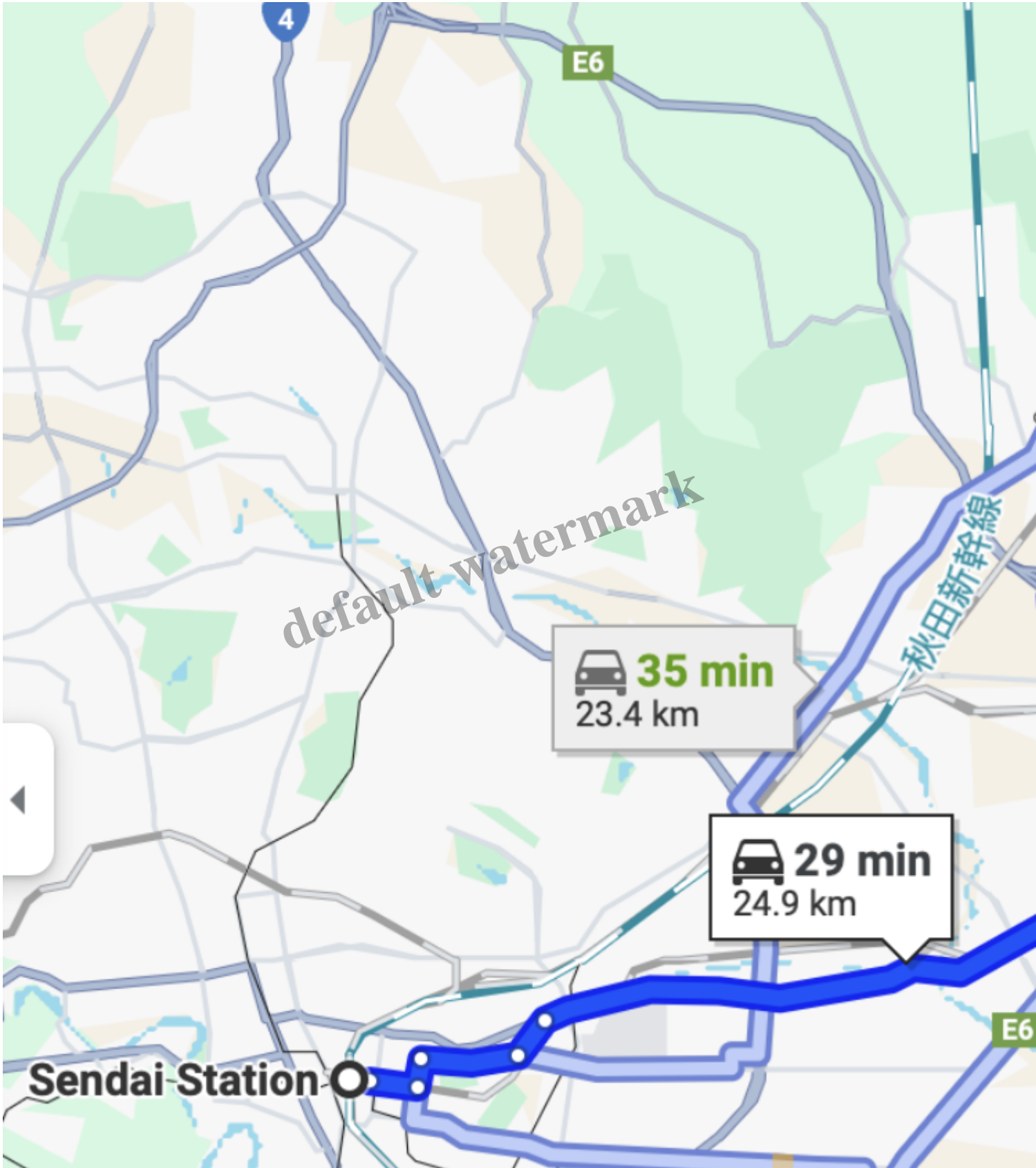
There's no road to cross and it was easy walking along the pavements.

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Lunch: Oysters Feast!

It was a quick 30-40 minutes drive from Sendai station to our lunch place: Matsushima Taritsuan Oysters and Conger Eel.



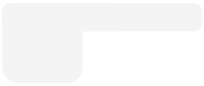
It's [rated 3.54 on tabelog](#).

The name of the shop is obvious, oysters and eel are what they are famous for.

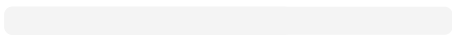
Now, you can probably walk in and get a table but the main reason why you should get a reservation in advance, it's because you need to get a seat with this view.



But unfortunately, sakura season is late this year. So we got to see this instead...



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There’s only 1 miserable cherry blossom tree to greet us at our very first stop. Makes me wonder if this will be the case for the entire trip.

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Ok, but the food is quite nice. I ordered the fried oyster set. I think the menu is seasonal also so certain special items may be available depending on the time of your visit.

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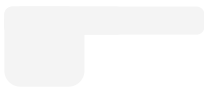


The eel rice is nothing to shout about. Overall, the price is on the higher side, consider that you are paying a premium for the view.

Another reason why we came here for lunch was because nearby, there is the Saigyo Modoshi no Matsu Park which blooms beautifully during Sakura season. But since the bloom is late for this area, there is no point going to the park.

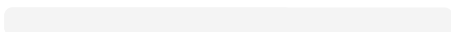
To be sure, we actually did drive to the park just to have a peep and it was still bare when we visited.

On the way back though, we randomly stopped by a pit stop and saw our very first sakura tree in its full glory. (the beauty of doing a self drive. you can hit the stop anytime and switch the itienary around to best suit your needs)



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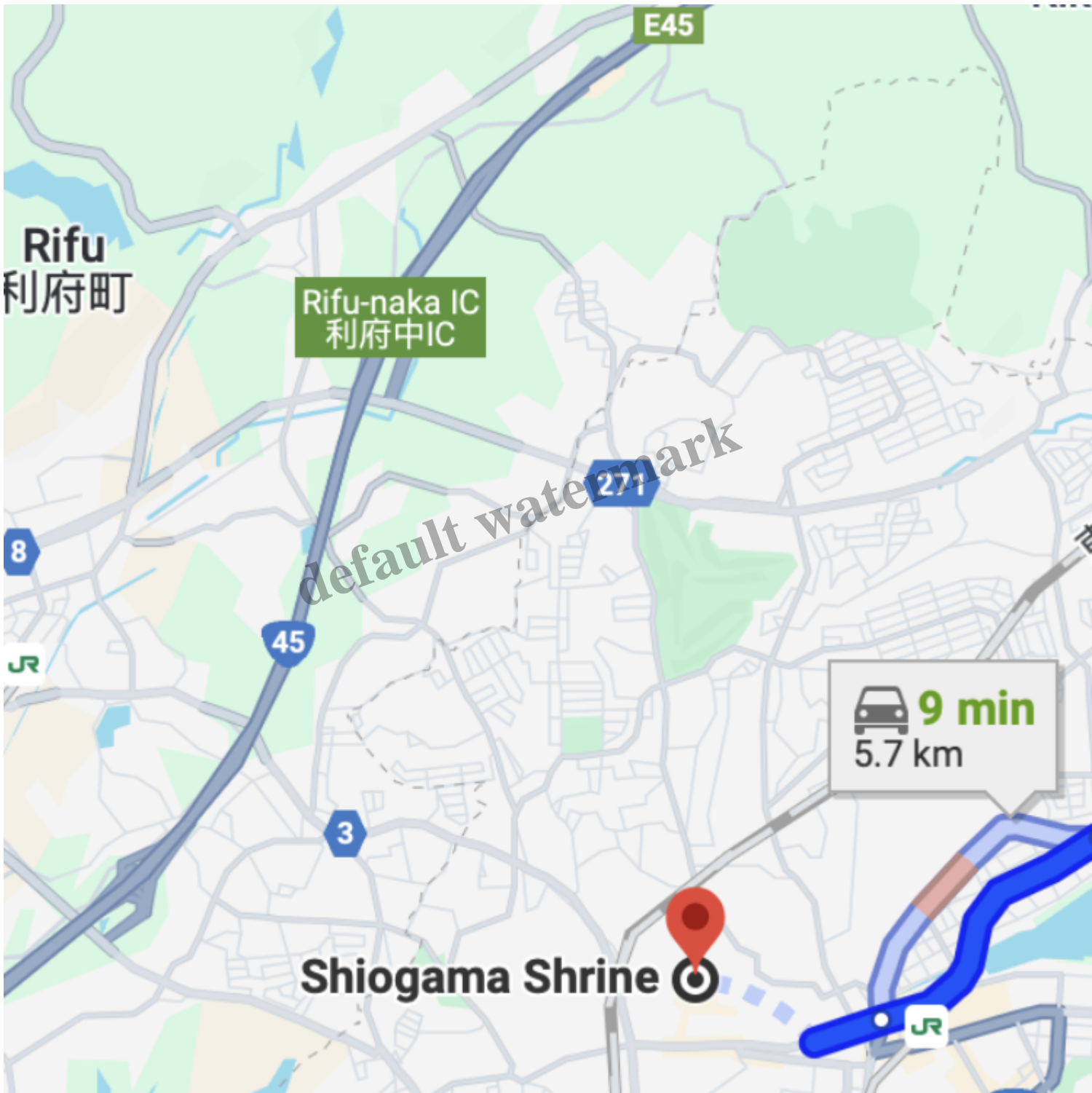


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We then headed back to the city towards our hotel. Before that, we stopped by another Sakura hotspot. – **Shiogama Shrine**.







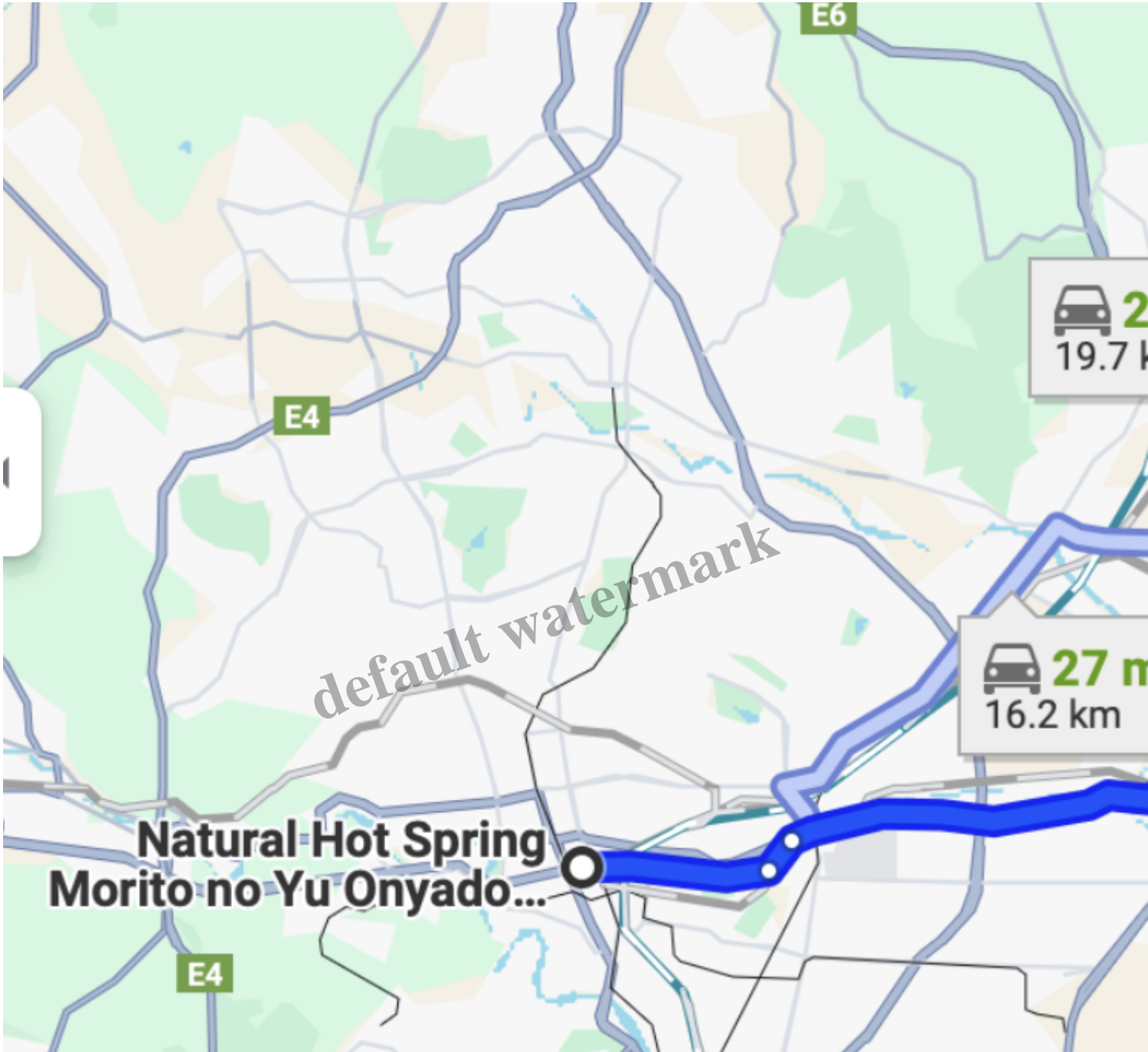


Its grounds are home to many varieties of blooming cherry trees including somei yoshino, weeping shidarezakura, and Shiogamazakura, nationally designated a Natural Monument.

There's also special illumination to light up the trees during peak Sakura season. For this place, we spent about an hour and left as most of the trees are not in full bloom yet.

I did marked this place to visit in the evening but due to distance and schedule, we have to give it a miss this time.

Check In Hotel – Natural Hot Spring Morito no Yu Onyado



For the next 2 nights, we will be staying in this hotel called Natural Hot Spring Morito no Yu Onyado. It's a rather convenient hotel with carpark next door and also convenient stores nearby.



The room is clean and decently sized. The hotel is overlaid with tatami flooring. You are to remove your footwear in the lobby and walk around the entire hotel in socks or barefoot only.



Customary free ramen

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Since the hotel is operated by the same folks of Dormy Inn, do not forget about the free ramen served every night from 9pm to 11pm.

After checking into the hotel and putting down our luggage, we did have some time to spare before dinner.

On the way to hotel, we passed by a park abuzz with activities so we thought to retrace our steps and visit the park and see what's happening.

The name of the park is called **Tsutsujigaoka Park**.

There is an entire stretch of food stalls and everyone is enjoying their picnic in the park. The whole atmosphere was festive and magical.

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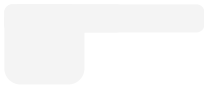




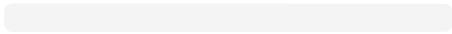


Dinner – Izakaya @ Cho-chomusubi

I made reservation for 8pm at this very popular Izakaya.



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It has a cozy setting and was packed with locals. The staff with their limited English, were still very welcoming and helpful as we navigated the menu.

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Ordered a cup of sake from their wide selection of spirits. It had quite a kick. (the bottle was for show only, i paid for that 1 small cup of sake)

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Through their recommendation and peeping at the tables left and right of us, we ordered a couple of items to share.

We are not exactly very hungry as we took some light bites at the food stalls earlier.

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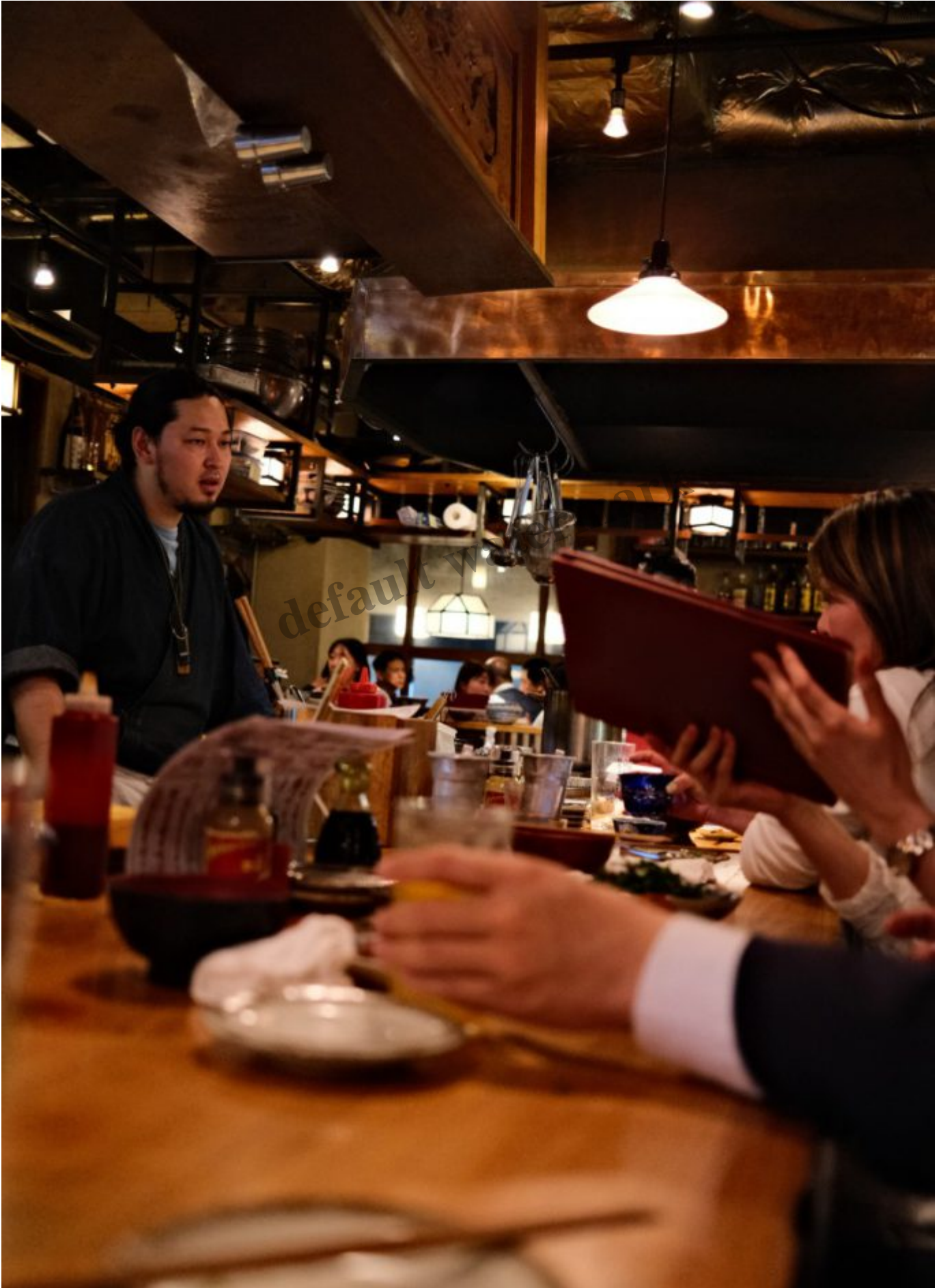






The entire room was lively (yet not rowdy). There was a good amount of interaction between the patrons and the staffs. Seems like most are regulars.

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The star of the show was the Irori grilled fish on sticks. The meat is succulent and full of umami.

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The food is of good quality and from memory, the price is decent too. If you come Sendai, I highly recommend a visit.



After dinner, we headed back to hotel for onsen and rested for the night. We have a long day ahead tomorrow.

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Read about the rest of my trip here!

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