Nature and the Outdoors

Right near the center of Japan, Matsumoto City. To the west lies the Chubu Sangaku National Park and the Northern Alps, which with 9 peaks over 3,000 m, beckons mountain climbers. To the east lies the Utsukushigahara Highlands, the widest plateau in Japan, from which to view Mt. Fuji. What’s more, one of the most outstanding mountain backdrops in Japan, Kamikochi, is there, and a bus can take you all the way up to the highest mountain road in Japan, located in Northern Highlands at a height of 2,700 m. Matsumoto holds an abundance of nature’s spectacles and beauty.

Kamikochi - Kappa Bridge

Kappa Bridge is the symbol of Kamikochi, an area with some of the most majestic mountain views in Japan. Enjoy the beautiful scenery of the changing seasons, from the view of the Azusa River as you stand atop the bridge, to the noble towering peaks of the Hotaka Mountain Range.

To protect the environment, private vehicle access to Kamikochi is restricted.

Kamikochi - Taisho Pond

Mt. Yakedake (2,455m), which is still smoking today, was formed overnight when it erupted in 1915 and disrupted the flow of the river. On a clear day, you can take in the tranquility of the Taisho Mountain Range reflected on the surface of the pond. Depending on the season and time of day, the weathered trees standing in the pond create a mystical sight. Moonlight fills the starry sky in the jet-black night, and other picturesque scenes show various sides of the area, drawing in an ever-expanding number of visitors.
Norikura Highlands

At the south of Kamikochi lies the Norikura Highlands, stretching out from the foot of Mt. Norikura’s east side (3,028 m). A road runs up to 2,700 meters, just below the summit, and is accessible by public transportation. In the summer, it hosts Japan’s most famous hill climb racing event, the Norikura Hill Climb. Natural hot springs erupt on the mountainside, and you can bathe in the unique milky-white waters at various lodging facilities. This area has it all—10-meter-high snow walls, beech forests and alpine flowers, colorful leaves in the fall, clear starry skies, waterfalls and ponds, various nature trails, and camping. In the winter, skiing and snowshoeing is also available. It was reestablished as Japan’s first Zero Carbon Park in 2007 and is dedicated to sustainable tourism.

Onsen (Hot Springs)

Matsumoto City has 16 hot springs, from the edge of downtown to deep in the mountains, where you can unwind from your travels with high-quality hot spring water. Hot spring inns also provide guest rooms with open-air baths, which are popular with visitors who want to enjoy the hot spring baths in privacy. The Azama and Utsukushigahara Hot Springs are both easily accessible from the city center, and the Shirahone Onsen is famous for its white hot spring water.

Utsukushigahara Highlands

Located at an elevation of 2,000 meters, the Utsukushigahara Highlands are the most expansive highlands in the country. Various trekking courses cross the land, and the view from the top gives a 360° panoramic view of the surrounding mountains, including Mt. Fuji, the Northern, Central, and Southern Japan Alps, Mt. Yatsugatake, and Mt. Asama when the weather is clear. It is possible to reach the summit by vehicle, and the Tour de Utsukushigahara is held on that same route at the beginning of summer. Don’t miss the view from the road of over 200 varieties of alpine plants in bloom throughout the seasons.

The snow corridor

From late May until the end of June, you can take a bus up to Norikura’s Snow Valley situated at an altitude of 2,800 m. Popular activities include walking along the 10-meter-high walls of snow and spring skiing.

Activity

There are many activities that allow you to fully enjoy the four seasons of the Northern Alps, such as snowshoeing and shower climbing.
Matsumoto Castle

One of the five castles designated as National Treasures, Matsumoto Castle was constructed over 400 years ago during the Warring States Period and currently boasts the oldest five-tiered, six-story castle tower in Japan. In harmony with the surrounding nature, the castle’s beauty awes visitors throughout the seasons. It is most famous as a cherry blossom spot in the spring when the cherry trees around the moat create tunnels of flowers, but seeing the castle among the summer green, fall colors, and winter scenery is popular as well. From sunset to 10 p.m., the castle tower is illuminated, allowing you to enjoy a fantastic view at night, too. The castle is surrounded by a moat, which is rare in Japan, and you can see the castle's reflection in the moat's water.

Nakamachi Street

Kura, traditional storehouses characterized by their black-and-white, crisscross-patterned walls, line this road. Surrounding you with the atmosphere of a castle town, the shops here offer handicrafts and folk crafts. In addition to restaurants and pubs selling regional sake made with local ingredients, chic cafés and confectionery shops with unique themes have been popping up left and right.

Nawate Street

The uncommon shops that line this street give the area a retro feel. Take a leisurely stroll down this pedestrian-friendly street, located just in front of Yohashira Shrine, any day of the year. A frog god is enshrined here, and the area is known as a sacred place for frogs. Music performances, markets, and other events are also held here regularly.
Matsumoto City Museum of Art
Matsumoto is the hometown of world-renowned artist, Yayoi Kusama. Some of her early works that aren't on display anywhere else are shown in her permanent exhibit. Her largest piece in the world, the massive field sculpture "The Visionary Flowers," sits on display at the front of the museum. A 2.5-meter-tall yellow pumpkin with black polka dots is one of 2019's signature pieces.

Japan Ukiyo-e Museum
The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum holds the world's largest collection of ukiyo-e woodblock prints, which were collected over 200 years by one of Matsumoto's wealthy merchant families. Pieces carefully chosen from that collection are on display.

National treasure Former Kaichi School
The former Kaichi School, founded in 1873, is one of the oldest schools and a national treasure. It was converted into a museum in 1965 and now displays teaching materials from the Meiji period (1868–1912). It is a Quasi-Western style architecture that conveys the atmosphere of the arrival of Western civilization.

Local Springs
Cold, pristine water from the surrounding peaks around Matsumoto wells up throughout the city. Visit the different springs and listen to the babbling sounds of the water.

Nightlife in Matsumoto at a bar
Matsumoto is also well-known for its bars. You can enjoy delicious drinks at one of the many stylish bars in the city that have been renovated from traditional Japanese warehouses.

Experience program
You can experience Japanese culture that will remain in your travel memories. You can also experience the history of Kimono, Samurai, Ninja, Rickshaw, and tea culture such as making soba noodles and temari candy.

Soba Noodles
Matsumoto is famous for soba. Among them, "Tofu soba" is a unique type of soba. Place some noodles in a small basket and dip them briefly into a hot pot full of mushrooms and other seasonal vegetables right before eating.

Fruits
The significant temperature differences between day and night coupled with plenty of sunlight makes Matsumoto's fruits, such as apples and grapes, splendidly sweet and juicy. Varieties developed right in Nagano Prefecture have also gained popularity.