

Sightseeing on the Hozu River

Navigating the sharp turns and rapid currents of the Hozu River requires a specialized boating method with boatmen in three positions: the *kaihiki*, *kajimochi*, and *saosashi*. The *kaihiki*, or rower, sits toward the front of the boat; the *saosashi* stands at the bow with a long bamboo pole (*sao*) to push the boat away from rocks; and the *kajimochi* is positioned at the back of the boat, where he can control the rudder (*kaji*) and make course corrections.

As fewer and fewer goods were transported on the Hozu River, the boatmen shifted from moving cargo to moving people. The river became a popular destination for visiting royalty, in particular members of the British royal family. In 1881, Prince Albert Victor (1864–1892), grandson of Queen Victoria, rode down the river with his younger brother George (1865–1936), who would later become King George V of England. King George's son, Prince Edward VIII (1894–1972), himself visited in 1922, and several more members of the royal family have visited since. Purportedly, they regarded a trip down the Hozu River as being second only to visiting Mt. Fuji. In 1901 and 1902, renowned British photographer Herbert Ponting (1870–1935) captured the Hozu River boatmen as they ferried passengers down the river, and along with the repeated royal visits, these photographs brought international attention to the area.

A trip down the Hozu can be made at any time of the year. Cherry blossoms decorate the ravine in spring, and scores of Japanese maples color the mountainside in autumn. The spray of the rapids offers relief from the heat in summer, and in winter, a trip through the icy waters is made cozy by warm stoves and tents arranged on the boats.