

The History of Seibu in Photos (Part 2)

III Business Expansion and Renewal Period (1950–2003)

The Expanding Leisure Business

Leisure in Japan changed, becoming a social phenomenon, and Seibu creates affluent, happy times

1950

Changes in the culture of leisure

Until the 1940s, the majority of Japanese workers were employed in agriculture and other primary industries. Subsequently, they were overtaken by workers in secondary industries as economic growth accelerated, speeding the influx of population to urban areas and driving a rapid increase in the so-called “salaried men” population of white collar employees. Workers’ disposable incomes also rose around this time, and the way people used the free time they were allotted began to change in many ways. One of those was leisure activities.

It was also around this time that golf went from being an accomplishment of a limited wealthy class to the classic pastime of the ordinary salaried men. The Seibu Group played a major role in the spread of golf’s popularity, having long owned golf courses in Hakone and Karuizawa that offered a place for salaried men from the city to play.

White collar households also found themselves with relatively longer summer and winter holidays. It was in the 1950s and beyond that families got into the habit of using this time off to enjoy leisure activities together.

In 1957, the Seibu Group opened Oiso Long Beach in the Shonan district of Kanagawa Prefecture, offering families a place to enjoy their leisure time. The enormous pool by the seashore was so impressive that many people still think of it when they think of summer in Japan.

The Naeba International Ski Area (now the Naeba Ski Area), which opened in 1961, became one of Japan’s most

well-known ski resorts between the 1970s and 1980s, and marked the flowering of Yoshiaki Tsutsumi’s capabilities.

The Seibu Group was in part responsible for creating Japan’s rich culture of leisure, and central in sustaining it. That is how deep the relationship between leisure and Seibu runs.

Creating Smiles

Leisure brings smiles to many. It not only adds color to peoples’ everyday lives, but offers an incentive to work and a richness of emotion.

The Seibu Group’s approach to leisure involved more than simply building new facilities, showing people how to enjoy them, and turning them into popular phenomenon. It went beyond mere recreation to incorporate suggestions for leading a healthier life.

Following the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, a greater awareness of health spread nationwide, and into the 1970s, fitness clubs opened everywhere. In 1974, the Seibu Group opened the BIG BOX Takadanobaba Seibu Sports Plaza, in Tokyo’s Shinjuku Ward. With convenient, direct access to Takadanobaba Station, it played a role in creating the weekday, after-hours fitness lifestyle.

The Seibu Group continued to be sensitive to changing times as leisure activities diversified, constantly looking for the best way to pursue customer satisfaction, and remaining involved in businesses that would eventually tie into its latter-day slogan, “Smiles Ahead.”



Sengokuhara Golf Course (now the Daihakone Country Club), which opened in 1954



The Manza Onsen Ski Area, which opened in 1956



Hakkeijima Sea Paradise, opened in Yokohama in 1993

Naeba Ski Area



Naeba International Ski Area (now the Naeba Ski Area) opened for business in 1961

In 1987, the movie “Take Me Out to the Snowland” was an enormous hit. The movie was filmed at Shiga Kogen Yakebitaiyama Ski Area and Manza Onsen Ski Area, and featured the Prince hotels in both locations. The Seibu Group’s ski resorts were an essential part of skiing’s huge popularity at the time.

Located within easy reach of Tokyo, Naeba Ski Area was close enough to enjoy day-trip skiing, and was popular with busy white collar workers. Its many slopes, designed around the Naeba Prince Hotel and accessible by everyone from beginners to advanced skiers, were another reason for its popularity.

In 2001, Seibu installed what was then the world’s longest ski lift, at 5,481 meters, between Naeba and the adjacent Kagura Ski Area. Known as the “Dragondola” (or the Naeba–Tashiro Lift), it offered access from Naeba to the ski areas at Kagura, Mitsumata and Tashiro, which were then operated collectively under the name “Mt. Naeba.”

Karuizawa 72 Golf



Beautiful white birch saplings at Karuizawa 72 Golf, around the time of its opening

In 1956, the Minami Karuizawa Golf Course (now part of the Iriyama Course) opened with nine holes. Later, in 1971 it began operating as Karuizawa 72 Golf. Today, it has expanded to 108 holes across six courses north, south, east and west, offering the enormous scale and access to nature that only Karuizawa can provide. In August of each year, it hosts the NEC Karuizawa 72 golf tournament on the LPGA of Japan tour, which has become something of a summer tradition in Karuizawa. With convenient transportation from the metropolitan Tokyo area, and access to the nearby Seizan Golf Course and Karuizawa Asama Golf course, it now forms a major golf resort.

Near the golf courses are hotels, shopping centers, ski areas, spas and other facilities, and eventually this major resort area transformed into the Prince Grand Resort Karuizawa, where three generations of families can enjoy a variety of activities throughout every season of the year.

Oiso Long Beach

The Seibu Group has many facilities in Kanagawa Prefecture, and representative among them is the Oiso Prince Hotel, alongside of which is Oiso Long Beach. With its ideal location fronting the Pacific Ocean, this complex of swimming pools was often used for filming swim meets and other television programs during Japan’s peak pop idol years of the 1980s. It is also well-known for its use of promotional models, a practice that began in 1979. The bold concept of offering an experience distinct from ocean swimming by placing a pool just a stone’s throw from the beach captivated the young people of the time.



Oiso Long Beach in the 1960s