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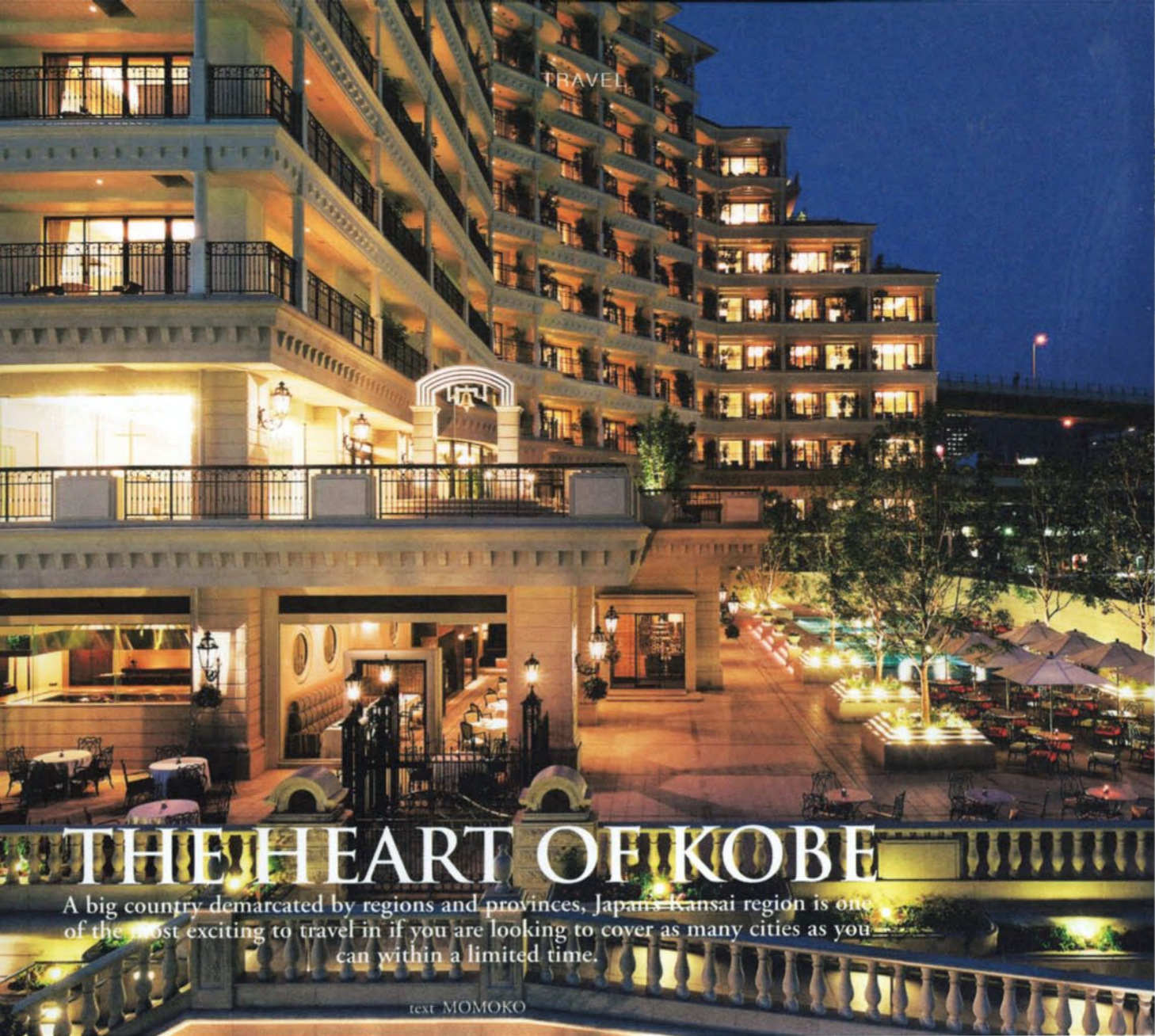
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TRAVEL

THE HEART OF KOBE

A big country demarcated by regions and provinces, Japan's Kansai region is one of the most exciting to travel in if you are looking to cover as many cities as you can within a limited time.

text MOMOKO

La Suite Kobe is a prestigious member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World. For more information or reservations, visit www.slh.com.



Each city in Kansai stands out with something noteworthy. For instance, Kyoto is known as the historical city of Japan, Osaka is the "kitchen of Japan", and Kobe is famous the world over for its prized Kobe beef.

With each city easily accessible by train within a matter of minutes, a Kyoto-Osaka-Kobe trip comprises the best of traditional and modern Japan for travelers in search of all there is to see, all there is to do, and all there is to buy or eat.

In Osaka, the natives take pride in being the bubbliest lot in Japan where food takes centre stage and the general attitude towards life is a lighter approach. This is somewhat in contrast to their Kobe neighbours who are known to adopt a more sophisticated air. This information was verified by a Kobeian who explained that the city used to be a trading port with the west, hence heavily influencing the locals' etiquette even to this day.



Given their close proximity, Kobe is a natural choice with many Osakans when they are looking for a short getaway.

With its unassuming classiness and European inspired theme, Kobe seems to be seeped in romance throughout the year and more so during winter. It is also a shopper's paradise ruled by two major shopping outlets - the Mitsui Outlet Park Marine Pia that overlooks Akashi Kaikyo Bridge - the longest suspension bridge in the world, and Kobe Sanda Premium Outlets.

Other majored activities are centered around the harbour front where Kobe Port Tower is located along with some of the best hotels in the city. Where it's calm during the day with occasional sightseeing boats cruising the waters, at night, the harbour comes to life with a myriad of colourful lights from the tower and surrounding establishments.

To enjoy the scenic view, Hotel La Suite Kobe Harbourland is the obvious choice as it directly faces the port tower. Every room has an ocean view and an accessible terrace where you can laze and enjoy a cuppa while being caressed by the ocean breeze.

The surprising thing about La Suite is that it is more than your average luxury hotel. Although not part of a large international brand, its services far exceed many of them.

The moment you enter the hotel, an attentive staff will pick up your luggage and bring it to the front desk where you do your check in. Guests are given a choice of complimentary amenities to choose from ranging from a full range of miniature size skin care products to other grooming necessities. This is especially thoughtful as some guests might have just arrived from the airport and would appreciate these amenities for a quick refreshing.



One can also tell from the set up that La Suite is very big on sensory experiences. No expense is spared on the in-room entertainment what with a large flat screen TV that can be swiveled to face different corners of the room, a DVD player, a dodecagon shaped speaker that projects sound in 12 directions and a large Jacuzzi bath with TV. The attention to detail doesn't stop there as they provide not just a hair dryer, but a hair styler as well for the ladies' grooming needs and a perfume spritzer in the bathroom.

The sensory experience overflows from the guest rooms out into the restaurants and other facilities. The teppanyaki restaurant Kokoro is well known with the local media and reservations are definitely recommended at this 12-seater restaurant. Every seat is laid with Hermes crockery of a unique design to reflect undivided attention to each guest. The cooking is an art in itself as the chefs moved swiftly and confidently with each toss and flip of the spatula. At Kokoro, you can enjoy the finest Kobe or Tajima beef which doesn't come cheap but will certainly not break the bank. The name "Kokoro" means 'heart' and you can really tell that they truly do serve with their heart.

If you have a little time to spare or just to put the icing on the cake, La Suite's spa is a must try as it not only indulges the body, but also the soul as they make it a point to pamper all five senses.

