

100

EXPERIENCES IN JAPAN



Japan.
Endless
Discovery.

EXPERIENCE YOUR *Passions*

Japan is a land overflowing with unforgettable adventures: hands-on experiences that are distinctively Japanese; unique sites that tell a powerful story; and local immersive encounters that will stimulate the senses, stir the heart, and leave impressions, which will stay with you long after you return home. This pamphlet is a curated guide to one hundred such experiences, inviting you to delve deeper into the country and its culture.

The destinations catalogued within comprise seven categories of Tradition, Outdoors, Cuisine, Cities, Nature, Art, and Relaxation, representing the areas of greatest interest to visitors, as well as those at which Japan and its people uniquely excel.

The Japanese archipelago stretches from north to south, east to west, and is home to a remarkable variety of regional cultures, natural splendors, and

man-made wonders both old and new. It is a place where you can keenly and profoundly feel the passage of time— both through the ages from the past to the present, and in the moment, with each of its four distinct seasons bringing with it new sights to behold, delicacies to savor, and activities to enjoy.

Let this booklet lead you off the beaten path to idyllic villages, virgin forests, ancient temples, modern art museums, lush gardens, fine restaurants, and more. Let it guide you deep into Japan's heart and soul, where you will not merely admire sights that have been seen countless times before, but interact with local residents, immerse yourself in their culture, and form lasting memories.

If the information within serves to make your journey to Japan a deeper and more memorable experience, nothing would give us greater pleasure.



TRADITION



OUTDOORS



CUISINE



CITIES



NATURE




ART



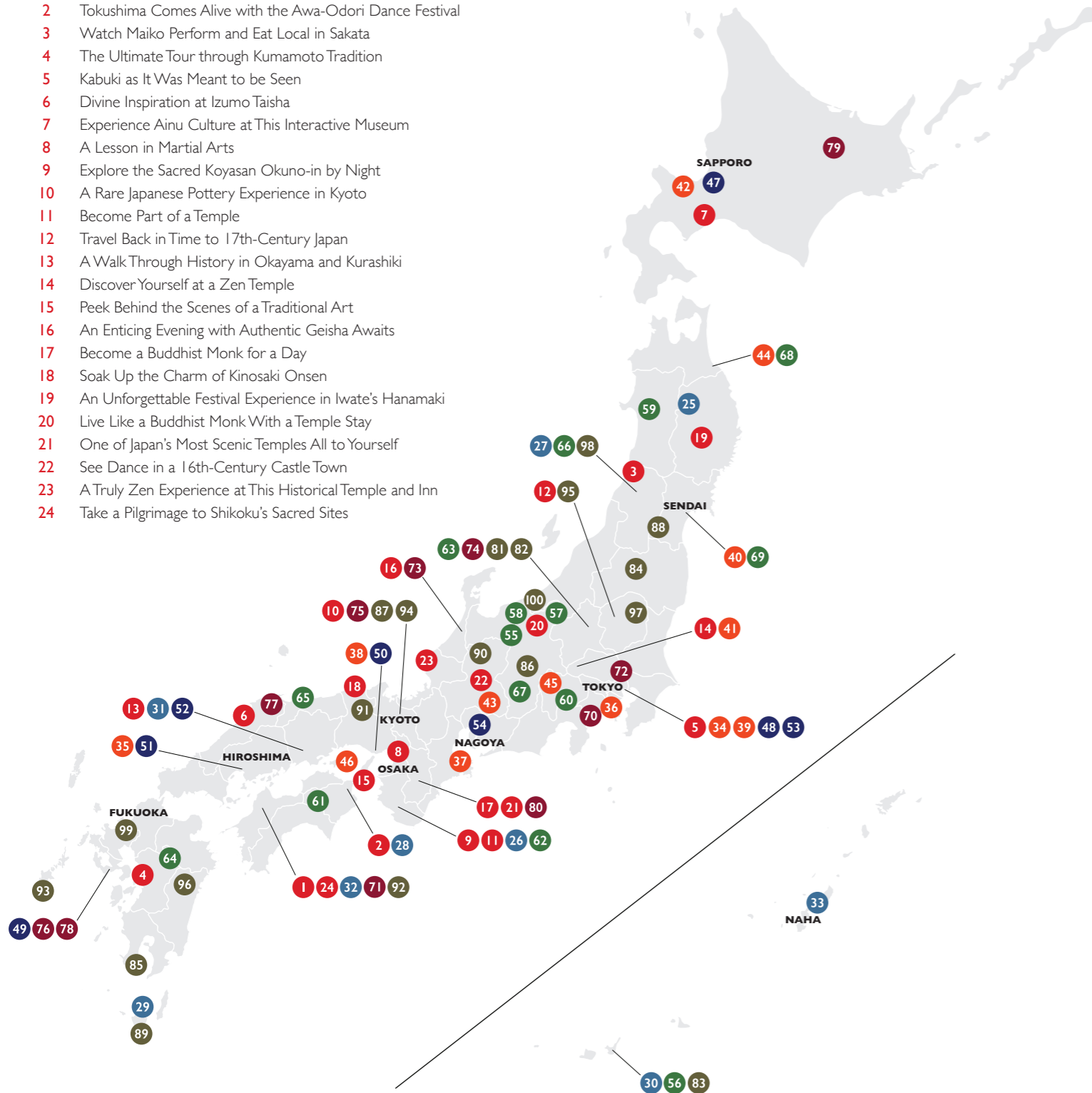
RELAXATION

100

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PASSION:
Tradition

Japan is a nation with a strong connection to its past. Bearing witness and taking part in some of these countless traditions will help you discover the essence of Japan. Whether at remote shrines or in historic cities, this rich cultural heritage is worth engaging first hand. From the multi-day pilgrimages of the Shikoku henro—a journey featuring as many as 88 temples—to hands-on experiences crafting distinctive raku pottery, take in the spirit of Japan and its people with all five senses.



01

Get Spirited Away at Dogo Onsen

Relax with a rejuvenating soak in one of Japan's oldest hot springs

Any trip to Ehime Prefecture should include a stop at Dogo Onsen Honkan, one of the oldest hot springs in Japan. Fans of Japanese animation may recognize the façade—it's said Dogo Onsen Honkan inspired the bathhouse in an award-winning film by one of Japan's most prestigious anime studios. Inside, you'll discover a labyrinth of hallways,

rooms, and staircases. The tatami and wooden designs make you feel as if you've been transported back in time. Dogo Onsen Honkan mixes water from 18 different springs to ensure the perfect temperature for your bath. The mix is slightly alkaline, making it ideal for even the most sensitive skin. Health benefits and relaxation await you in these soothing waters.



Dogo Onsen Honkan 道後温泉本館

5-6 Dogoyuno-machi, Matsuyama-shi, Ehime-ken

<https://dogo.jp/en/>

02

Tokushima Comes Alive with the Awa Odori Dance Festival

One of Japan's most famous festivals draws over a million people to cheer on (and take part in) a parade of colorful dancers



The Awa Odori (Awa Dance) is one of Japan's most exuberant dance festivals. It dates from the 16th century, and though its exact origins are unclear, it includes ties to the bon-odori, the summer dance that takes place throughout Japan. And though Awa -Odori performances also take place in various areas, nowhere is it celebrated with more enthusiasm than Tokushima. Over a million visitors make their way to this city to witness—or take part in—the dancing. Every year, from August 12- to 15, the city streets come alive with beating drums, stomping geta clogs and high-spirited calls of "Yattosa!" and "Yatto yatto!" as a seemingly endless parade of groups perform before a crowd of enthusiastic onlookers. The dancers wear traditional peaked straw hats, and move to the music of a folk song brought from

Kyoto by indigo merchants. The electric atmosphere and infectious energy must be experienced to be believed. If you're unable to visit during festival time, when you can watch from the spectator seats or join one of the groups open to non-professionals, there are daily performances at the Awa Odori Kaikan. Besides noon and evening dances (guests can join in for the latter), museum displays describe the history and traditions of the dance.

Awa Odori
阿波踊り
Tokushima-shi City Center, Tokushima-ken
<https://discovertokushima.net/en/topics/awa-odoridance/>



03

Watch Maiko Perform and Eat Local in Sakata

A harbor town teahouse with culture and atmosphere preserved since the Edo period

Travel to the city of Sakata in northern Yamagata Prefecture and find Somaro—an Edo-period (1603-1867) teahouse that offers locals and tourists alike the chance to slip back to Japan's olden days. Just minutes from the shores of the Mogami River and Sea of Japan, enjoy traditional maiko performances at a venue formerly open only to the most



esteemed guests. Marvel at the historical white storehouse that survived the 1894 Shonai Earthquake, and has since been designated by the Japanese government as an Important Cultural Property. Make a reservation and visit Somaro Maiko Teahouse for a luxurious lunch and experience what it was like to be an Edo-period VIP. Dine on local delicacies such as eel or chirashi (scattered) sushi. Feast your eyes on exquisite performances of traditional dance put on by authentic apprentice geisha. Art aficionados are encouraged to stop at the neighboring Yumeji Takehisa Museum of Art to enjoy nihonga illustrations of women said to have pioneered the stylistic features in classic manga.



Maiko Chaya Somaro Takehisa Yumeji Museum
舞娘茶屋相馬樓 竹下夢二美術館
1-2-20 Hiyoshi-cho, Sakata-shi, Yamagata-ken
<https://www.somaro.net/englishhome>

04

The Ultimate Tour through Kumamoto Tradition

Practice archery like a samurai, drink matcha tea, and enjoy a sake tasting at a heritage brewery

Spend a day in Kumamoto City experiencing Japanese culture and tradition with a JTB Global Marketing & Travel tour—from samurai martial arts to leisure activities, all with a certified English-speaking guide. You will visit a dojo to practice the ancient art of kyudo archery, a spiritual discipline believed to reveal the soul of the archer. Your master

instructor will teach you the proper etiquette and techniques unique to kyudo, before you test your newfound skills by shooting some arrows. The tour includes multiple chances to stimulate your taste buds. In Kawashiri Town, with its well-preserved historic streetscapes, you'll enjoy a lesson in making the traditional sweets known as wagashi using uniquely Japanese ingredients like sweet bean paste. Once your creation is ready, savor it with some quality matcha green tea. You'll also visit Zuiyo, one of the oldest sake breweries in Kumamoto City. Here you'll learn how to create enticing brews and sample the different kinds of sake at an exclusive tasting.



JTB Global Marketing & Travel Inc.
株式会社JTBグローバルマーケティング&トラベル
1-1 Tetorihon-cho, Chuo-ku, Kumamoto-shi, Kumamoto-ken
<https://www.viator.com/tours/Kumamoto/Kumamoto-Samurai-Experience-Tour-4-Hour-Charter-Plan/d50823-2142P987>

05

Kabuki as It Was Meant to Be Seen

Experience this colorful, dynamic, and timeless art at its home theatre in Tokyo

Kabuki, one of Japan's most celebrated traditional performing arts, dates back more than 400 years. It is said to be based on a dance performed on the banks of the Kamo River in Kyoto. Since then, Kabuki has become a stylized art involving makeup, costumes, and stories that has entertained



©SHOCHIKU Co., Ltd./KABUKI-ZACo., Ltd.

people since the Edo Period (1603-1867). Kabuki has experienced a resurgence in popularity in modern times, and different plays are put on monthly at Ginza's renovated Kabukiza (Kabuki Theatre). Kabuki can be enjoyed with a single act or an entire performance. The set design, stage, and colorful backdrops are complicated and intricate. Audience members are often impressed by the kakegoe, a distinctive vocal call; some spectators call out to the actors, bringing the viewer closer to the performer. While all kabuki plays are performed in Japanese, it can be enjoyed with an understanding of the plot.



©SHOCHIKU



©SHOCHIKU

Kabukiza Theatre 歌舞伎座

4-12-15 Ginza, Chuo-ku, Tokyo-to

🌐 <https://www.kabukiweb.net/theatres/kabukiza/>

07

Experience Ainu Culture at This Interactive Museum

The living traditions and unique history of Hokkaido's Indigenous people

The seaside town of Shiraoi is home to Upopoy National Ainu Museum and Park, a national center dedicated to the history and culture of Hokkaido's indigenous Ainu people. Set on the shores of Lake Poroto amidst abundant natural beauty, Upopoy offers visitors the opportunity to learn about the Ainu worldview, which has a reverence for nature.

The National Ainu Museum, located within Upopoy, is Japan's northernmost national museum and the first one dedicated to Ainu culture. What's more, the museum's exhibitions are presented from an Ainu perspective. Experience the culture through hands-on experiences. Cook and taste authentic Ainu cuisine, or play a melody on traditional Indigenous instruments. Visitors can also learn about meaningful Ainu designs through wood carving and embroidery. Visitors may also see traditional Ainu dance. With immersive experiences, insightful exhibits, and dining venues serving traditional fare, this singular destination just one hour from Sapporo is sure to please the curious traveler.



©Courtesy of The Foundation for Ainu Culture



©Courtesy of The Foundation for Ainu Culture



©Courtesy of The Foundation for Ainu Culture

Upopoy (symbolic space for ethnic harmony)

ウポポイ (民族共生象徴空間)

2-3 Wakakusa-cho, Shiraoi-cho, Shiraoi-gun, Hokkaido

🌐 <https://ainu-upopoy.jp/en/>



©Main Structure, Oracle Hall, Bronze Torii Gate

The Izumo Taisha Grand Shrine in Shimane Prefecture is one of Japan's oldest and most important Shinto shrines. It is visually famous for its classic shrine architecture and the huge shimenawa sacred rope that marks a dwelling place of the gods. The

06

Divine Inspiration at Izumo Taisha

Step off the beaten path and onto sacred grounds in rural Shimane

shrine is dedicated to Okuninushi, a deity associated with marriage and relationships. The shrine dates back at least to the Kojiki, the ancient chronicle written in the early eighth century. The current shrine buildings, however, were constructed in 1744 and are designated a national treasure. The highlight of the year is the Kamiari Festival, which takes place over the course of a week, usually in November. This is when the eight million gods of Japan gather at the shrine to hold matchmaking discussions. Unlike most festivals in Japan, it is a somber affair so as not to disturb the meetings. Note to shrine visitors: Prayers here are conducted with two bows, followed by four claps—as opposed to the usual two claps—and one bow.



©Hall for sacred dances

Izumo Oyashiro 出雲大社 (いづもおおやしろう)

195 Kitsukihigashi, Taisha-cho, Izumo-shi, Shimane-ken

🌐 <https://www.izumo-kankou.gr.jp/english/4760>

08

A Lesson in Martial Arts

Dress like a samurai and learn to wield your sword like one of the warriors of ancient Japan

The Japan Tate-do Association Yotsubashi Dojo in the heart of Osaka City offers lessons in the traditional styles of sword fighting like an actor in a samurai film. Tate is the art of theatrical sword-fighting that is used by movie and stage actors. "Do" refers to a traditional set of moral principles followed by practitioners of various Japanese arts. Participants choose from a wide variety



of outfits, learn proper etiquette, and engage in martial arts training. Finally, the "newly trained samurai" take part in a theatrical swordfight with enemies played by professional actors, to a realistic background of sound effects. Highly qualified instructors ensure that the exciting reenactment takes place safely, while giving participants the thrill of an actual battle. Visitors to the Tate-do training area can also enjoy watching expert "samurai" face off in an epic sword fighting show or try knife-throwing like a ninja.



Japan Tate-do Association Yotsubashi Dojo

日本殺陣道協会四ツ橋道場

3rd Floor, Imai Bldg., 1-1-27 Kitahorie, Nishi-ku, Osaka-shi, Osaka-fu

🌐 <https://osaka-info.jp/en/spot/japan-tate-do-association/>

09

Explore the Sacred Koyasan Okuno-in by Night

A spiritual world awaits at one of the most magical and sacred sites on the Henro pilgrimage

The precincts of the Koyasan temple complex in northern Wakayama are fascinating enough by day, but after sundown they become even more intriguing and magical. Soak up this history and mystique on a night tour with a licensed guide through the Okuno-in, one of



Koyasan's most sacred sites. You'll be treated to stories about Kobo Daishi—also known as Kukai, the founder of this well-known collection of temples—see his mausoleum, and learn the story of his life along with the basic tenets of Shingon Buddhism. In Shingon Buddhism, Kobo Daishi is believed to rest in eternal meditation, praying for the peace and happiness of all sentient beings.

This curated walk highlights aspects of the sacred site that travelers often miss on unaccompanied visits, such as the symbolism of the memorials and their shape, Buddhist funeral culture, and other traditions. Expect to be entertained with fascinating stories and legends, both spooky and silly, all provided in English.



AWESOME TOURS 株式会社 AWESOME TOURS

497 Koyasan, Koya-cho, Ito-gun, Wakayama-ken

<https://awesome-tours.jp/en/>

11

Become Part of a Temple

From tourist to temple lodger: Experience Koyasan life like a monk

In the lush, misty Kii mountains of Wakayama prefecture stands the awe-inspiring Buddhist temple site of Koyasan, founded over 1,000 years ago.

Koyasan is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the most important spiritual locations in Japan. Long a draw for worshipers, Koyasan has since unveiled an even more enlightening experience in the shape of its popular temple lodging option.

For a stay of one or more nights, you can live



just like the full-time monks who serve guests and prepare meals. Enjoy the subtle simplicity of shojin ryori (Buddhist vegetarian cuisine), served to overnight guests in the evening and again the following morning. You can also meditate and pray with the monks at the morning ceremony, which usually starts around 6:00 a.m.



Koyasan Shukubo Association 高野山宿坊協会

600 Koyasan, Koya-cho, Ito-gun, Wakayama-ken

https://en.visitwakayama.jp/venues/venue_6/

10

A Rare Japanese Pottery Experience in Kyoto

Make your own Raku ware tea bowl under the guidance of an artisan at the Shoraku Kiln

The Shoraku Kiln is nestled in the hills of Kameoka City on the outskirts of Kyoto. It specializes in making Raku ware, the stylized tea bowls used in the tea ceremony. Raku ware artisans mold the clay rather than throw it, raising the edges a little at a time until the bowl fits comfortably in the hand. The



slightly uneven shape of the completed bowl embodies the wabi-sabi aesthetic, and they are a favorite of tea ceremony practitioners. Artisans at the Shoraku Kiln offer lessons to aspiring potters, teaching them to make their own Raku-style tea bowl using the methods passed down over the centuries.

The three-and-a-half-hour workshop teaches participants to shape the clay into a bowl-like shape, and—after drying it for about one hour—cutting it into the final shape. Workshops are limited to one group per day, and participants can also take part in a traditional tea ceremony.



Shorakugama 昭楽窯

2-4 Dogatani Higashibetsuin-cho Kamihara, Kameoka-shi, Kyoto-fu

<https://shorakugama.com/en/>

12

Travel Back in Time to 17th-Century Japan

Experience life in the Edo period at this theme park for history-loving people of all ages

Nikko is a tourist destination famous for its splendid natural scenery, historic temples and shrines, and relaxing hot springs. There are also many fascinating, though lesser-known sights and activities for visitors of all ages. Edo Wonderland Nikko Edomura is a cultural theme park, a recreation of the streets of the



©edowonderland

Edo period (1603-1867), when samurai and other residents of Edo went about their daily business.

Edo Wonderland Nikko Edomura is not just a visual attraction. Visitors can dress in the kimono styles of various classes of citizens and interact with other Edoites as they stroll through the streets of what Tokyo was like centuries ago. A variety of programs for children are also available, including ninja and samurai experiences.

Visitors can learn about the work of 17th-century firefighters, wander through a mechanical ninja maze, or try their hands at a variety of cultural arts and activities. Numerous performances and events take place throughout the day, making visitors wonder if they've truly traveled back in time.



©edowonderland



©edowonderland

Edo Wonderland, Nikko Edomura 江戸ワンダーランド日光江戸村

470-2 Karakura, Nikko-shi, Tochigi-ken

<http://edowonderland.net/en/>

13

A Walk Through History in Okayama and Kurashiki

This walking tour covers a magnificent castle, historic gardens, a traditional district, and a celebrated museum of Western art.

Enjoy a one-day walking tour through the cities of Okayama and Kurashiki.

On a visit to the remarkable tower of Okayama Castle, originally completed in 1597, an English-speaking guide will teach participants about traditional castle architecture. This is followed by a visit to the Japanese garden



Korakuen, which boasts over 300 years of history, and other Okayama highlights. Tour members who walk down the willow-lined, riverside streets of the historical Kurashiki Bikan quarter will feel as if they traveled back in time. This was a crucial trading center, and the streets are lined with distinctive white-walled storehouses with black tile roofs. Many of them date back to the Edo Period (1603–1867), and have been converted to stylish cafes and shops. The tour includes a visit to the Ohara Museum of Art, the first collection of Western art in Japan, and other Kurashiki sightseeing spots.



otomo Inc. otomo株式会社

1 Ekimoto-machi, Kita-ku, Okayama-shi, Okayama-ken

<https://contents.setouchitrip.com/okayamacnt/okayama20/>

14

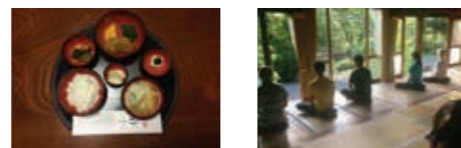
Discover Yourself at a Zen Temple

Live like a monk and meditate in serene natural surroundings

Experiencing the life of a Buddhist monk is an interesting opportunity for travelers who want a deeper exploration of Japan, and themselves. Shogakuji temple in Saitama offers overnight meditation retreats called Shukuhaku Zazen and single day visit zazen lunches. Shogakuji has welcomed visitors from over 28 countries to participate in zazen, a form of seated meditation, and sutra copying, known as shakyo. Feel the beauty of nature as you kneel on tatami mats and gaze out the window, letting



your mind wander in soulful contemplation. Hold the brush and feel its soothing rhythm as it moves across the paper. Your overnight retreat, including two contemplative zazen sessions and two shojin ryori meals, can be reserved up to five days ahead. People with dietary requirements, such as vegans, vegetarians, and those who cannot consume pork or alcohol, will welcome the temple's shojin ryori, the traditional Buddhist cuisine made without meat or seafood.



Shogakuji Temple 正覚寺

2326 Kaminaguri, Hanno-shi, Saitama-ken

<https://fukuouan-shougakuji.jimdo.com/english/>

15

Peek Behind the Scenes of a Traditional Art

See puppets come to life in a stunning show combining drama, music, and artisanship

On Awaji Island, located in the Seto Inland Sea, the traditional puppet theater of Ningyo-Joruri has delighted audiences young and old for over four centuries. Today, you can enjoy Ningyo-Joruri at the Awaji Ningyo-za, a theater overlooking Fukura Bay on the southern tip of Hyogo Prefecture's Awaji Island. Multilingual audio guides and pamphlets make this



fascinating performance accessible to people from across the world.

Awaji Ningyo-Joruri is a National Intangible Cultural Property of Japan. Each 45-minute show features a narrator who chants a story enacted by the puppets to the accompaniment of shamisen music. From the rise and fall of the narrator's vocals to the plaintive strains of the shamisen, every aspect of this dynamic performance art engages the senses. Backstage tours are available for visitors who would like to see the puppets up close.

Among the performers at Awaji Ningyo-za is shamisen player Maestra Tsurusawa Tomoji, a "living national treasure." A monument dedicated to her life stands just outside the theater.



Awaji Ningyo-za Theater 淡路人形座

1528-1 Fukurako, Minamiawaji-shi, Hyogo-ken

<https://awajiningyoza.com/other/en/>

16

An Enticing Evening with Authentic Geisha Awaits

Kanazawa's largest teahouse offers guests the refined traditions of Japanese hospitality

Veteran geisha will welcome you into their world of traditional tea house culture at Kaikaro, a stunning teahouse in Kanazawa's historic Higashi Chaya district. Designated as a national cultural asset, the area's traditional architecture dates to the early 19th century and is characterized by two-story wooden

buildings fronted by beautifully carved lattices.

With a history of over 200 years, the Kaikaro is the largest teahouse here. Hanako Baba, the English-speaking house proprietress, leads a group of elegant entertainers. The geisha will treat you to a tour-de-force performance of traditional song and dance, while the proprietress provides commentary to aid your understanding of the lyrics and movements.

After this cultural experience, you can enjoy authentic Kanazawa cuisine with a multicourse meal featuring local seasonal ingredients. Don't be surprised if you see edible gold leaf on your plate—it's a symbol of the historic wealth of the Kaga samurai lords.



©artexinc.



©artexinc.



©artexinc.

Geisha Evenings in Kanazawa 芸者イブニングス運営事務局

1-14-8 Higashiyama, Kanazawa-shi, Ishikawa-ken

<http://www.geishaevenings.jp>

17

Become a Buddhist Monk for a Day

Experience the Buddhist lifestyle firsthand in a temple with over 1,000 years of history

Gyokuzoin temple is a hidden gem tucked away in the hills of Nara Prefecture. Located in Kongo-Ikoma-Kisen Quasi-National Park, this Buddhist sanctuary offers breathtaking views of Mt. Shigi and its seasonal colors.

Gyokuzoin was founded over 1,000 years ago and features impressive Japanese Buddhist architecture including a magnificent main hall, all set within verdant, beautifully manicured grounds. Among its highlights is the Great Jizo, a 14.5-meter-tall statue of the guardian bodhisattva. Visitors with an interest in Buddhist tradition can participate in Goma purification prayer rituals, sutra copying, tracing of Buddhist images, and zazen meditation. Shukubo overnight stays are also available. Guests stay in one of Gyokuzoin's traditional Japanese-style guest rooms and enjoy shojin ryori, a Buddhist vegetarian meal,

in a tranquil setting. Mornings offer breathtaking views of the serene landscape outside the window, which can only add to the sense of mindfulness beyond the cares of the material world.



©Shigisan Gyokuzo Temple



©Nara Ikaruga Tourism Waikaru

Shigisan Gyokuzoin Temple

信貴山大本山 玉蔵院

2280 Shigisan, Heguri-cho, Ikoma-gun, Nara-ken

🌐 <https://gyokuzo.com/en/>

19

An Unforgettable Festival Experience in Iwate's Hanamaki

Massive numbers of mikoshi shrines will enchant you at this otherworldly celebration

The city of Hanamaki in Iwate Prefecture, northeastern Japan, offers an engaging historical adventure. In addition to gorgeous nature and soothing hot springs, you'll find a festival noted in Guinness World Records. The Hanamaki Matsuri (Hanamaki Festival)

has a history of over 400 years, starting in 1593 under the auspices of Kita Shosai, the founder of the city.

During the festival, over a hundred mikoshi are paraded through the city streets. Admire the glorious floats, experience folk arts, and marvel at kagura, a culturally important Shinto dance. The festival atmosphere will stay with you for a lifetime. Visitors are even encouraged to join and help shoulder the mikoshi and dance along to the music.

The festival takes place from Friday to Sunday on the second weekend of September.



©Hanamaki City



©Hanamaki City



©Hanamaki City

Hanamaki Festival

花巻まつり実行委員会事務局

Kamicho, Hanamaki-shi, Iwate-ken

🌐 <https://www.kanko-hanamaki.ne.jp/en/event/>

18

Soak Up the Charm of Kinosaki Onsen

Don a yukata and explore this ultimate hot spring resort destination

Tucked away in a lush mountain valley in San'in Kaigan National Park, Kinosaki Onsen is an ancient hot spring town exuding nostalgic charm. This Kansai oasis in Hyogo Prefecture is the perfect spot to escape the city in summer and warm up in winter.

Watch bathers clad in traditional cotton yukata robes stroll along the willow-lined canal, illuminated by lanterns. Admire historic



IROHA Yukata Shop & Rental

浴衣レンタルいろは

449 Yushima, Kinosaki-cho, Toyooka-shi, Hyogo-ken

🌐 <https://visitkinosaki.com/tour-packages/yukata-rental-in-kinosaki-onsen/>

architecture in the town's streetscapes. Enjoy free access as an overnight visitor to seven public baths within walking distance of the town's center.

Kinosaki Onsen's traditional ryokan inns provide guests with their own yukata and geta clogs. For a more personalized touch, head to IROHA Yukata Shop & Rental for a variety of high-quality yukata—from brightly colored floral fabrics to more subdued and modern geometric patterns.

Those looking to explore the area further can pop into one of the town's retro arcades, or catch a gondola up to pray to the guardian of the sacred waters at Onsenji Temple.

20

Live Like a Buddhist Monk With a Temple Stay

Experience new ways to meditate alongside monks at a historic temple in Nagano

Welcome to Zenkoji, one of Japan's great Buddhist temples. This sanctuary in Nagano Prefecture has a history of over 1,400 years and was a place of worship for notable samurai including Oda Nobunaga and Tokugawa Ieyasu. Zenkoji also prides itself in being non-



denominational, a rarity in Japanese Buddhism. Visitors can stay for a night and participate in the temple's rituals. You will stay in Yakuoin, one of the temples within the Zenkoji compound. Spend your evening exploring the temple, and wake up early to participate in "o-asaji," the sunrise rituals. Listen to the bells and chants to center yourself in meditation. Gaze upon the gorgeous lapis lazuli and gold interior of the main hall to reflect on your time.

After a meal break, you will deepen your spiritual connection. You can try "shakyo," transcription of Buddhist sutras for meditative purposes, and "zazen," Zen-style meditation. The experience includes authentic Buddhist vegetarian meals and English-speaking guides.



Zenkoji Yakuoin

善光寺薬王院

657 Motoyoshi-cho, Nagano-shi, Nagano-ken

🌐 <https://yakuoin.jp/activity/>

21

One of Japan's Most Scenic Temples All to Yourself



8th century, when Nara City to the north served as Japan's first capital. This hillside sanctuary has traditionally been known as a place of healing but it's also supremely picturesque—it has eye-popping views of the cherry blossom forests of Mt. Yoshino which explode in color in springtime.

After closing hours, a monk will take you on an exclusive tour of this magnificent site. Highlights include the thousand-armed Senju Kannon statue enshrined in the octagonal Hakkaden Hall, which dates to the Edo period (1603–1867). You'll learn about the temple's history, don traditional dress, take part in a Buddhist prayer session, and receive a good-luck talisman. Group reservations are also welcome.

In the stillness of night, a sacred and ethereally beautiful experience awaits

If you have ever wanted to experience a Japanese temple without the crowds, Tsubosaka-dera in Nara Prefecture offers a magical and exclusive experience with a deep dive into history and spirituality.

Tsubosaka-dera temple traces its history to the



Tsubosaka-dera Temple 壺阪寺

3 Tsubosaka, Takatori-cho, Takaichi-gun, Nara-ken

https://nara-experience.com/detail/index/247&ml_lang=en

23

A Truly Zen Experience at This Historical Temple and Inn

A traditional Japanese inn located next to Eiheiji Temple offers Zen Buddhist aesthetics and meditation practice to its visitors.

Visitors looking to find inner peace are welcome to a stay at the Hakujukan hotel, set in an ancient forest in Fukui Prefecture. This traditional Japanese inn is located just outside the gate of Eiheiji, a vast temple complex that is the home of the Soto school of Zen Buddhism.



©hakujukan

This remarkable location allows guests to enjoy time-honored Japanese hospitality with a distinctly Zen twist. The hotel's Zen concierge can arrange attendance at morning zazen meditation sessions at the temple. He is also able to answer questions on meditation techniques, arrange lectures on Zen practices, and lessons in sutra copying. The Zen influence is part of the dining experience at Hakujukan, where the restaurant offers traditional Buddhist vegetarian fare created by chefs trained in the temple cuisine.

The hotel offers all the modern amenities in a classic Japanese setting, including a spacious bath facility with an open-air section. A Zen garden and library are ideal spaces for meditative thought or simple relaxation.



©hakujukan



©hakujukan

Hakujukan hotel of Eiheiji Temple 永平寺 親禪の宿 柏樹閣

6-1 Shihi, Eiheiji-cho, Yoshida-gun, Fukui-ken

<https://www.hakujukan-eiheiji.jp/en/index/>



Gujo Hachiman is a beautiful town in the mountains of Gifu Prefecture renowned for its rivers, canals and waterways, and its lively bon dance festival.

In the Edo period (1603–1867), Gujo Hachiman was a major stopover on the route connecting Nagoya to the Sea of Japan. Visitors will find that its cultural heritage established by craftsmen, artists, and merchants lives on today. The town is a veritable time capsule, with streetscapes,

22

See Dance in a 16th-Century Castle Town

Experience a timeless corner of Japan in the mountains of Gifu Prefecture

architecture, and a traditional lifestyle sure to enchant the traveler.

Marvel at elegant Gujo Tsumugi woven silks and Gujo Honzome dyed in striking indigo hues, or put on your yukata robe and experience the Gujo Odori—a 400-year-old summer dance festival considered one of the most culturally important of its kind in Japan. It's held for 31 nights between July and September, with all-night revelry for four nights in mid-August. Visitors can enjoy the festival with the help of Sugi Interface, a tour providing all the essentials to get in on the merriment. Participants will learn how wear a yukata robe, the basic steps of the dance, and a guide will be there to lead them into the dance circle.

Gujo Hachiman's town center is pleasantly compact and can be comfortably explored on foot or by renting a bicycle.



Sugi Interface 杉インターフェイス

72-21 Hachiman-cho Shimadani, Gujo-shi, Gifu-ken

<https://sugi-interface.studio.site/2-1-1-1-1-1>

24

Take a Pilgrimage to Shikoku's Sacred Sites

A four-hour journey through three temples in Ehime Prefecture

For those seeking a spiritual adventure away from Tokyo, Shikoku is a must visit. The Shikoku Pilgrimage (Shikoku Henro) features 88 temples related to the great Buddhist monk Kobo Daishi. While the full trip can take from 30 to 60 days, this tour brings you to three temples: Jodo-ji, Hanta-ji and Ishite-ji, numbered 49, 50, and 51 on the pilgrimage, respectively.



Jodo-ji is a Shingon Buddhist temple dating back to the 15th century. Its main hall, an Important Cultural Property, houses a wooden statue of the monk Kuya Shonin. Founded in the 8th century, Hanta-ji offers a breathtaking panoramic view of Matsuyama Castle, Matsuyama City, and the Seto Inland Sea. Finally, Ishite-ji temple, also established in the 8th century, boasts the majestic Niomon gate, a National Treasure, and other Important Cultural Properties.

Don't worry if this is your first pilgrimage. You're sure to emerge from the experience with a deep knowledge of Japanese history and the Buddhist spirit.



Matsuyama Trekking 松山はいく

K-13 Building 5 Floor, 3-9-3 Sanbancho, Matsuyama-shi, Ehime-ken

<https://experiences.travel.rakuten.com/experiences/20478>



PASSION:
Outdoors

Japan's natural wonders offer exhilarating activities sure to leave an impression on the wandering traveller. Go diving in pristine ocean waters, or venture deep into incredibly biodiverse forests on the island of Yakushima. Take on the thrilling challenges such as the world popular Shimanami cycling route—a 70-kilometer course spanning the course of six islands. You can experience a fusion of Japanese tradition and real outdoor thrills with timber rafting on the Kitayamagawa river. With so much to do, you won't have time to catch your breath!

25

Fly Down Snowy Slopes in the Backcountry of Tohoku

Ski and snowboard incredible powder snow on scenic Mount Hachimantai this winter

The northern region of Tohoku is rich with offerings for winter sports. The centerpiece of the area is the vast Towada-Hachimantai National Park, with many locations for backcountry skiing.

Backcountry skiing affords off-the-beaten-path sights sure to make your trip especially memorable, and the views and powder in the Hachimantai side of the park are some of the best in Japan. The experienced staff are certified in both guidance and avalanche tracking, but the route is advanced so it is only recommended for veteran skiers.

The tour starts with a snowcat journey to heights kissed by virgin snow. Blaze your own trail as you glide down the mountain. Swap your skis for a snowboard for extra excitement. Your guide can take pictures of



©CLUBMAN MOUNTAIN GUIDE



©CLUBMAN MOUNTAIN GUIDE

Guide & Lodge Clubman

ガイド&ロッジ クラブマン

2-712-2 Matsuoyoriki, Hachimantai-shi, Iwate-ken

https://www.tohokukanko.jp/en/attractions/detail_2044.html

you, too, if you bring your own memory card. The tour is offered seasonally, from late January to early March.

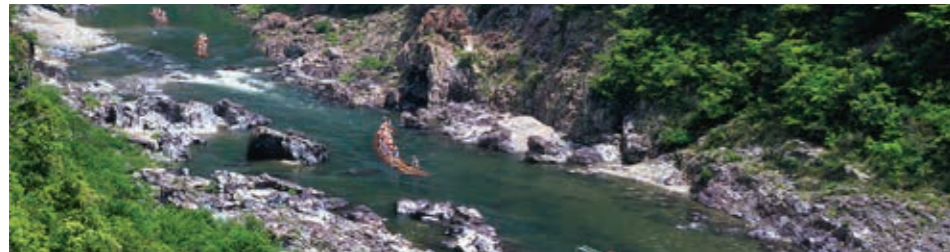


©CLUBMAN MOUNTAIN GUIDE

26

Tame the Torrents at Scenic Dorokyo Gorge

A 600-year-old Japanese tradition amid the wonders of nature that still enthalls today



©Tanabe City Kumano Tourism Bureau

Come to Kitayama, a historic village tucked away in the mountains of the Kii peninsula, and hop aboard a log raft for a whitewater ride rooted in history. Part of Yoshino-Kumano National Park, Dorokyo Gorge is the ancestral home of the river runners—loggers who learned to navigate the rapids long before roads were paved.

Your guides will ferry you downstream using the same techniques employed by their ancestors. The gorge is a breathtaking slice of unspoiled nature, with emerald waters, sheer cliffs, and verdant foliage on every side. In autumn, the leaves turn red and gold, creating even more spectacular scenes.

For an even more unforgettable experience, arrive the evening before and spend the night at the rustic Okutoro Onsen hot spring resort to prepare for your adventure.



©Tanabe City Kumano Tourism Bureau



©Tanabe City Kumano Tourism Bureau

Tanabe City Kumano Tourism Bureau

田辺市熊野ツーリズムビューロー

476 Shimooi, Kitayama-mura, Higashimuro-gun, Wakayama-ken

<https://www.kumano-travel.com/en/tours-activities/log-rafting-in-dorokyo-gorge-ikada-kudari>

28

Discover the Best of Naruto City by Bicycle

Witness mighty whirlpools by boat and taste fresh seafood as you cycle around a lively port city

Hop onto a bicycle and enjoy contrasting sea views, from dynamic whirlpools to calm inland waters.

Naruto City is a port city on the Seto Inland Sea. The whirlpools in the Naruto Strait are some of the largest and fastest on Earth, and this tour is a unique opportunity to approach



them by boat for a safe but close-up view. But before that, your English-speaking guide from otomo Inc. will take you around the city by bike, stopping at sites of historic significance and observing the bustle of daily life.

After you work up an appetite, stop for lunch at a restaurant with an excellent view of the Naruto Strait. Feast on locally harvested sea bream and seaweed, which feature a pleasantly firm texture due to the fast-moving currents of the strait.



otomo Inc.
otomo株式会社
Naruto-shi, Tokushima-ken

<https://contents.setouchitrip.com/tokushimacnt/tokushima04/>

27

Trek Historic Yamabushi Trails in the Tohoku Countryside

Natural beauty and spiritual tradition converge in the sacred Dewa Sanzan mountains

Yamagata is home to three sacred mountains known as Dewa Sanzan. These mountains have long been a site of pilgrimage for spiritual ascetics known as Yamabushi. Now you can trek the same ancient pathways with an English-speaking guide. Each of the three mountains that comprise



©thehiddenjapan



©thehiddenjapan



©thehiddenjapan

Dewa Sanzan is associated with a different stage in the Buddhist cycle of reincarnation. Mount Haguro, which rises 414 meters above sea level, is where Yamabushi prayed for those living in the present world.

Visit the unpainted wooden Five-story Pagoda, said to have been reconstructed 600 years ago. Climb an ancient stone staircase of 2,246 steps and wend through stately old-growth cedar forest dating back 1,000 years to reach Sanjin Gosaiden, the Shinto shrine at the peak. Appease your appetite with delectable Buddhist vegetarian cuisine called shojin ryori.

Two-day walking tours can also be arranged, and busses are available to help visitors reach the peak of Mt. Haguro.

The Hidden Japan

The Hidden Japan
Touge, Haguromachi, Tsuruoka-shi, Yamagata-ken

<https://www.thehiddenjapan.com/hagurotour>

29

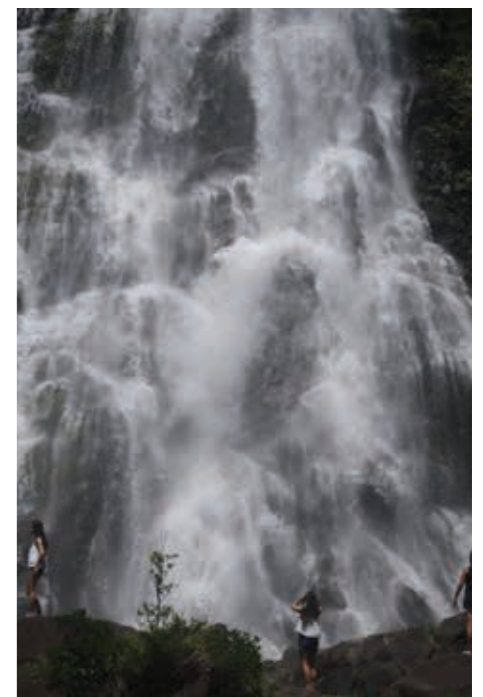
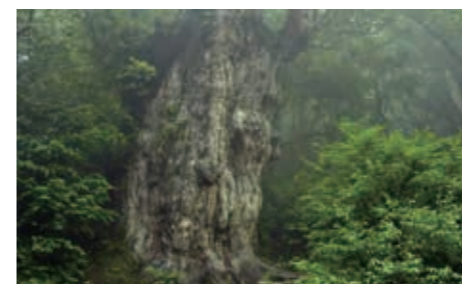
Explore an Incredibly Bio-diverse Island

From exciting mountain pilgrimages to relaxing forest walks, Yakushima Island is a fascinating destination.

Visitors can enjoy excursions into the forests and mountains on the island of Yakushima, containing Yakushima National Park, with Go! Yakushima. The subtropical island is located some 60 kilometers south of Kyushu's main island and was recognized by UNESCO as a great example of biodiversity in East Asia. It has unspoiled forests and 40 mountains that are over 1,000 meters high.

The tours range from easy walks to challenging

treks, and from a few hours to overnight mountain expeditions. One of the most popular is the Yakushima Island Tour that usually includes a complete circuit of the island and stops at places of interest, well-known and surprising ones. The mountain tours often follow pilgrimage routes, as the island has long been considered a spiritual place. The guides are residents on the island and fluent in English, with expertise in fields from history to wildlife.



Go! Yakushima

Go! Yakushima
707-21 Koseda, Yakushima-cho, Kumage-gun, Kagoshima-ken

<https://www.goyakushimatour.com/>



©Prime Scuba Ishigaki

Ishigaki is one of Japan's most distant islands, located more than 2000 kilometers southwest of Tokyo. It has been ranked at the top of Japan's scuba diving destinations for many years.

30

Scuba Diving Japan's Island Paradise

A scuba dive operator offers a variety of dive tours in the transparent Pacific waters of this island getaway

The sub-tropical island climate is mild, and the waters are full of life from macro sea creatures to large sea turtles and giant cuttlefish. Many divers come to Ishigaki hoping to see the mantas. Coral canyons and arches make for a colorful seascape to enjoy and photograph.

Prime Scuba Ishigaki is a dive operator that runs a number of tours to dive spots around the nearby islands. It offers dives for certified divers, including a refresh course, but also offers a license course (two-day minimum) and assisted dives for those who want to experience diving for the first time.

The island of Ishigaki offers a wide range of accommodations to suit all budgets, from five-star hotels to minshuku guest houses.



©Prime Scuba Ishigaki

Prime Scuba Ishigaki プライム・スクーバ石垣

345-9 Maezato, Ishigaki-shi, Okinawa-ken

<https://www.primescuba-isg.com>



The Shimanami Kaido, Japan's most famous cycling trail, links the cities of Onomichi and Imabari in Hiroshima and Ehime Prefectures respectively. Located within the borders of the vast and verdant Setonaikai National Park,

32

Sea-View Cycling at Its Best

The Shimanami Kaido: Conquer Japan's most scenic and famous cycle trail

it spans some 70 kilometers and six islands along the way.

Even novice bikers will delight in the mostly level trails through stunning scenery. Follow the winding island coastlines, take in the breeze off the Setouchi Inland Sea while crossing the bridges from island to island, and admire the lemon and other citrus orchards that the region is famed for. No wonder the Shimanami Kaido was voted one of the Top 7 cycling routes in the world by CNN.

There are bike-friendly hotels in both terminal cities and numerous points to receive and drop off rental bikes.

You can also expect help and support if you run into any problems, so grab a helmet and get your two-wheeled tour underway.



Sunrise ITOYAMA サンライズ糸山

2-8-1 Sunabacho, Imabari-shi, Ehime-ken

<http://www.sunrise-itoyama.jp/archives/english/>

31

A Cycling Tour of Culinary and Cultural Traditions

A unique tour of the quaint rural town of Maniwa, with a focus on its history of food and drink production.

Maniwa is a gorgeous rural town in Okayama Prefecture that is actively working to preserve its traditional culture through sustainable tourism. This cycling tour focuses on the Katsuyama and Kuse areas, and their culinary traditions of brewing and fermenting. An expert English-speaking guide leads cyclists on visits to various food artisans and a temple famous for its

woodblock print art.

Generations of local Japanese craftsmen here have been producing quintessential ingredients for Japanese cuisine. Participants will visit a maker of miso, soy sauce, and vinegar. They will also tour a sake brewery to see how this Japanese beverage is created. Another stop is at an old sake brewery that has been repurposed into a culture center.

Other highlights on the tour include a visit to a local textile atelier that makes noren curtains, Miraiji Temple, and lunch at a local restaurant.



Maniwa Tourism Bureau 一般社団法人真庭観光局

654 Katsuyama, Maniwa-shi, Okayama-ken

<https://www.maniwa.or.jp/en/recommendedroutes/katsuyamacourse/course.html>

33

Dive into the Secrets of Coral Reefs

Help preserve marine flora and fauna

Coral reefs are unique animal formations that play a vital role in ocean ecosystems. In recent years, however, climate change has led to rises in sea temperatures, causing the algae that corals feed upon to migrate to cooler waters. This, in turn, has bleached large swathes of coral around the world, causing ocean biodiversity to suffer. In 2003, researchers in Onna Village on Okinawa Island succeeded in restoring cultivated corals to



©OkinawaDivingServiceLagoon



©OkinawaDivingServiceLagoon



©OkinawaDivingServiceLagoon

the sea. At Okinawa Diving Service Lagoon, you can learn all about coral science and observe coral growing in tanks. Adopt a piece of coral by attaching it to a concrete base.

You can also take a short boat ride and snorkel or dive down to the ocean floor to see where your coral will help contribute to the future of Okinawa's marine life. Environmental enthusiasts should not miss this unique experience.

Okinawa Diving Service Lagoon 沖縄ダイビングサービスLagoon

339 Onna, Onna-son, Kunigami-gun, Okinawa-ken

<https://visitokinawajapan.com/travel-inspiration/okinawa-coral-reefs/>



PASSION: *Cuisine*

Japanese cuisine is a worldwide phenomenon. Inseparable from the land, the seasons, and the people who make it, these culinary experiences are best experienced at the source. Take a look behind the counter with various tours showing the inner workings of factories and kitchens. Go behind the scenes and see how soy sauce is made in wooden barrels. Japan is also home to fine whisky, ramen shops, and masterful French and Italian fare prepared with local ingredients. Immerse yourself in a rich landscape of gourmet culture and discover a world of wonders that exceeds expectations.



34

Savor the Best of the Season on Your Plate

Enjoy a sumptuous and healthful Buddhist meal with a scenic Japanese garden view



Shojin ryori is a characteristic vegetarian cuisine served and eaten by Buddhist monks throughout history. At Daigo, every dish presented is a gem of nature, fashioned from deliciously fresh seasonal ingredients.

This restaurant sits in an exquisite space beside Mount Atago, a small natural mountain in the heart of Tokyo. Step inside the traditional teahouse-style construction, and you will be welcomed by the refreshing aroma of incense and an interior decorated to perfectly capture the beauty of the season. Sit down and admire the charming Japanese garden that lies right outside the window.

Don't worry about poring over the menu to select the one perfect dish—at Daigo, you'll enjoy a lavish kaiseki-style full course meal, prepared from carefully selected ingredients freshly delivered to the kitchen every morning and using techniques preserved since the restaurant's founding. The cuisine at Daigo is especially designed with a devotion to Buddhist

spiritual practices and to avoid animal cruelty. Appreciate these artistic delicacies beautifully presented on your table, and savor fine cuisine with your tastebuds, body, and soul.



Vegetarian meal DAIGO 精進料理 醍醐

2-3-1 Atago, Minato-ku, Tokyo-to

https://www.atago-daigo.jp/index_en.html

35

A Food Theme Park for a Hiroshima Favorite

Enjoy the ever-popular Hiroshima-style okonomiyaki in its place of origin

Each region of Japan has a unique food culture. Hiroshima's claim to fame is okonomiyaki, a savory pancake-like dish filled with shredded veggies, meat, and—most importantly—the noodles that set it apart from other regional variants. An ideal spot for this is the Okonomimura building, a collection of restaurant stalls that put their own spin on the popular dish.

Wandering through the two floors of Okonomimura



located in a seven-story building in downtown Hiroshima is a bit like exploring a culinary wonderland. Hear the sizzle of batter on the griddle. Smell the rich aroma of frying meat. Tuck in, and wash it down with a tall chilled glass of draft beer. Some stalls offer English menus, and most can cater to vegetarians.

It's worth checking out all of the stalls, or perusing the Okonomimura website. Each vendor has something unique, from crunchy buckwheat noodles and cheese mochi to a homemade kimchi. To find your favorite, you'll want to come back time and again.



Okonomimura お好み村

5-13 Shintenchi, Naka-ku, Hiroshima-shi, Hiroshima-ken

<http://www.okonomimura.jp/foreign/english.html>

37

Insight into a Unique Diving Culture

Meet Ise-Shima's traditional free divers and savor seafood delicacies



Japan's ama ("women of the sea") have been diving for abalone, pearls, and other underwater bounty since ancient times. These female free divers captured the imagination of Japan's earliest poets with their resilience and vigor, becoming a symbol of the coastal communities where they settled. Even today, many ama dive well into their seventies.

Ama Hut Hachiman, located within Ise-Shima National Park, is your chance to learn about this 3,000-year-old way of life from a first-person perspective. Try on unique ama diving garb, join the divers in a traditional dance, and

feast with them on freshly caught seafood. The warm hospitality and thrilling stories of these experienced divers will leave an unforgettable impression.

Ama Hut HACHIMAN 海女小屋はちまなかまど

819 Ousatsu-cho, Toba-shi, Mie-ken

<http://amakoya.com/english%20page/>

36

Your One-Stop Destination for All Things Ramen

Slurp to your heart's content at the world's first ramen-themed amusement park



Japan has a lip-smacking tradition of noodle dishes. This tradition is celebrated at the Shin Yokohama Ramen Museum, the world's first amusement park dedicated to ramen.

You'll find a wide variety of ramen shops housed in a replica of a 1950s Japanese street scene. The shops here serve specialty ramen dishes from across Japan including miso, soy sauce, salt and tonkotsu pork broth among others. There are a number of vegetarian ramen options, including soy meat substitutes for roasted pork fillet.

Visit the gallery to learn the history of how

ramen noodles first came from China and later evolved into the distinctive dish that Japanese people love today. Visitors even have the chance to create their very own brand of ramen.

Shinyokohama Ramen Museum 新横浜ラーメン博物館

2-14-21 Shinyokohama, Kohoku-ku, Yokohama-shi, Kanagawa-ken

<http://www.raumen.co.jp/english/>



38

Kobe Beef: Beyond Words

Prime, marbled Kobe beef is a treat for meat lovers

The city of Kobe, a visual and culinary delight, is best known for its namesake beef—and for good reason. Kobe beef, a specific variety within the wagyu family, has a world-famous melt-in-the-mouth sensation. It takes exceptional skill and care to bring this succulent, flavor-packed beef to your table.

Kobe beef comes from cows born and reared exclusively in Hyogo Prefecture, where Kobe is located. Only heifers and steers that meet the strict standards are certified as Kobe beef by the Kobe Beef Marketing & Distribution Promotion Association. Among these chosen few, grade A5 is the best of the best.

The meat is typically enjoyed as marbled steak grilled to perfection for you on a hotplate inches away. Expect to pay over a hundred dollars to feast on premium Kobe beef—a price well worth it for a meal you'll never forget.



Setsugetsuka 雪月花本店

8F, Rainbow Plaza Bldg, 1-9-3 Kitanagasaki, Chuo-ku Kobe-shi, Hyogo-ken

<http://setouchitrip.com/food-drink/2362>

39

A Sublime Sushi Experience in the Heart of Ginza

Dine on supremely crafted nigiri in the Edomae tradition at Ginza SUSHI AOKI



©Ginza Sushi Aoki/Tokyo Japan



©Ginza Sushi Aoki/Tokyo Japan

An unassuming lantern on the street outside is all that marks the entrance to Ginza Sushi Aoki, an internationally acclaimed sushi bar in Tokyo's ritzy Ginza district. Score a seat at the counter; however, and you'll soon realize that there's nothing modest about the food on offer: Chef Aoki follows the traditional Edomae style of preparation, using the freshest seafood sourced daily from the Toyosu Fish Market. A true culinary artist, Chef Aoki does not follow set recipes, but rather lets the day's catch and even the weather guide him in his preparation. A frequent highlight of the menu is gizzard shad, as well as creamy sea urchin and quality tuna.

Ginza Sushi Aoki can also be enjoyed from the comfort of your home or hotel room with the takeaway sushi bento. From a simple-is-best chirashi sushi featuring choice morsels of seafood over rice to the beautiful temari-style ball sushi bento, this is one takeout meal that rises above all others.



©Ginza Sushi Aoki/Tokyo Japan

Ginza SUSHI AOKI 銀座 鮨青木

4th floor, The 3rd Iwatsuki Building, 6-7-7 Ginza, Chuo-ku, Tokyo-to

<https://www.sushiaoki.jp/en/index.html>

41

Share a Marvelous Moment in Nature

Dine in style on a traveling restaurant



©SEIBU RAILWAY



©SEIBU RAILWAY



©SEIBU RAILWAY

The "Fifty Two Seats of Happiness" a travelling restaurant operated by Seibu Railways, offers the chance to experience fine dining while viewing gorgeous seasonal scenery of Musashino and Chichibu in northwest Tokyo and Saitama Prefecture.

Designed by a creative team including a world-renowned architect, these four renovated cars are decorated to match the four seasons. The cars can accommodate from 20 to 52 guests—hence the name. Some cars are designed with traditional materials in reference to the surrounding nature, such as the Arakawa River and the Chichibu Mountains.

Visitors may partake in a dinner or brunch while

admiring the scenery from large windows. The primarily western menu changes with the seasons and is prepared by distinguished chefs. This experience is a feast for the eyes and the palette. The train operates about 100 days per year, mainly on weekends and holidays.

SEIBU RAILWAY Co.,Ltd. 西武鉄道株式会社

1-16 Nosaka-machi, Chichibu-shi, Saitama-ken

<https://www.seiburailway.jp/railways/seibu52-shifuku/en/>

40

The Fascinating Seafood Culture of Shiogama

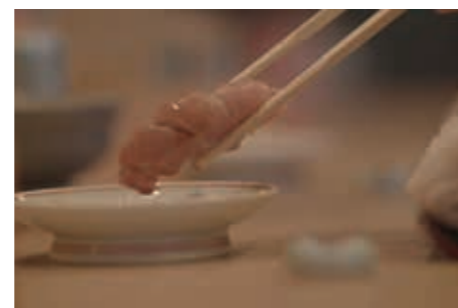
Learn the unique local traditions of sake, salt, and seafood on a tour of this coastal town, known for its lively fish markets.

This tour introduces visitors to the local culture of Shiogama, a port town on the northern coast known for its thriving fishing industry. One of the local specialties is seaweed salt, heralded for its rich umami flavor. The first stop is a shrine dedicated to the deity of salt-making, followed by a visit to Shiogama Shrine to learn about the



importance of salt and its purifying role in the Shinto religion.

The tour continues with a visit to a specialty store for a sake-tasting workshop. After learning how to distinguish sake types, you'll visit a brewery to further appreciate how Japan's signature beverage is made (and taste more varieties of sake). Lunch takes place at a local sushi restaurant for a meal of fresh seafood paired with sake. Try sushi "Shiogama style," served with seaweed salt instead of soy sauce. The tour ends at a nearby tea shop with a cup of uniquely brewed tea and a traditional sweet made with seaweed salt. The tour takes about 4 hours, and is available year-round on every day of the week except Sundays.



In-outbound Sendai-Matsushima inc. 株式会社インアウトパウンド仙台・松島

1-1 Ichimoriyama, Shiogama-shi, Miyagi-ken

<https://www.tohoku-local-secret-tours.jp/tourinfo/1153/>

42

Savor the Taste and History of Japanese Whisky

Nikka's Yoichi Distillery: Insights for those who love the golden nectar



Nikka is one of Japan's foremost whisky producers. This tour takes you to where it all began nearly a century ago.

Nikka's Yoichi distillery stands at the northern base of Hokkaido's Shakotan Peninsula, with its fascinating rock formations. Masataku Taketsuru, the father of whisky in Japan, founded his first independent distillery here in 1934, believing it was the place in Japan most like Scotland where he had trained.

Tour Nikka's Yoichi distillery to see firsthand how whisky is made, then visit the museum to explore

the history of whisky production inside and outside Japan. Taketsuru's residence has also been preserved as a piece of Japanese distilling history. Round off your tour with a wee dram or two of Nikka's smooth products.

The Nikka Whisky Distilling ニッカウキスキー北海道工場 余市蒸溜所

7-6 Kurokawa-chō, Yoichi, Yoichi-gun, Hokkaido

<https://www.nikka.com/eng/>

43

See the Beautiful Ingenuity of Rice Terraces

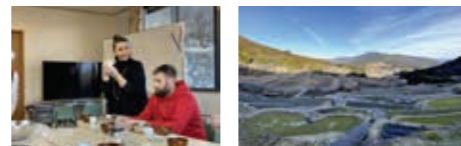


Walk among gorgeous rice paddies in a picturesque town, and learn to make a Japanese staple with locally produced rice

literally and figuratively walking you through the irrigation and cultivation techniques preserved in this village for 400 years. In May or September, you may even be able to join in on planting or harvesting, respectively.

After your terrace tour, enthusiastic local residents will teach you how to make onigiri, or rice balls, using locally produced rice and seasonal fillings. They will also share with you the legends that surround Mt. Gongen, a mysterious peak rising above the town.

Rice plays an integral role in Japanese culture, and rice terraces are a key farming technique. On this tour, offered by the Ena-shi Sakaori Tanada Preservation Association in Gifu Prefecture, an English-speaking guide will show you breathtaking terraced hillside rice paddies,



Ena-shi Sakaori Tanada Preservation Association NPO法人恵那市坂折棚田保存会

782-1 Nakanoho-cho., Ena-shi, Gifu-ken

<https://attractive-j.rezdy.com/388589/the-npo-ena-city-sakaori-tanada-preservation-society-sakaori-tanada-terraced-rice-fields-walking-and-onigiri-making-tour-400>

45

A Factory Tour of a World-Renowned Japanese Whisky Maker

Go behind the scenes at Suntory's storied Hakushu Distillery and sample the sublime product

Nestled in a forest at the foot of the Japan Alps lies the Suntory Hakushu Distillery. Established in 1973, the Hakushu facility is Suntory's second whiskey distillery. The forest of Hakushu was chosen for the quality and

mineral content of its water, leading to a fresh, vibrant and crisp whisky as compared to their Yamazaki brand, which offers a deeper, multi-layered taste.

Visitors can see the inner workings with a full distillery tour. The tour sheds light on the manufacturing process, Suntory's dedication to whiskey making, and a tasting session. (Advance bookings are required.) The Suntory Whisky Museum and Bar Hakushu are available without reservation.

The White Terrace restaurant serves carefully paired cuisine. There's even a bird sanctuary where many wild birds come to visit throughout the year.



Suntory Hakushu Distillery サントリー白州蒸溜所

2913-1 Torihara, Hakushu-cho, Hokuto-shi, Yamanashi-ken

<https://www.suntory.com/factory/hakushu/>



44

Sake and History at this Remarkable Brewery



A sublime brand of sake is brewed from locally sourced ingredients in this historic building.

Hachinohe Shuzo is a prominent brewery in Aomori that brews world-renowned sake. It is also heralded for its traditional wooden main building and red-brick warehouses—a perfect fusion of Japanese and Western building styles. All six of the buildings were constructed during the Taisho era (1912-1926), and have been designated as Registered Tangible Cultural Properties by the Japanese government and important landscape architecture by Hachinohe City.

Brewed from locally sourced rice, and pristine local water, the brewery's brand Mutsu Hassen has received both domestic and international awards. It is known for its refreshing, sweet flavor,



and is a perfect companion to almost any type of cuisine.

Tours that explain the brewing process and the history of this brewery are available with advance booking, and tasting sessions can be arranged for a small additional charge.

Hachinohe Shuzo 八戸酒造

9 Hon-cho, Minato-machi, Hachinohe-shi, Aomori-ken

<https://www.mutsu8000.com/en/kura/#Kengaku>

46

Learn About Soy Sauce and Local Folklore on an Island

A day-tour of Shodoshima Island, famous for a quintessential condiment and a museum dedicated to the wonderful world of yokai

The Seto Inland Sea island of Shodoshima is part of the Setonaikai National Park. It is a perfect place to explore two ubiquitous features of Japanese culture: soy sauce and mythical creatures known as yokai. This English day tour is operated with English-



speaking guides by the Shodoshima Tourism Organization. The first stop is the Yokai Art Museum to learn more about yokai, traditional folk creatures whose temperaments can range from dangerous to delightful. This playful museum features exhibits related to these creatures that are integral to Japanese philosophy and spirituality—and to the world of anime and manga.

The next stop is a restaurant for a lunch made of locally sourced ingredients. A soy sauce sommelier teaches participants about the history of local soy sauce production and how to pair different soy sauces to match your meal. The final visit is to a Japanese soy sauce artisan, who demonstrates the use of wooden barrels—some up to 150 years old—to create this iconic condiment.

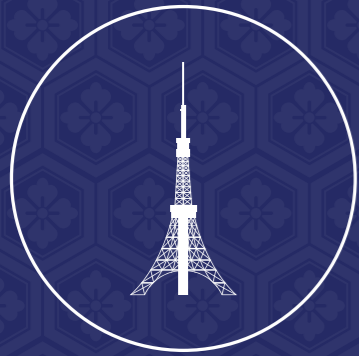


Shodoshima Tourism Association 小豆島観光協会

1896-1 Nishimurakabuto, Shodoshima-cho, Shozu-gun, Kagawa-ken

<https://contents.setouchitrip.com/kagawacnt/kagawa23/>





PASSION: *Cities*

Japan's cities are bustling with myriad cultures and evolving infrastructure. Here, age-old traditions coexist alongside modern technology in a singular harmony. Japan's cities offer a wealth of experiences available nowhere else. Visit a museum where you can learn the history of the ubiquitous automotive manufacturer, or tour Hiroshima and hear residents' thoughts on peace first-hand. Climb high atop the world class suspension bridge and thrill at the sight below, or walk the historical trading town of Kurashiki—lined with weeping willows and traditional townhouses.

47

It's a Winter Wonderland at the Sapporo Snow Festival

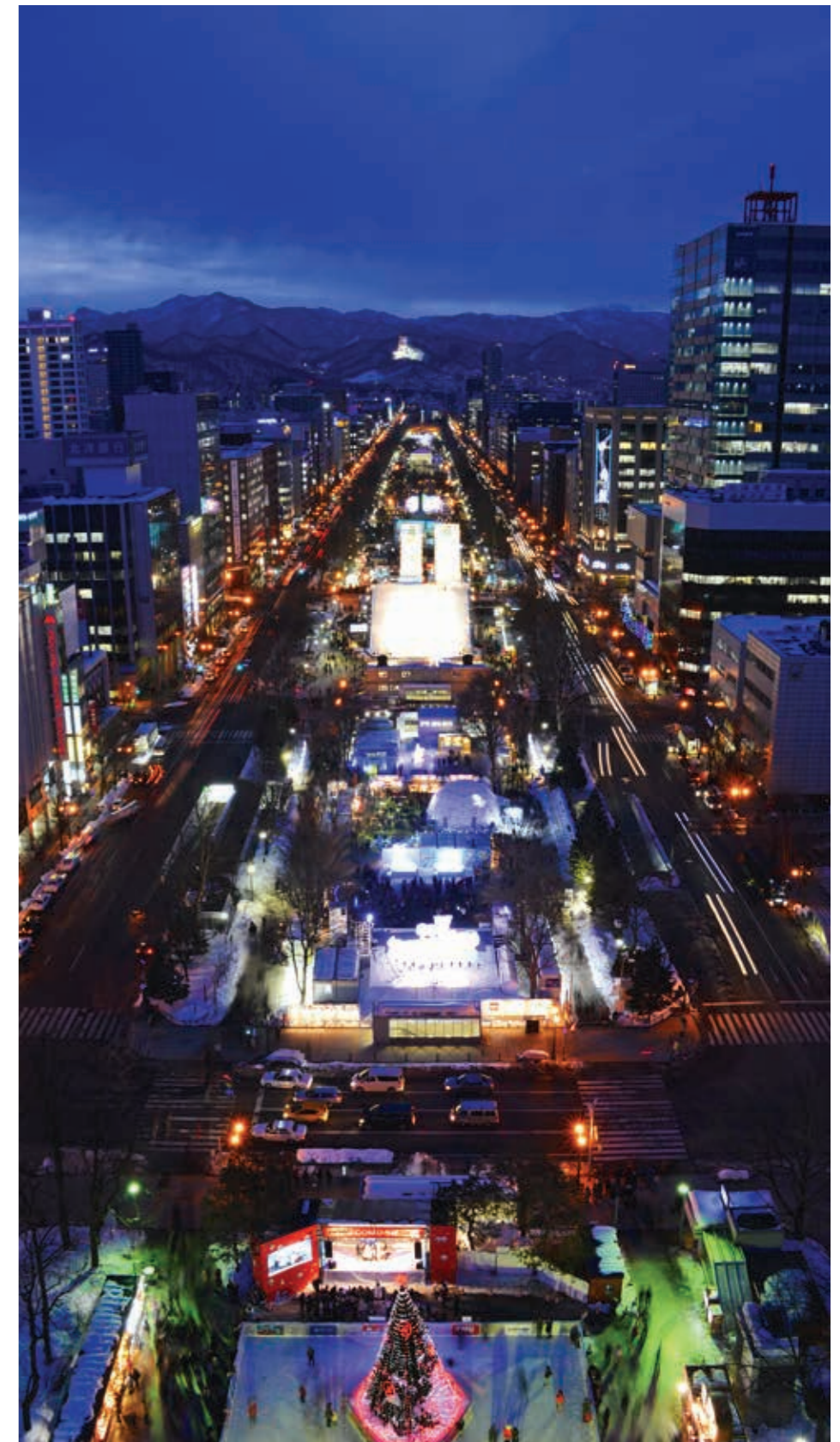
You'll be astounded by the massive snow sculptures at Hokkaido's signature event

Get ready to be blown away at the Sapporo Snow Festival, a celebration of snow—as art, architecture, and much more.

A total of 30,000 tons of snow is needed to build about 200 snow and ice sculptures for one of Japan's largest winter events. The scale of these massive creations can be astounding—a 1972 statue of Gulliver even reached a height of 25 meters. It takes two weeks to one month to finish all the installations, and members of Japan's Ground Self-Defense Forces, along with volunteers, build the biggest ones.

The festival begins in early February at three Sapporo locations: Odori Park, Tsudome, and Susukino. Evenings also feature musical projection mapping programs at various spots in Odori Park.

At the end of the park, check out sculptors from a range of countries battling it out in an international competition. With the theme changing each year, the Sapporo Snow Festival is well worth visiting multiple times.



Sapporo Snow Festival さっぽろ雪まつり

2 Chome, Kita 1 Jonishi, Chuo-ku, Sapporo-shi, Hokkaido

<http://www.snowfes.com/english/index.html>



©JR-EAST

48

Explore Japan by Luxury Train

Ride the rails in style, from the comfort of your own deluxe carriage suite



In addition to the well-known Shinkansen bullet train, Japan's luxury trains show the scenic side of Japan in real time.

The interiors come with all the trimmings—like private bathtubs and spacious living quarters. The ultra-smooth journey takes visitors through Japan's rural heartlands while serving the finest cuisine and stopping at key sightseeing spots.

East Japan's TRAIN SUITE SHIKI-SHIMA transports guests around Tohoku and South Hokkaido in carriages painted in the key of champagne-gold and offers an exquisite dining menu and comfortable suites.

The Twilight Express Mizukaze travels through Sanin and Sanyo regions, located in western Japan and home to some of the most stunning country landscapes. Dishes presented by top-class culinary artisans using ingredients from along the route are prepared on board.

Or experience Kyushu from the comfort of the Seven Stars in Kyushu luxury sleeper train. With sophisticated interiors combining Western and Japanese influences, the itinerary takes guests through the southern main island with plenty of sightseeing stops along the way.

TRAIN SUITE SHIKI-SHIMA
Twilight Express Mizukaze
Cruise Train Seven Stars in Kyushu
TRAIN SUITE 四季島 (トランススイート四季島)
(東日本旅客鉄道株式会社)
瑞風 (西日本旅客鉄道株式会社)
ななつ星九州 (九州旅客鉄道株式会社)

- 🌐 <https://www.jreast.co.jp/shiki-shima/en/>
- 🌐 <https://twilightexpress-mizukaze.jp/en/>
- 🌐 <https://www.cruisetrain-sevenstars.jp/english/>

49

Set Sail for the Abandoned City of Gunkanjima

Explore industrial history on this island off the coast of Nagasaki

Hashima Island rises from the azure waters off Nagasaki City at the far western tip of Japan's main islands. It is often known as Gunkanjima, " Battleship Island," because its rugged form resembles a Japanese battleship. The island was also featured in the 2012 movie Skyfall.

Inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage

site in 2015, Gunkanjima proudly embodies Japan's strength during the Meiji Industrial Revolution. Beginning in the nineteenth century, the island was used as a base for undersea coal mining. It bristles with dense clusters of concrete towers that once housed thousands of workers but have stood silent and motionless since the mines closed in 1974.

The island was off-limits to the public for decades, but today you can enjoy the eerie atmosphere of the abandoned island in person, with several companies offering daily boat tours. There's also Gunkanjima Digital Museum on the mainland where you can safely explore the island's no-go zones through VR.



©GUNKANJIMA DIGITAL MUSEUM



©GUNKANJIMA DIGITAL MUSEUM



©GUNKANJIMA DIGITAL MUSEUM

Gunkanjima Digital Museum
軍艦島デジタルミュージアム

5-6 Matsugae-machi, Nagasaki-shi, Nagasaki-ken

🌐 <https://www.gunkanjima-museum.jp/>

50

Experience a 4 km Suspension Bridge from 300 m Up

Scale an engineering marvel that stretches nearly 4 km across the Akashi Strait



The Akashi Kaikyo is one of the world's longest suspension bridges, spanning nearly 4 km across the busy Akashi Strait to connect Kobe and Awaji Island. The bridge opened in April 1998, achieving what had long been considered an impossible feat.

On this tour, you'll hear amazing stories of the decade over which this US\$3.6 billion structure took shape, and ascend 300 m to the top of the bridge tower for unforgettable panoramic views and photos.

The tour starts at the Awaji Island end of the bridge and lasts around 3 hours. Audio guides are available in English.

Bridge World for Akashi-Kaikyo Bridge
明石海峡大橋ブリッジワールド

Iwaya, Awaji-shi, Hyogo-ken

🌐 <http://www.jb-honshi.co.jp/english/bridgeworld/index.html>

51

The Hiroshima Cycling Peace Tour

A course on two wheels that covers sites related to the tragic atomic bombing of the city and its appeal for peace

This guided bicycle tour covers sites related to the 1945 atomic bombing of Hiroshima, its reconstruction efforts, and its appeals for peace. Participants ride electric bicycles over a three-hour course led by local guides.

Visits are made to well-known sites such as the Atomic Bomb Dome, Hiroshima Peace Park, and Aioi Bridge—the target of the bomb. Participants have a chance to learn much more of the tragic experience, by visiting places like the Red Cross Hospital, the Gokoku Shrine gate, which withstood



the blast, and a surviving weeping willow that represents the resilience of the people of Hiroshima. The guides share stories of the city at the time of the bombing, and inspiring tales of rebuilding as the tour passes through beautiful modern-



sokoiko! ソコイコ!

1 Nakajima-cho, Naka-ku, Hiroshima-shi, Hiroshima-ken

<https://attractive-j.com/experiences/PDKNWN?lang=EN>

53

The Anime and Manga Mecca of Nakano Broadway

Go hunting for a trove of subculture treasures in the stores of this retro shopping arcade

Nakano Broadway was constructed in 1966, and named after its New York counterpart. With its location right next to Nakano Station, it was the perfect location to open a complex of luxury apartments and high-end shopping in the post-war building boom. However, by



the time the 1980s rolled around, the area had lost out in popularity to newly-built shopping districts like Shinjuku and Ikebukuro. Today, Nakano Broadway is enjoying a second lease on life as a prime destination for anime and manga fans. When second-hand bookseller Mandarake opened in the area in 1980, it brought a trickle of manga fans to the district. That trickle turned into a flood, and a host of shops offering manga, anime and gaming figurines opened in a 10-story building a short walk from the station to cater to the growing interest. Mandarake alone boasts multiple outlets in the Nakano Broadway shopping complex, and even offers services in multiple foreign languages.



Nakano Broadway 中野ブロードウェイ

5-52-15 Nakano, Nakano-ku, Tokyo-to

<https://nakano-broadway.com/>

52

Walk the Streets of Kurashiki's Historical Quarter

This distinct riverside district is celebrated for its traditional buildings and historical atmosphere

The Kurashiki Bikan Historical Quarter is a unique district only minutes from Kurashiki Station. Much of the area is preserved in the style of its heyday during the Edo-period (1603–1867), when it was an important trading town. Its appearance is marked by the white-plastered walls of the traditional townhouses that line its streets, and



©Okayama Prefectural Tourism Federation

the graceful weeping willow trees along the canal. It is home to several cultural attractions, including the Ohara Museum of Art, with its impressive collection of Western art. Many visitors are content to absorb the atmosphere of Japan's past, strolling—or riding a rickshaw—down its streets, or floating down the river on a traditional boat. Cafes, restaurants, and souvenir shops in authentic settings offer traditional dishes, crafts, and more. Some townhouses have been converted into accommodations for those who would like to see more.



©Okayama Prefectural Tourism Federation

Kurashiki's Bikan District 倉敷美観地区

Honmachi, Kurashiki-shi, Okayama-ken

<https://www.okayama-japan.jp/en/spot/886>

54

Explore a Rich Legacy of Manufacturing Technologies

Trace the path of Japan's industrialization in this automotive museum

This museum was founded and curated by the Toyota Group, the world-leading automaker that started as a manufacturer of textile looms. It shines a spotlight on Japan's remarkable history of technological advancement, innovation, and modernization. Visitors can observe the technological



©Toyota Commemorative Museum of Industry and Technology

transition of the spinning and weaving machines, and the original machines dating from 1890. These were the foundation for the manufacturing methods and principles the company employs to this day. Up next is the Automobile Pavilion, that explains why and how the business expanded into the automobile industry. Visitors also get a bird's-eye view of automobiles being assembled. Children will particularly enjoy Technoland, a hands-on exhibit where visitors can experience the joy of creation.



©Toyota Commemorative Museum of Industry and Technology

Toyota Commemorative Museum of Industry and Technology

トヨタ産業技術記念館

4-1-35 Noritakeshimachi, Nishi-ku, Nagoya-shi, Aichi-ken

<https://www.tcmiit.org/english/>



PASSION: *Nature*

Stretching 2787 kilometers from the southernmost point to the northernmost point, Japan offers dynamic scenery throughout the four seasons. Japan has 34 national parks throughout this the archipelago, allowing visitors to enjoy these sights in their most undisturbed form. Trek through stunning Japan Alps in Chubu-Sangaku National Park, lush and verdant in spring and fiery gold in the fall, or chug through a mountain ravine on the Kurobe Gorge Railway. Here you can encounter seasonal wonders only found in Japan.

55

A Singularly Scenic Expedition Across the Japan Alps

Massive snow walls, stunning autumn colors: The Tateyama Alpine Route is an ecotourist's dream



Spanning more than 30 kilometers with an elevation change of 2,000 meters, the Tateyama Alpine Route through Chubu-Sangaku National Park astounds nature lovers with some of Japan's most dynamic mountain views and autumn colors. Your journey begins at Tateyama Station with a steep cable car climb to a virgin forest of mighty ancient cedars and beech. Then comes a winding bus ride featuring massive snow corridors up to 17 meters and other stunning vistas at every turn. Next, you'll board an electric trolley bus and tunnel through the heart of sacred Mount Tateyama, emerging to one of the world's most unique ropeways boasting

incredible panoramic views of the steep Kurobe Gorge. You'll then ride an underground cable car to Kurobe Dam, the highest arched dam in Japan, and see beautiful mountain scenery reflected in the waters of Lake Kurobe. Finally, ride an electric bus to Ougisawa, on the Nagano side.

With hot spring resorts, hiking routes, campgrounds, and cultural and historic sites along the way, there's truly something for everyone—and snack bars at each station will ensure that you don't go hungry. The entire trip takes 6–7 hours one way and is best enjoyed from April to June, when the snow walls are at their highest.



Tateyama Kurobe Alpine Route 立山黒部アルペンルート

(Toyama Side) Ashikuraji, Tateyama-machi,
Nakaniikawa-gun, Toyama-ken
(Nagano Side) 2117 Taira, Omachi-shi, Nagano-ken
🌐 <https://www.alpen-route.com/en/>

56

Enjoy a Tropical Paradise in the Yaeyama Islands

Choose from a number of tour itineraries featuring Japan's southernmost islands



Visitors can enjoy tours in and around the Yaeyama Islands, the southernmost archipelago of Japan, led by Hirata Tourism. The tours range from marine activities to trekking to just relaxing at a spectacular white sand beach.

Each of the Yaeyama islands is unique, with its own charms and unusual sights. Taketomi Island, for example, is known for its charming village of traditional houses or red tiled roofs and coral sand roads—as well as the seemingly endless lagoon of Kondo Beach. Iriomote Island is known for its mangrove forests—great for kayaking or paddle boarding. Barasu Island is for snorkeling or just soaking in the sun, and other tours offer rides on the traditional buffalo-drawn carriages, or trekking the unspoiled jungle paths.

Ishigaki Island's Kabira Bay is celebrated for the underwater views from its glass-



bottomed boats. Pottery lovers can explore local kilns, where the shisa, fierce lion-god figures that stand guard over the island's homes, are made. Local sake distilleries accept visitors, as do many traditional artisans, like the local weavers.

Visitors can arrange tours from the time of arrival, including taxi services and English-speaking guides. Besides regularly scheduled tours there are also tailor-made itineraries to meet any special interests.

HIRATA TOURISM, Inc 平田観光株式会社

1 Misaki-cho, Ishigaki-shi, Okinawa-ken (Within Ishigaki Port Terminal)

<https://hirata-group.co.jp/english/>



57

Shiga Kogen's Famous Snow Monkeys Will Steal Your Heart

Visit their pristine winter wonderland in the scenic mountains of Nagano



©JIGOKUDANI YAENKOEN

Watch wild Japanese macaques saunter out of the snowy forest and frolic in their natural habitat. This truly unique wildlife scene in Nagano Prefecture's Shiga Kogen is sure to warm your

heart on even the coldest winter's day. Famously known as snow monkeys, the Japanese macaques are the northernmost non-human primates in the world. At Jigokudani (meaning

"Hell Valley"), located within the borders of Joshin'etsukogen National Park, monkeys young and old roam free along the mountainsides and the river. These magnificent animals are a captivating sight that can't be experienced anywhere else in the world.

Later, take a 30-minute drive to the historic town of Obuse and visit the Hokusai Museum, home to a spectacular collection of works by the legendary Japanese woodblock artist Hokusai.



©JIGOKUDANI YAENKOEN

Jigokudani Yaen-koen 地獄谷野猿公苑

6845 Hirao, Yamanochi-machi, Shimotakai-gun, Nagano-ken

<http://en.jigokudani-yaenkoen.co.jp/>



The Kurobe Gorge Railway offers a journey through a beautiful mountain ravine. Originally built to aid in the construction of an electric power station, this train travels slow along a wonderfully scenic 20-kilometer stretch

58

Thrilling Views of the Kurobe Gorge

A small, open-air “trolley” train offers some of the most panoramic views in Japan as it slowly chugs along

through tunnels and across bridges, offering sweeping views of the gorge.

Visitors may stop at some of the numerous stations along the way to enjoy all this untouched area has to offer. Visit hot spring facilities to enjoy the surrounding nature from warm waters. Go for a stroll across the many footbridges to enjoy the landscape at a leisurely pace. A variety of hiking courses have trailheads near the final stop, boasting routes sure to please hikers of all levels. The gorge is in Chubu-Sangaku National Park, so visitors can find even more in the surrounding park. The Kurobe Gorge Railway operates from spring, when the foliage is a fresh green and flowers are in bloom, through autumn, when it becomes a popular viewing spot for the changing colors of the forest trees.



Kurobe Gorge Railway 黒部峡谷鉄道株式会社

11 Kurobekyokoguchi, Kurobe-shi, Toyama-ken

<https://www.kurotetu.co.jp/en/>

60

A Capsule Hotel at the Mt. Fuji Trailhead

Prepare to climb or just enjoy a world above the clouds

The Fujikyū Unjokaku capsule hotel is perched on the slope of Mt. Fuji, located in Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park, over two thousand meters above sea level. This is the spot on the Fifth Station where most people begin their climb, so it's an ideal location for acclimating to the altitude, or a hard-earned respite at



the end of the long mountain trek. For those not interested in climbing, it often offers spectacular views from above the clouds as well as skies full of stars. The Sixth Station is a short hike away, with an unhindered view of the sunrise.

The accommodations are basic, but more than comfortable, with security shutters for complete privacy. There are 42 capsule rooms, 20 of them exclusively for women. Parking and the community toilet can be used free of charge by guests. Paid services include use of a locker, and showers.

The hotel also has a restaurant and a souvenir shop featuring items with a Mt. Fuji theme.



Fujikyū Unjokaku 富士急雲上閣

8545-1 Fujisan, Narusawa-mura, Minamitsuru-gun, Yamanashi-ken

<https://www.unjokaku.jp/en/>

59

A Journey by Rail Through Northern Japan's Backcountry

This small, friendly train offers access to the most unspoiled areas of Akita Prefecture

The Akita Nairiku Inland Railway line is an almost 100-kilometer train route that connects the inland areas of Akita Prefecture. The two-carriage trains (nicknamed the Smile Line) pass stunning natural vistas and historical sites as they make their way from the southernmost station of Kakunodate to the northern terminus of



©Akitainlandline

Takanosu. The entire route, encompassing 29 stations, takes approximately two hours. Kakunodate is a historic samurai town just three hours by Shinkansen from Tokyo. From there, the wide windows of the cars offer views of rustic villages and rice fields, deep valleys and verdant forests. The landscape is spectacular year-round, from the lush summer greenery to the snow-blanketed hills of winter. Locals along the way wave to passengers and, in summer, create rice-paddy artworks that can be seen from the train. The final destination of Takanosu is home to Mt. Moriyoshi and nearby hot springs. More adventures can be had by disembarking at one of the small stations along the way.



©Akitainlandline

Akita Nairiku Jukan Tetsudo 秋田内陸縦貫鉄道株式会社

41-1 Shimoshinmachi, Aniginzan, Kitaakita-shi, Akita-ken

<http://www.akita-nairiku.com/en/>

61

The Ancient Appeal of a Secluded Shikoku Hideaway

The remote rural location of Iya Valley offers thrilling adventure and tranquility

Few places feel as untouched by the hands of time as Iya Valley in central Shikoku. Criss-crossed by rivers and dotted with peaks, the remote location of this sparsely populated region has helped preserve much of the attractions of traditional Japanese life. Visitors in search of thrills should make their way across the valley's precarious double rope



bridge, which according to legend was first constructed by warriors fleeing from a battle over eight centuries ago. Hike the steep hills for a view of farmed terraces carved from the mountain to support the village of Ochiai, famed for its thatched-roof houses. Visit the village of Nagoro, surrounded by more than 300 scarecrows—each with its own unique facial expression.

Relax and enjoy the slow pace of Iya Valley. Stay overnight in a traditional farm-house or enjoy the hospitality of an inn. Stunning views of the natural surroundings are everywhere, so don't be surprised to find yourself forgetting the world beyond this lovely mountain valley.



Sora no Sato 一般社団法人そらの郷

995-1 Ikeda-cho Shima Miyoshi-shi, Tokushima-ken

<https://nishi-awa.jp/english/>

62

Find Your Spiritual Side on the Kumano Kodo Trail

Tread the same moss-covered steps as ancient pilgrims on the sacred paths of the Kii Peninsula



The UNESCO World Heritage Kumano Kodo trail in Tanabe provides an exciting spiritual adventure. The tree-lined paths and moss-covered steps have been walked by pilgrims for millennia. These mystical woods are now part of Yoshino-Kumano National Park. Visitors can experience the physical and spiritual healing powers of shinrin-yoku, or “forest bathing.” English-speaking guides retell stories of ancient legends and point out historic locations en route.

Choose from numerous trail options, from 1- to 3-hour courses suitable for beginners to full or multi-day treks for the veteran hiker:

First-timers shouldn't miss Nachisan Seigantoji Temple, with its beautiful architecture amid the dramatic setting of Nachi Falls. When you're done, head into town to dine on fresh seafood and other local delicacies.



Kumano Travel 熊野トラベル

14-6 Minato, Tanabe-shi, Wakayama-ken

<https://www.kumano-travel.com/en/tours-activities/kumano-trek-english-speaking-guides>

64

Explore an Active Volcano in Kumamoto

Eat, stay, and play in Mount Aso, where ancient shrines and smoldering mountains await within one of the world's largest volcanic calderas

Mount Aso is an active volcano that cradles a vast basin-like caldera, 25 kilometers across at its widest point. It was formed by eruptions hundreds of thousands of years ago. Today, Mount Aso is a designated geopark within the borders of Aso Kuju National Park. Visitors



can enjoy activities like solo cycling, horse-riding, guided hiking across volcanic peaks. Mount Nakadake, is the most active part of the site today. Its smoldering crater is 600 meters across and 130 meters deep. When the fumes become hazardous it is closed to visitors, so be sure to check before you visit. Despite this volcanic activity, people have called Mount Aso home for thousands of years. When you need a break from outdoor activity, head into town to visit ancient Aso Shrine and try some local sake and specialties cultivated in the rich volcanic soil. By night, stargaze from inside the caldera for a one-of-a-kind view of the universe.

Kumamoto Prefectural Tourism Federation 公益社団法人 熊本県観光連盟

Kurokawa, Aso-shi, Kumamoto-ken

<https://kumamoto.guide/en/season/detail/8>

63

Scenic Fields of Lavender in Gunma

This mountainside park is home to many species of colorful flowers in summer and mild ski slopes in winter



The Tambara Lavender Park is blessed by summer temperatures averaging 20°C, which results in a lengthy flower season that lasts from early July to late August. The highlight of the park is the 50,000 lavender plants, but it is also home to over 100 other varieties of flowers—hydrangeas, wild grasses, marigolds, red and blue salvias, and a field of golden sunflowers.

The ski lifts also run in the summer, so park guests can not only take the easy route up the slope, but get a bird's eye view of the blossoms.

Hungry visitors can dine on a variety of foods, including lavender-infused soba noodles and lavender ice cream.



Tambara Lavender Park たんばらラベンダーパーク

Tamahara Plateau, Numata-shi, Gunma-ken

<https://www.visit-gunma.jp/en/spots/tambara-lavender-park/>

65

Capture Picture-Perfect Moments in Rural Daisen

A professional photoshoot against the starry skies of the Japanese countryside—light painting optional

Daisen, located in Daisen-Oki National Park, has long been the center of mountain worship, and once drew thousands of monks to its peak. Of the more than 100 temples they built, only a fraction remains today. Now you're more likely to find nature-lovers, skiers, and snowboarders instead of monks on its slopes. By night, with so few man-made structures and so little light pollution, the starry skies will take your breath away. With a professional photographer at your side, you can be the model of your own photoshoot in this striking setting. Stargaze while the photographer sets up, then create Insta-perfect snapshots and light paintings so you can share the experience with all your friends.



Daisen Tour Desk 大山ツアーデスク

45-5 Daisen, Daisen-cho, Saihaku-gun, Tottori-ken

<https://tourismdaisen.com/en/tour/star/>



66

Sail Down One of Japan's Most Scenic Rivers

Ride a traditional riverboat through Mogami Gorge's seasonal attractions

Osaka and Edo (now Tokyo). The celebrated haiku poet Matsuo Basho once visited the gorge on a journey through northern Japan, composing an ode to the swift current. Guests can enjoy a variety of different boat styles, from traditional tatami seating to regular chairs that allow customers to keep their shoes on. Reservations are required for meals—an exquisitely prepared bento lunch box or warming potato stew—on the hour-long ride. All passengers will be treated to a performance of the traditional river song of the Mogami River boatmen. Boats run the river course 365 days a year, so the scenery can be enjoyed in all its seasonal splendor, from spring wildflowers to snow covered hills.



MOGAMI KYO BASYOURAIN KANKO CORPORATION
最上峡芭蕉ライン観光株式会社
86-1 Furukuchi, Tozawa-mura, Mogami-gun, Yamagata-ken
📍 https://yamagatakanko.com/en/attractions/detail_282.html

A ride on a riverboat through the Mogami Gorge is like traveling through a slice of history. This Mogami river is one of the fastest in Japan, and was once a major trade route plied by boats hauling rice or safflowers to

68

Trekking Scenic Northern Japan on the Michinoku Coastal Trail

This long trail offers adventurers the hike of a lifetime along the Japan's northern Pacific coast

The Michinoku Coastal Trail stretches more than 1,000 kilometers along Japan's northern Pacific Coast. This ambitious trail is part of Sanriku Fukko National Park, developed as a reconstruction project following the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami. Today, this hiking path treats adventurers



to all the wonders of northern Japan's diverse countryside. The trail runs through magnificent landscapes from beaches to mountains. It offers numerous chances to experience local hospitality as it passes through tiny villages and major cities. Hikers can walk the streets of a once-proud castle town, or encounter wildlife, like the wild deer and monkeys of Kinkasan Island. A variety of accommodations are available, from campgrounds to luxury inns and everything in between. Ambitious hikers can walk the entire length from Hachinohe City in Aomori Prefecture to Soma City in Fukushima Prefecture, while casual travelers may select a shorter section.



Tanesashi Kaigan Information Center
種差海岸インフォメーションセンター
14-167 Tanakubo, Same machi, Hachinohe-shi, Aomori-ken
📍 <http://tohoku.env.go.jp/mct/english/>

67

The Central Alps from Japan's Highest Ropeway

Admire the mountainous majesty of the Senjojiki Cirque in all four seasons



The Central ("Chuo") Alps in Nagano are an alluring destination for alpinists and nature lovers of all stripes. The Komagatake Ropeway climbs 950 meters in just over seven minutes to a vantage point 2,612 meters above sea level. Here you can gaze out over the Senjojiki Cirque, a vast basin forged by glaciers some 20,000 years ago, with the Southern Alps and Mt. Fuji rising in the distance. From lingering spring snow in spring to autumn foliage, the Senjojiki Cirque offers beauty year-round, plus mountain hiking trails for every

experience level. In winter, enjoy unique views of frozen trees and snow-swept slopes from the warm comfort of the Senjojiki Hotel, where the restaurant serves up many local delicacies.

Chuo Alps Komagatake Ropeway
中央アルプス駒ヶ岳ロープウェイ
759-489 Akaho, Komagane-shi, Nagano-ken
📍 <https://www.chuo-alps.com/lang/en/>



©Tohoku Regional Environment Office

The Sanriku Fukko (reconstructed) National Park was established to help the revitalization of the Sanriku region, a stretch of the Pacific coast encompassing parts of the northern

69

Coastal Landscapes Rich with Life

A National Park in Tohoku rich in natural wonders and picturesque coastlines

prefectures of Aomori, Iwate, and Miyagi, the area hit by the earthquake and tsunami of 2011. The park offers a variety of activities and scenic spots for outdoor lovers. Picturesque rock formations and a beautiful seascape mark the area. The inlets of the ria coast, caused when coastal river valleys are inundated by sea waters, are deep and almost too numerous to count. The coastal waters have been tailored by nature into a perfect habitat for numerous species of sea life. Rare birds such as the black-tailed gull and peregrine falcon soar along the coast, and make their homes on rocky islets. Visitors might want to make a stop at the Miracle Lone Pine Tree at Rikuzentakata, which stands as a symbol of reconstruction and hope for future generations.



©Tohoku Regional Environment Office

Sanriku Fukko National Park
三陸復興国立公園
6F, Sendai Joint Government Building No. 2, 3-2-23, Honcho, Aoba-ku, Sendai-shi, Miyagi-ken
📍 <http://www.env.go.jp/en/nature/nps/park/sanriku/index.html>



PASSION: *Art*

Ancient and modern, natural and man-made: in Japan, these contrasting elements combine to create singularly enchanting experiences. Visit Japanese gardens and appreciate the beauty of the four seasons as medieval poets once did. Turn your eyes to the present, and you'll find impactful architecture that blends elegantly with its natural location, modern art museums tucked into historical cities, well preserved history museums, immersive exhibits of cutting-edge digital art, and more.



©Woods of Net"Photo by Toshiko Horiuchi MacAdam "Knitted Wonder Space 2

70

Art and Natural Splendor Await at the Hakone Open-Air Museum

*Admire the works of the world's greatest artists in harmony
with nature*

Few museums in Japan can claim a more stunning setting than this one located in the verdant hills of the hot spring paradise of Hakone. Located just off the Hakone Tozan cog railway line to Gora, this museum showcases sculptures and paintings by some of the world's most influential artists, from Henry Moore to Auguste Rodin and beyond. A highlight is the Picasso Pavilion, where nearly 320 of the Spanish master's works are displayed on a rotating basis.

Another must-see feature is Gabriel Loire's Symphonic Sculpture, an 18-meter-tall lookout tower of eye-popping stained glass enveloping an interior spiral staircase.

Set against the beautiful hills and valleys of Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park, the sculpture-filled garden is the perfect marriage of art and environment. If you're visiting with kids, be sure not to miss the climbable sculptures. To relax after exploring the grounds, try the on-site foot bath featuring natural hot spring water.



The Hakone Open-Air Museum
彫刻の森美術館
1121 Ninotaira, Hakone-machi, Ashigarashimo-gun, Kanagawa-ken

<https://tripref.kanagawa.jp/destination/hakone-open-air-museum/726>

71

A Luxury Cruise and Hotel Stay for Art Lovers

Take a private tour to the architectural masterpieces of the Seto Inland Sea



The Seto Inland Sea is an area known for world-class art and architecture. This two-day tour takes participants via cruise ship to the architectural highlights of the area.

A luxury cruise ship departs Mihara port for Omishima Island, home to three museums designed by award-winning architect Toyo Ito. The Toyo Ito Museum of Architecture stands out with its bold geometric angles and jet-black color. At the Ken Iwata Mother and Child Museum, sculptor Ken Iwata's human figures are exhibited in an open-air space framed by concrete walls. And international artists are the highlight at the Tokoro Museum Omishima.

Guests will return to the cruise vessel for a sumptuous lunch before transfer to the Tadao Ando-designed hotel Setouchi Retreat Aonagi. Minimalist in design, this luxury retreat features an awe-inspiring infinity pool. A multi-course dinner of local seafood and

farm-fresh ingredients follows. This journey through the breathtaking architecture and scenic wonders of the Setouchi Islands is steeped in luxury every step of the way.

Setouchi Retreat Aonagi
WAKKA
Ehime Kintetsu Taxi Inc.
Setouchi Island Cruise Co., Ltd.

瀬戸内リゾート青風

WAKKA (わかか)

愛媛近鉄タクシー(株)

瀬戸内アイランドクルーズ(株)

794-1 Yanaidanimachi, Matsuyama-shi, Ehime-ken

6691-1 Inokuchi, Kamiura-cho, Imabari-shi, Ehime-ken

2-9-37 Miyanishi, Matsuyama-shi, Ehime-ken

796-53 Goto-cho, Takamatsu-shi, Kagawa-ken

<https://experiences.travel.rakuten.com/experiences/22358>



©Tokamachi Tourist Association

72

Miniature Art at the Omiya Bonsai Art Museum

A unique showcase of the history, culture, and cultivation of these miniature man-made natural artworks



©The Omiya Bonsai Art Museum, Saitama

Bonsai is the traditional Japanese art of cultivating potted trees to grow in sizes small enough to fit on a tabletop. The best examples can be decades or even centuries old—and have been carefully coaxed by generations of bonsai masters into sublime, harmonious shapes that mimic their appearance in nature. The Omiya Bonsai Art Museum is the world's first publicly run museum devoted to bonsai, and it has an impressive collection on display.

English audio guides are available to give visitors greater insight into the history, culture, and production of these amazing miniature creations.

The museum is located less than an hour from central Tokyo. It makes for a perfect half-day destination, or as a full day combined with exploring the surrounding area, home to the lovely Omiya Park and a number of private bonsai gardens.



©The Omiya Bonsai Art Museum, Saitama

The Omiya Bonsai Art Museum, Saitama

さいたま市大宮盆栽美術館

2-24-3 Toro-cho, Kita-ku, Saitama-shi, Saitama-ken

<https://www.bonsai-art-museum.jp/en/>

73

Explore the World of Contemporary Art in Central Kanazawa



©Photo: WATANABE Osamu
Courtesy: 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa

The museum's architecture is a work of art that stands out among the other buildings in the center of Kanazawa. Designed by the Japanese architects Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa, the circular building has no facade or main entrance, so you can enter and explore it freely. Walk around and through an artwork, "The Swimming Pool," where your fellow museum-goers appear to be underground.

For families, hands-on workshops are offered in the kids' studio and a rich history of contemporary art is available in the on-site library. Complete with a restaurant, the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa is a destination artistically minded families can enjoy together.

Stimulate your mind and senses at the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa

The 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa hosts exhibitions from visionary creators around the world, including experimental interactive works and art integrated with the building's structure. The museum is located in the heart of Kanazawa, nearby the beautiful Kenrokuen Garden.



©Leandro ERLICH, "The Swimming Pool", 2004
Collection: 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa
Photo: WATANABE Osamu
Courtesy: 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa

21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa 金沢21世紀美術館

1-2-1 Hirosaka, Kanazawa-shi, Ishikawa-ken

🌐 <http://www.kanazawa21.jp/en/>

75

A Trove of Cultural Treasures at the Kyoto National Museum

One of Japan's oldest museums has a remarkable collection of cultural treasures in an architecturally stunning setting

The Kyoto National Museum was opened in 1897 as the Imperial Museum of Kyoto. It was established by the government to protect the country's endangered cultural properties from damage or destruction at a time when Japan was quickly modernizing. It took on its present name in 1952.

The museum presently houses almost 15,000 items, some from its own collection, others on long-term loan from temples, shrines, and private collections. The items are primarily pre-modern Japanese art, including archeological artifacts, paintings, sculpture, ceramics, calligraphy, lacquer, and textiles. The spacious Heisei Chishinkan Wing, designed by Taniguchi Yoshi (also responsible for the Museum of Modern Art in New York), is also worth a visit, with a classic traditional tea house, stone statues and bridges, and more. A museum shop sells museum-related merchandise and the museum's on-site café serves drinks and light meals. The schedule of exhibitions and events, including lectures and concerts, is posted on the official website.



©Kyoto National Museum



©Kyoto National Museum



©Kyoto National Museum

Kyoto National Museum 京都国立博物館

527 Chaya-cho, Higashiyama-ku, Kyoto-shi, Kyoto-fu

🌐 <https://www.kyohaku.go.jp/eng/index.html>

74

Stay at a Creative Paradise Hotel in Gunma



©Katsumasa Tanaka

The Shiroiya Hotel was redesigned by one of Japan's leading architects, and it exhibits works by artists from Gunma, other parts of Japan, and even abroad. The hotel offers a traditional in-house tea ceremony, critically acclaimed cuisine, and a Finnish sauna with open air views of Mt. Akagi.

The nearby Minakami Biosphere Reserve is perfect for hiking, and visitors can kayak in Lake Shima. Exclusive guided tours to these destinations are available with advance booking. The hotel also serves as a center for the area's revitalization efforts, where guests can learn about the lifestyles of the locals and how Maebashi has transformed.

Art, nature, history, dining, and relaxation: Whatever your interest, one hotel offers something for you

Maebashi was formerly a silk-producing powerhouse and was crucial to the modernization of Japan. Once an inn for artists and celebrities, the hotel has undergone many transformations, and is now open thanks to the efforts of the international art community.



©Shinya Kigure



©Shinya Kigure

SHIROIYA HOTEL 白井屋ホテル

2-2-15 Honmachi, Maebashi-shi, Gunma-ken

🌐 <https://www.shiroiya.com/en/>

76

Endless Entertainment Options Await on a Nagasaki Island

Chart a course for outdoor fun and adventure on an island paradise of marine beauty

On the island of Iojima, just a stone's throw from central Nagasaki, you'll find i+Land Nagasaki, a resort offering untouched nature, outdoor activities, and even a cutting-edge digital entertainment experience. i+Land Nagasaki is divided into two main sections: the PORT AREA and GARDEN AREA, each offering a host of accommodation and dining venues. Take in beautiful ocean vistas, feast on fresh seafood and other seasonal dishes, or relax at one of three natural hot spring resorts. Marvel at a panoramic view of the Nagasaki Sea from an open-air bath, or enjoy the solitude of a bedrock bath. If you're the outdoor type, there's no shortage of marine activities for you to enjoy, from stand-up paddleboarding to marine jet sailing, banana boats, and more. You can also rent a bicycle and fishing rod to tour the island at your own leisure.

For a different sort of entertainment, don't miss



the ISLAND LUMINA multimedia experience to be found on the far side of the island. You'll walk illuminated forests, a bamboo maze, down a well all brought to life with digital animation to create a fantastical story that will transport you to another world. The experience lasts about an hour, making this a wondrous way to end the day. Check the website for exact start times, as the island comes to life when the sun goes down.



ISLAND LUMINA ISLAND LUMINA

1-3278-3 Iojima-machi, Nagasaki-shi, Nagasaki-ken

🌐 <https://www.islandlumina.jp/en/>

77

Masterpieces of Japanese Art and a World Famous Japanese Garden

The Adachi Museum of Art in Shimane Prefecture should be on every art lover's itinerary

The Adachi Museum of Art hosts one of the premiere collections of Japanese art. It was founded by a local businessman who was passionate about art and equally interested in Japanese gardens. The museum collection has a total of 2,000 artworks, including contemporary



©Adachi Museum of Art

paintings, ceramic works, and a permanent exhibition of paintings by Yokoyama Taikan—known for his paintings of Mt. Fuji. A separate hall is dedicated to the artwork by the epicure and artist known as Rosanjin.

The museum's garden is simply spectacular, and has been named the best in Japan in the annual ranking by the Journal of Japanese Gardening. Its 41 acres consist of fine examples of various garden types, from dry landscape and moss gardens to ponds and waterfalls. The variety means the garden areas' seasonal splendor can be enjoyed throughout the year.



©Adachi Museum of Art



©Adachi Museum of Art

ADACHI MUSEUM OF ART 足立美術館

320 Furukawacho, Yasugi-shi, Shimane-ken

<http://www.adachi-museum.or.jp/en/>

79

A Night Walk on Sacred Ainu Land

Immerse yourself in the land of Ainu gods with an enchanting nighttime experience in Hokkaido



©MOMENTFACTORY

Those with an interest in the Ainu—the indigenous people of Hokkaido—and their philosophy of living in harmony with nature will want to make the time to visit Akan Mashu National Park in Hokkaido. Immerse yourself in a one-of-a-kind experience, as an owl—one of the Ainu deities—guides you through a primeval landscape.

Attune your ears to a traditional Ainu song as you begin your journey at nightfall. Follow a 1.2 km path into the sacred home of the Ainu gods and become a part of the story yourself by using a so-called rhythm staff. Wield this staff as prompted by your owl guide, and persevere through trials to unravel the story's mysteries.

Dive head-first into the world of Kamuy Lumina, where you will find yourself transported into an interactive, imaginative world. Let yourself be taken away by the seamless integration of light, sound, scenography, and projection for a luminous trek outdoors. The juxtaposition of immersive multimedia and natural scenery promises an unforgettable nighttime experience.



©MOMENTFACTORY

Akan Adventure Tourism 阿寒アドベンチャーツーリズム

1-5-20 Akankoonsen, Akan-cho, Kushiro-shi, Hokkaido

<http://kamuylumina.jp/en/>

78

Reflect on the Lessons of History in Nagasaki

See powerful reminders that peace must be preserved

Nagasaki, where the second atomic bomb was dropped on August 9, 1945, serves as a somber reminder of the horrors of nuclear war. This tour will introduce the city with several sites that preserve the history of this tragedy.

The tour begins at the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum—located beside the very site



©NPTA

where the bomb exploded. Visitors can learn about the history of nuclear weapons and what may be done to prevent such horrors going forward. At the Nagasaki Peace Park, visitors may make a wish for world peace before the 10-meter-tall Peace Statue.

About 500 meters from the epicenter, a wooden sculpture of the Virgin Mary that survived the blast at Urakami Cathedral, tells the tale of Nagasaki's bombing. Miraculously, the single-pillar torii gate and the trees at Sanno Shire still stand to this day. Finally, visit the ruins of Shiroyama Elementary School, a site where you can learn about the young victims whose lives were lost.



©NPTA

The Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum, etc. 長崎原爆資料館他

Nagasaki-shi, Nagasaki-ken

<https://www.discover-nagasaki.com/en/featured-topics/about>

80

Explore History at Nara National Museum

Discover a repository of venerable Buddhist art in the heart of Japan's ancient capital

Nara Park is perhaps most famous among tourists for its free roaming deer, but art and history aficionados won't want to miss the Nara National Museum, located on the premises. Enter the museum's Nara Buddhist Sculpture Hall, completed in 1894 and designated an Important Cultural Property, and you'll find marvelous

Buddhist statues dating as far back as the Asuka period (592–710).

With English-language signage and explanations throughout the museum, the historical and cultural significance of the masterpieces of sculpture, painting, calligraphy, and more can be readily understood. Volunteer guides are also stationed in the exhibition rooms to answer any questions you may have. There is a museum shop where visitors can purchase goods such as exhibition guides, art books, in addition to a cafe serving drinks and light meals.

Special exhibitions are held throughout the year, so be sure to check the calendar before you visit. The museum is conveniently located within walking distance from Todaiji Temple, home to Nara's Great Buddha.



©Nara National Museum



©Nara National Museum



©Nara National Museum

Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館

50 Noborioji-cho, Nara-shi, Nara-ken

https://www.narahaku.go.jp/english/index_e.html



PASSION:
Relaxation

Thanks to a deep-seated spirit of hospitality and rejuvenating nature, Japan offers myriad destinations to escape the stress of modern society. Leave the city behind to discover idyllic mountains and seaside locales. Stay the night at the rustic homes of farmers or fishermen, or luxurious inns that combine the best of Japanese tradition and modern design. Feast on local delicacies prepared from the finest ingredients. Soak in rejuvenating hot spring waters and wash your worries away.

81

Exquisite Views at this Luxury Mountain Resort

This award-winning hot spring resort in the scenic Gunma mountains is an ideal getaway year-round



The boutique hotel Bettei Senjuan was awarded the title of Luxury Hideaway Resort in the 2016 World Luxury Hotel Awards. It is a fusion of traditional Japanese and contemporary elements and offers surpassing comfort and Japanese hospitality in an idyllic natural setting.

Their rooms are primarily Japanese-style, though rooms with Western-style beds are also available. The windows are floor-to-ceiling, offering spectacular views of nearby Mt. Tanigawa in every season. Each room features its own private outdoor bath, with

continually flowing water that is 100-percent spring-sourced. There's also a full-service spa for those looking for further pampering.

The first-class Japanese cuisine served at the restaurant features locally sourced ingredients, from colorful salads to fresh fatty tuna to amazingly marbled wagyu beef.

Outdoor and nature enthusiasts will find something to love throughout the year. The abundant snowfall makes it a great winter sports destination, and mountain trails offer superb hiking opportunities during the warmer months.



Bettei Senjuan

別邸 仙寿庵

614 Tanigawa, Minakami-machi, Tone-gun, Gunma-ken

<https://www.relaischateaux.com/us/japan/senjuan-gunma-minakami>



82

A Hot Spring Getaway in a Historical Property

Soothe body and mind in the therapeutic baths of this remote traditional inn



The Hoshi Onsen Chojukan is a secluded hot spring resort in a beautifully preserved 140-year old building that is a Registered Tangible Cultural Property recognized by the Japanese government. It is located in the picturesque mountains of Gunma Prefecture in Joshin'etsukogen National Park.

The main building was constructed during the Meiji period (1868-1912) and maintains the architectural style of that time. The inn welcomes overnight guests as well as those who are just looking to enjoy the bathing facilities. Rare among Japanese hot spring resorts, it offers both

gender-separate and mixed bathing depending on the time of day, making it perfect for couples. The indoor baths feature exquisite cypress tubs, while the outdoor baths offering spectacular views of the starry skies at night. There's even a riverside bath reserved for women.

For overnight guests, the inn offers extensive dining options featuring local ingredients and sublime Japanese sake. For those dropping by for the day, there are special packages that include bathing and a choice of lunches. Visitors are encouraged to check availability ahead of time.



Hoshi Onsen Chojukan 法師温泉 長寿館

650 Nagai, Minakami-machi, Tone-gun, Gunma-ken

<http://hoshi-onsen.com/english/index.html>

83

Experience Taketomi Island in Its Purest Form

Immerse yourself in the idyllic island life at this traditional yet luxurious Ryukyu resort

HOSHINOYA Taketomi Island is a resort imbued with rich cultural heritage, located on Taketomi Island in Okinawa's Yaeyama region. The white coral sand paths, red tile-roofed pavilions, and gukku stone walls for privacy were built to match the style of the local residences, making every

visitor an islander during their stay.

For a taste of authentic local culture, start your day with an exclusive island tour aboard a wagon drawn by a water buffalo. Back at the resort, take a shamisen lesson or make your very own shisa—one of the lion-like stone guardians atop walls and roofs throughout the area. Visit the nearby Iriomote and Yubu Islands, where, with luck, you may see a rare Iriomote cat or crested serpent eagle in Iriomote-Ishigaki National Park. Or, of course, simply relax on the beach.

Lavish dining is an indispensable part of any vacation, and HOSHINOYA Taketomi Island's exclusive French-Okinawa fusion dishes are sure to delight, with locally sourced ingredients and traditional island herbs attractively served on plates and bowls fashioned by an Okinawan pottery master.



©HOSHINOYA Taketomi Island - Hoshino Resorts Inc.



©HOSHINOYA Taketomi Island - Hoshino Resorts Inc.



©HOSHINOYA Taketomi Island - Hoshino Resorts Inc.

HOSHINOYA Taketomi Island 星のや竹富島

1955 Taketomi-cho, Yaeyama-gun, Okinawa-ken

<https://hoshinoya.com/taketomijima/en/>

84

Escape to Soothing Waters at Ashinomaki Onsen

Terraced baths, traditional music, and culinary delights

Ookawaso Ryokan is a traditional Japanese inn in the Ashinomaki Onsen area, nestled in a peaceful river gorge. The inn offers many scenic hot spring baths for taking in forest views as you soak. The Shiki Butai Tanada baths are designed to look like terraced rice paddies, while the Kuchu Rotemburo overlooks the fast-flowing river below.



Visitors are housed in two wings: the Yoiwachitei, with modern touches, and the more traditional Tsukimitei. At mealtime, diners feast on regional specialties like Fukushima beef and seafood, served with a wide range of local produce. All guests can enjoy a live shamisen performance in the hotel's roomy lobby from 4:00 to 6:00 P.M. daily.

Aizu Ashinomaki Hot Spring Resort Hotel Ookawaso

会津芦ノ牧温泉 大川荘
984 Oto-machi Oaza Ashinomaki, Azashimodaira, Aizuwakamatsu-shi, Fukushima-ken

<http://www.ookawaso.co.jp/en/>

85

Take a Refreshing Bath in the Sand

Get buried in this hot spring-heated sand bath

On the southern tip of Kagoshima Prefecture lies a natural marvel sure to soothe even the most stubborn nerves. Ibusuki's hot spring waters flow directly beneath the sandy beach and into the ocean. It's said to be the world's only naturally heated sand bath. Hop on in and let your worldly cares melt away. A tradition in the Ibusuki area that dates back some three centuries, the sand baths have been scientifically proven by researchers at Kagoshima University's Faculty of Medicine



to offer numerous health benefits including increased blood circulation. Rent a traditional cotton yukata and buy a face towel when you arrive. Once you're buried in the sand, snug up to your chin, the only challenge is staying awake amid the intense relaxation. When you're done, head back to the main facility for a rinse in a heated shower to wash away the sand. You may never experience a "sauna" like this again.



Sand Bath Hall SARA KU 砂むし会館砂楽

5-25-18 Yunohama, Ibusuki-shi, Kagoshima-ken

<http://kagoshima-trip.jp/en/25/>

87

Spend a Night at a Traditional Boathouse

Unique traditional accommodations with a tranquil bay view in a charming village

Ine is a charming fishing village that sits on a calm protected bay on the Sea of Japan. The village is known for its unusual residential style of funaya, a type of home built right on the water above the family's boat shed. Funa no Yado: Kura is a renovated funaya made into a delightful inn, with modern facilities in a classic building once used by a local fishing family.

Guests can bask in the warmth of the hosts' hospitality, as the inn is for the exclusive use of one party. The tatami-floored main guestroom offers great views of the calm waters of the bay. Even the bathroom, featuring a traditional Shigaraki-ware tub, offers a sweeping view of the outdoors and access to sea breezes.



©Funaya no yado KURA



©Funaya no yado KURA



©Funaya no yado KURA

Funaya no yado KURA 京都伊根 舟屋の宿「蔵-KURA-」

863-1 Kameshima, Ine-cho, Yoza-gun, Kyoto-fu

<http://www.ine-kura.com/en.html>

86

Stay at a Traditional Inn on the Nakasendo Trail

A post town with a centuries-old legacy of hospitality offers a respite for today's travelers

Iseya is a traditional family-run inn in the former post town of Narai. Nestled in the mountains of Nagano Prefecture's scenic Kiso Valley, this town long served as a rest stop along the Nakasendo trail that connected the former capital of Kyoto with Edo



©iseya

(now Tokyo). Today, centuries later, visitors can enjoy the same feeling of adventure that early travelers experienced.

Founded in 1818 and set in a traditional structure that was once a wholesaler's warehouse, Iseya welcomes visitors with its distinct Edo-period (1603-1867) architecture and views of the surrounding natural beauty. Dinner and breakfast are prepared using local ingredients such as mountain vegetables and fish caught from the nearby river: (Iseya can accommodate most dietary restrictions; simply mention them at the time of reservation.)

Guests to the town will find charming local shops and carefully preserved historical residences. To truly experience the road as it once was, it is even possible to walk parts of the Nakasendo to the next town.



©iseya

ISEYA 御宿 伊勢屋

388 Narai, Shiojiri-shi, Nagano-ken

<https://oyado-iseya.jp/>

88

Pamper Yourself at a Full-Service Luxury Resort on Beautiful Mount Zao

The elegant inn offers the best of traditional Japanese hospitality and Western amenities

The extravagant CHIKUSENSO Mt. Zao Onsen Resort & Spa is a full luxury spa over a natural hot spring, right at the base of Mount Zao in northeast Japan—just the place to relax after a



long day of hiking or a stressful week at work. Choose from VIP suites, standard suites, and deluxe guest rooms. All suite rooms have private hot springs, and non-suite rooms still provide access to the hotel's public hot springs, as well as two private outdoor baths (reservation required).

The full-course Japanese meals at the restaurant are sure to delight your taste buds. There's also a bar, an outdoor lounge, and a library lounge—plus a gym. The architecture fuses traditional Japanese values and stunning garden views with Western elements, and contemporary works of art are on display throughout the premises.



CHIKUSENSO: Mt. Zao Onsen Resort & Spa 竹泉荘

88-11 Uwanohara Tōgattaonsen, Zao-machi, Katta-gun, Miyagi-ken

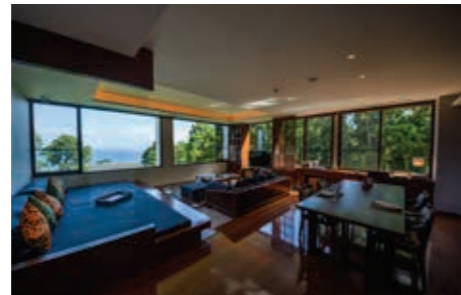
<http://mtzaoresort.com/en/index.php>

89

Luxury Accommodations in the Midst of an Ancient Forest

A quality hotel and spa welcomes guests at the UNESCO World Heritage site of Yakushima island

The lush island of Yakushima sits some 60 kilometers off the southern tip of Kyushu. It is known for its ancient forest, including the giant yakusugi cedar trees, some thought to date back over 2,000 years. It was designated a World



©sankara hotel&spa Yakushima

Heritage Site in 1993. The Sankara Hotel & Spa Yakushima sits in a secluded natural setting between the sea and the mountains of this lightly populated island. The luxury resort consists of several villas scattered among the forest, some with their private spas or outdoor baths. The magnificent views and comforting seclusion are only matched by the high level of service. Two restaurants offer French cuisine made from local seasonal ingredients. The superb spa is manned by expert staff. A pool offers a grand view of the sea and the surrounding forest, and a fully stocked gym rounds out the guest facilities. The resort offers a relaxing getaway with access to the natural wildlife of this rugged island.



©sankara hotel&spa Yakushima

sankara hotel & spa YAKUSHIMA

sankara hotel & spa 屋久島
553 Haginoue, Mugio, Yakushima-cho, Kumage-gun, Kagoshima-ken
🌐 <http://www.sankarahotel-spa.com/en/>

91

A Touch of Traditional Luxury Near Takeda Castle

Spend a memorable night in a converted sake brewery



A former drawing room and the large warehouse have been repurposed to serve as guest rooms, complete with both Western-style mattresses and Japanese touches like sliding shoji screens and tatami mats. Wooden beams and ornate scrolling reflect the structure's past life as a working brewery. A separate annex is available for exclusive use by one group per day.

Food is another highlight, with dinner ingredients selected from regional favorites, like Tajima beef, one of Japan's heritage cattle brands, and locally grown vegetables.

The hotel is just a short walk from Takeda Castle, known as the "castle in the sky" due to the unique weather conditions of fog and clouds that give the appearance that it's floating in midair.

Takeda Castle Town Hotel En is an elegantly restored property at the base of Takeda Castle. The property, which has been in the Kimura family for 400 years, was formerly a renowned sake brewery.



Takeda Castle Town Hotel EN 竹田城下町ホテルEN

363 Nishigawa Uemachi, Takeda, Wadayama-cho, Asago-shi, Hyogo-ken
🌐 <https://www.takedacastle.jp/en/lp/>

90

Stay in a Traditional Thatched Farmhouse in a Scenic Rural Village

Experience how villagers once lived in these iconic traditional homes

The iconic village of Shirakawa-go is tucked away in the mountains of Gifu Prefecture in central Japan. It consists of a cluster of 100 or so historic farmhouses—some over three centuries old—set in an alpine valley. Their thatched roofs are unforgettable. They are built in the Gassho-style, so named because



©Shirakawa Village Office

of the steep pitch similar to praying hands. The thickness of the thatch helps insulate the interior, while the vertical angle helps the roofs shed the heavy snowfalls for which the area is known. This fairytale-like setting in an authentic rural landscape is still home to villagers who are keeping old customs alive. Although it is a popular destination year-round, it is particularly attractive in the winter months when an illumination event lights the farmhouses in the snow-covered valley. Many of the homes have been repurposed as inns or guest houses, and welcome guests interested in experiencing what rural life was like in this once isolated part of Japan.



©Shirakawa Village Office



©Shirakawa Village Office

Shirakawa-go 白川郷

Ogimachi Shirakawa-mura Ono-gun, Gifu-ken
🌐 <https://shirakawa-go.gr.jp/en/stay/?index>

92

Minimalist Design, Maximum Comfort

A repurposed private guesthouse by world-renowned architect Tadao Ando is now a luxury hotel



The okcs Retreat Setouchi Aonagi is a unique luxury hotel in a secluded location in the mountains of Matsuyama, Ehime Prefecture. It was originally designed as a private guesthouse by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Tadao Ando, and reopened as an exclusive hotel in 2015. The architect collaborated in the choice of furnishings, interior, and artwork, including pieces by such artists as calligrapher Rieko Kawabe and Frank Stella.

The retreat has only seven spacious rooms, all done in the minimalist style of bare concrete for which Ando is famous. An extraordinary rooftop infinity pool offers views of the Inland Sea and surroundings.

The kaiseki-style meals are as stylish as the hotel design, using local farm-to-table ingredients, including seafood caught fresh each morning.

Setouchi Aonagi 瀬戸内リゾート青尻

794-1 Yanagidani-machi, Matsuyama-shi, Ehime-ken
🌐 <https://setouchitrip.com/en/relaxing-stay/1629>

93

Starlit Camping on the Goto Islands



©Nordisk Village Goto Islands

Discover the timeless beauty of this East China Sea archipelago

Explore a different aspect of Japan's history with a visit to the Goto Islands. Once a refuge for Japan's "hidden Christians," this lush volcanic archipelago of beaches, jagged cliffs and fantastic seafood is home to historic churches as well as the first Nordisk Village glamping property in Asia.

You'll bed down for the evening at this camp site in spacious canvas tents including all modern conveniences. Feast on island-grown food in the village's restaurant housed in a

tastefully converted schoolhouse under the stars.

Take in the islands' natural wonders from land, sea, or air—try scuba diving in the crystal-clear waters, where the Tsushima current brings various fish from the south, or enjoy fishing, cruising, cycling, or even chartering a sightseeing flight over the archipelago for even more write-home-about experiences.

Be sure not to miss Goto's charming heritage churches, like Kusuvara Church and Mizunoura Catholic Church, which form part of the Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region UNESCO World Heritage site.



©Nordisk Village Goto Islands



©Nordisk Village Goto Islands

Nordisk Village Goto Islands Nordisk Village Goto Islands

1233 Tao, Tomie-machi, Goto-shi, Nagasaki-ken

🌐 <https://www.nordiskvillage.jp/en/index.html>

95

Lose Yourself in Luxurious Mountain Lodgings

Heal body and soul at a unique national park



©FUFU Nikko



©FUFU Nikko

Nikko National Park, encompasses Tochigi, Gunma and Fukushima prefectures. The park's namesake city is home to magnificent cultural assets such as the shrines and temples of Nikko, and stunning nature like Kegon Falls and the Byobuwa Cliffs.

Located within walking distance the famous Toshogu Shrine, FUFU Nikko offers 24 tastefully decorated suite rooms with private hot spring baths, blending western and Japanese influences.

Visitors will have the chance to experience unique Japanese cuisine. Select from either traditional Kaiseki courses with a garden view, or at a counter, with Teppanyaki cuisine, both prepared with seasonal Tochigi ingredients.

Visitors can relax in the FUFU Lounge, warmed by the fireplace and adorned with wooden décor. A variety of beverages are available. The lounge provides an opportunity for slow contemplation.

FUFU Nikko ふふ日光

1573-8 Hon-cho, Nikko-shi, Tochigi-ken

🌐 <https://www.fufunikko.jp/en>



©FUFU Nikko

94

Stay in a Thatched Cottage in a Rural Village

Enjoy the slow life of traditional Japan in a small community north of Kyoto

Miyama Futon & Breakfast features holiday rentals at four thatched cottages in the rustic Miyama region. These unusual accommodations offer a restful, relaxing escape in a traditional setting far from today's urban centers.



©Miyama FUTON&Breakfast

The cottages are run by a company specializing in thatching, and while they use ancient sustainable methods to maintain the roofs, the hospitality and facilities are far from spartan. The cottages range from a spacious 150-year-old home that is registered as a cultural heritage site to a more compact modern villa built recently with local materials. Along with top-notch bathing facilities and conveniences, there's a fully equipped modern kitchen in each cottage. Guests are welcome to cook for themselves or dine at local restaurants. If they do cook, they are sure to appreciate the chicken coop, from which come fresh-picked eggs for breakfast. Peaceful scenes of rice fields, rivers, and bamboo forests add an unforgettable backdrop.



©Miyama FUTON&Breakfast



©Miyama FUTON&Breakfast

Miyama FUTON&Breakfast thatched cottages 美山FUTON&Breakfast

52 Kitsuneiwa, Shima, Miyama-cho, Nantan-shi, Kyoto-fu

🌐 <http://miyamafandb.jp/>

96

Soak Up Waterfalls and Mountain Air at a Retreat in Takachiho

From shochu spirits to kagura performances, this Kyushu inn has you covered

An intimate village nestled in the mountains of Miyazaki. A deep gorge sparkling with towering waterfalls. And an inn of relaxing ryokan residences. Welcome to Kamigakure. With only eight rooms spread across multiple residences, your stay is sure to be quiet and



restorative. At night, enjoy a meal prepared with locally sourced ingredients, such as local Takachiho beef or fresh masu salmon straight from the nearby rivers, and wash it down with local shochu. Finally, sink into your suite's private bath fed with water from a nearby sacred waterfall.

Experience the natural beauty of Takachiho's waterfalls, tour the local shrines, or head to the top of Kunimigaoka and take in the breathtaking view from above the clouds. Kamigakure is short walk from the spectacular Takachiho Gorge, where you can paddle by the falls in a rowboat. Another spectacular local attraction is the traditional kagura dance performances at Takachiho Shrine.



Japanese-style inn "Kamigakure" in Takachiho 高千穂離れの宿 神隠れ

1120-5 Mitai, Takachiho-cho, Nishiusuki-gun, Miyazaki-ken

🌐 <https://www.kamigakure.jp/en/>

97

A Luxurious Overnight Stay at a 200-Year-Old Mansion



Iizuka-tei's traditional Japanese architecture is integrated with modern furniture in a one-of-a-kind aesthetic combination. Rooms are airy and open, with garden views. Perfect for both short and long stays, Iizuka-tei has English-speaking staff ready to ensure all your needs are met for a pleasant stay.

While you can spend your entire visit in the comfort of your room, Iizuka-tei encourages guests to explore the town as well. The hotel is simply a place to stay, and the traditional hospitality of the local restaurants and other establishments is what makes the experience complete.



National Tangible Cultural Property Hotel Iizuka-tei

有形文化財ホテル 飯塚邸
360 Batō, Nakagawa-machi, Nasu-gun, Tochigi-ken
<https://iizukatei.ohatawaragt.co.jp/en/>

Experience the fusion of modern architecture and traditional Japanese sensibilities

Iizuka-tei is a luxurious hotel housed in a 200-year-old mansion in northeast Tochigi Prefecture—the sole National Cultural Tangible Property that has been refurbished into premium accommodation.

99

A Rural Retreat at a Saga Farmhouse

Kick back and experience country life Japanese-style at the rustic Guza guest house



Guza, a rustic farmhouse deep in the mountains of Saga Prefecture, offers a rural retreat. You'll feel as if you've traveled back in time to experience life in rural Japan.

You won't find anything fancy here, and that's the beauty of it. The farmhouse structure is constructed of massive wooden beams, and the floors are tatami mats. The kitchen boasts an old-fashioned kamado wood stove, where the owners will prepare your two included meals—a feast of fresh local produce. The iron Goemon-style bath is wood-fired, and the futons are plenty comfortable.

There's nothing much to do here if you're tied to your electronic devices, and that's the point. You're welcome instead to explore the mountains, fish, take a dip in the river to cool off on a summer's day. Or just step outside, sit down around the firepit and take a deep breath of fresh mountain air.



"Guza" Farm-inn

農家民宿 具座
1097 Fujubarū, Mitsuse-mura Saga-shi, Saga-ken
<http://guza-mitsuse.com/for-foreign-guests/>

98

Stay at This Unique New Yamagata Concept Hotel

Rediscover a countryside landscape you never knew existed



©SUIDEN TERRASSE

Shonai Hotel Suiden Terrace opened in 2018 as a hotel providing a refined experience. Shigeru Ban, an award-winning architect, designed the building carefully and in tune with local surroundings as a two-story wooden construction; apparently floating on rice fields that reflect the sky both day and night. As well as comfortable rooms—many of which boast views of the mountains and fields beyond—the Shonai Hotel also has a restaurant serving locally sourced ingredients, a spa and fitness suite, and a library. And look no further than the Kids Dome Sorai for your younger family members—the facility has both a playground and an extensive area devoted to crafts and other activities.



©SUIDEN TERRASSE

SHONAI HOTEL SUIDEN TERRASSE

ショウナイホテル スイデンテラス
23-1 Shimotorinosu, Kitakyoden, Tsuruoka-shi, Yamagata-ken
<https://www.suiden-terrasse.yamagata-design.com/en/>



©SUIDEN TERRASSE

100

Ski Down Powder Slopes and Soak in Spectacular Hot Springs

Enjoy superb winter activities and relaxation in the mountains of Niigata

Often getting a meter of snowfall in one night, Myoko City is a winter wonderland with gorgeous views of the snowy mountains. Situated at an altitude of 1,000 meters on Mt. Myoko is the Akakura Kanko Hotel, an authentic highland resort accommodation.



The hotel is connected to Akakura Kanko Resort, an international ski resort with runs stretching over 4 kilometers. This sky-high location ensures you will have a fantastic view as you zip down slopes blessed with powder snow due to their proximity to the Sea of Japan.

After an exhilarating day in the snow, soak your bones in the hotel's hot spring baths. The spring flows directly from Mt. Myoko's Kita-Jigokudani valley, and is said to be effective in curing ailments and revitalizing the skin. Take your pick of outdoor and indoor baths, and let the waters soothe your mind and body as you gaze upon the rustic towns, mountains, and other natural wonders stretching for kilometers in the distance.



Akakura Kanko Hotel 赤倉観光ホテル

216 Tagiri, Myoko-shi, Niigata-ken
https://www.akr-hotel.com/e_introduction.html

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Shirakawa-go, Gifu ©Saowanee Phaengy Suntararak

Back cover images (clockwise from top left):

Mt.Fuji, Yamanashi
Yoshino River, Kochi
Sakaematsu Beach, Miyazaki
Aizu Ashinomaki Onsen, Fukushima
Akita Nairiku Inland Railway, Akita
Geto Kogen Ski Resort, Iwate
Minami Aso, Kumamoto
Hirosaki Park, Aomori

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