

Former Moji Mitsui Club

The Former Moji Mitsui Club's lavish design reflects the wealth of mercantile companies during the early twentieth century, when Moji was a major port of trade. Its half-timbered architecture and opulent, European-style interior are examples of the cultural fusion that was commonplace in this thriving international port city. The building was completed in 1921, and the following year it hosted renowned physicist Albert Einstein (1879–1955) during his tour of Japan.

The club was built for the employees and guests of Mitsui & Co., Ltd., a trading company founded in 1876. The building originally stood next to the local branch manager's office in the mountainside district of Tanimachi, to the east of central Moji. In 1949, the structure was bought by Japanese National Railways, and it ultimately passed into the care of the city in 1990. Shortly thereafter, it was moved to its current location near Mojikō Station.

European Flair Both Inside and Out

The building's facade reflects a European architectural influence that was prevalent in the early 1920s. The exposed timbers, slate roof, and textured mortar walls are all evocative of German design, and the asymmetry of the gabled windows is a notable departure from Japanese convention. However, the building is not wholly European in design: the smaller, single-story annex on its north side, with a tiled roof and plaster walls, is distinctly Japanese. This secondary building is used by the club staff.

The club's interior reflects the same European style. The entryway has a stained-glass transom window showing a ship in full sail, a hint at the club's maritime origins. The entryway leads to an elegant sitting room with an ornate mantelpiece and chandelier. To the right is a parlor, complete with a grand piano, that is used for events and recitals. Both rooms are furnished in an Art Deco style, as seen in the ceiling reliefs, marble fireplaces, and decorative mantelpieces.

The first floor has a restaurant serving local specialties such as puffer fish sashimi and baked curry and rice (*yakikarē*).

The Einsteins' Visit

For its first 27 years, the Moji Mitsui Club was also a guesthouse, and the second floor had Western-style rooms. Albert Einstein and his wife Elsa (1876–1936) stayed in a second-floor suite for five days during their 43-day tour of Japan in 1922. By the time Albert reached Moji, the final and longest stop on the tour, he was exhausted. Writing in German, he left this account in his travel diary: “I was dead, and my corpse traveled back to Moji, where it was dragged to a Christmas mass and made to play violin for the children” (*Ich aber war tot, und mein Leichnam führ nach Moji zurück, wo er noch in eine Kinderweihnacht geschleppt wurde und der Kindern vorgeigen musste*).

The Einstein Memorial Room suite has been redecorated as it was during the couple’s stay. There is a handwritten letter by Albert and a photo of him holding the violin he played at the childrens’ Christmas mass.

Remembering Hayashi Fumiko

The second floor has several rooms dedicated to Moji-born author Hayashi Fumiko (1903–1951). Born to unwed parents and raised in poverty, Fumiko wrote stories and poems about disadvantaged people in society, especially women. The exhibits in these rooms cover several major periods of her life, including memorabilia from the years before she moved to Tokyo, early editions of her novels, postcards she wrote as a teenager, and a Parisian travel diary from 1932. There are posters from the film adaptations of her works and a replica of the writing desk she used in her later years.