

HOKKAIDO SHINKANSEN

It was more than a year ago, in fall 2014, when we introduced the Hokkaido Shinkansen (bullet train) in our bulletins.

Well, it seems that the time has finally come.

On March 26, 2016, the first ever *shinkansen* (bullet train) to Hokkaido has officially started its operation. We had the opportunity to explore the area, to give you a brief introduction of what these places has to offer!

The Eve: Friday, March 25, 2016



(photo above) Kanemori Red Brick Warehouse in Hakodate, humbly illuminated at dusk

After our arrival, we headed straight to Kanemori Red Brick Warehouse, where all the pre-launch events were held. Kanemori Red Brick Warehouse is a row of red brick warehouses, built more than a century ago. While many of the warehouses are now used for shops, restaurants and event facilities, some of the warehouses are still used for their original purpose.

A special stage was set up at Hakodate Bay area in front of the Warehouse, and around the stage were taiko (Japanese drum) performances taking place. As it started to get darker, the performances ended, and some of the most prominent people with connections to Hokkaido, including the Governor, lined up on the stage to give a short speech, before pressing the buttons to start the projection mapping on the warehouse wall.



(photo above) Projection mapping on the brick wall of the warehouse

Leaving Sapporo in the morning of Friday on the special express Super Hokuto, we arrived at Hakodate Station a couple hours into the afternoon. The station was preparing itself for the launch of shinkansen; Hokkaido's first-ever bullet train was to start its operation the next day.

Hakodate in general is a very popular tourist destination within Hokkaido for both Japanese and for people from overseas, for its historical importance, fresh local seafood, hot springs, and other attractions. However, it seemed that the station was more crowded than usual weekends, presumably due to the shinkansen launch. Countless amount of banners and posters celebrated the launch, painting the station in green, lavender, and white – the three Hokkaido shinkansen colours.



(photo above) Hokkaido Governor Harumi Takahashi, Hokkaido Assembly Speaker Ren Endo and several others line up to press the start button for the projection mapping.

The projection mapping, shown on the left photo, was specially created for this particular occasion – to celebrate the launch of the Hokkaido Shinkansen. It shows the Hokkaido shinkansen running through cities in Tohoku region and Southern Hokkaido area in different seasons, with depiction of events such as Aomori Nebuta Festival to introduce the different local specialties. The background music is Glay's "Supernova Express 2016" which was composed in celebration of the shinkansen reaching Hokkaido.

The evening was brought to an end with a series of fireworks at the bay. As we saw the fireworks with hundreds of people gathered around the bay area, we could only get more excited about seeing the green train in person.

And the Day Finally Comes: Saturday, March 26, 2016



(photo above) This 170-yen commemorative ticket was required to enter the Shinkansen platform at Shin Hakodate Hokuto Station.

(photo right) "Hakodate Liner", a new train service connecting Hakodate Station and Shin Hakodate Hokuto Station, introduced on the same day as the shinkansen

We headed to Hakodate in the early morning of this very special day. In order for us to see the shiny, brand new train, we first needed to go to Shin Hakodate Hokuto Station – one of the newly built stations with a special platform to welcome the shinkansen trains into Hokkaido.

To get to Shin Hakodate Hokuto Station, one must take the train named Hakodate Liner from Hakodate Station. Hakodate Liner is another new line of train that was put into action on this very same day, and we saw quite a few people at the platform, trying to take photos of this train.



Upon our arrival at Shin Hakodate Hokuto Station, we soon realized that this was where everything was happening. The station was flooding with people – not only visitors, but people from various organizations and municipalities, holding goodie bags in their hands to hand out to the said visitors, all in a very celebratory mood, painted in green and lavender colours. We then searched for the platform where we can see the shinkansen in person, and stumbled upon a line of dozens of people under a banner that said “Entrance Fee”.



(photo above) The bilingual display panel shows the arrival/departure times of the shinkansen trains.



(photo above) The brand new Hokkaido Shinkansen! Dozens of people gathered here to take a shot or two of this beautiful, shiny face.

As it turns out, all visitors were permitted entrance to the platform without a shinkansen ticket in hand, provided they purchase a special entrance ticket priced at 170 yen (approx. 2 dollars). With the tickets in hand, we went down to the platform and waited for the arrival of Hokkaido Shinkansen. As the shiny green body appeared into the station, many people gathered at the end of the platform to take photos of the “face” of this brand new train.

Now that the shinkansen has arrived in Hokkaido, there is one more way in which people on the main island can visit Hokkaido. As a Hokkaido resident, I certainly hope this train brings not only people but livelihood especially to the southern parts of Hokkaido!



(photo above) The brand-new Shin Hakodate Hokuto station, designed to welcome the Hokkaido Shinkansen



(photo above) Famous figures including the governor and the comedian duo Taka and Toshi on stage, pressing the buttons to fire the silver ribbons at the Hokuto Omotenashi Matsuri

♡ Special Encounters ♡



(photo above) A very rare species of shinkansen found at Hokuto Omotenashi Festival which, when we saw them again later, evolved into a 7-person train.

(photo right) Hokuto City’s official character, “Zushi-Hokki”, modelled after Hokki sushi (Hokuto City is well-known in Hokkaido for its Hokki-gai, a species of clam). Zushi-Hokki has been slowly acclaiming fame not just within Hokkaido but also within the country for its rather peculiar looks, being called “kimo-kawaii” (disgusting but cute). I could not take a photo with him, but he was also at Hokuto Omotenashi Festival. Below is a pinned badge I received in a goodies bag.



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(photo below) Myself posing with my most favourite mascot character from Hokkaido, Kyun-chan, modelled after a pika wearing an ezo deer headcap. Kyun-chan even put his little right foot out to pose with me for the photo!

