Japanese cuisine is a worldwide phenomenon. Indelibly tied to the land, the seasons, and the people, it’s best experienced right here at home. Venture to a historic fishing village to enjoy fresh catches hauled in with time-honored techniques. Stay overnight in Japan’s green tea heartland and join farmers at work. Let a master chef teach you to prepare a feast, or go behind the scenes and see how sake is brewed. Japan is also home to fine wine and whisky, ramen shops, masterful French and Italian fare prepared with local ingredients, and much more. Immerse yourself in the full landscape of Japan’s gourmet culture and discover a world of wonders beyond what you see on your plate.

Kobe beef: beyond words!

Attention meat lovers, premium, prime Kobe beef is ready to amaze you.

The city of Kobe, full of visual and edible feasts, is best known for its namesake beef—and for good reason. Kobe beef is succulent. Packed with flavor. A world-famous melt-in-the-mouth sensation. It takes exceptional skill and care to bring this unmatched beef to your table. The meat comes from cows born and reared exclusively in Hyogo Prefecture, where Kobe is located, and only the very finest pass muster. Among these chosen few, grade A5 is the best of the best. The meat is typically enjoyed as steak grilled to perfection for you right on the spot: on a hotplate inches away. Halal varieties are now also available. Expect to pay over a hundred dollars to feast on premium Kobe beef—well worth it for a meal you’ll never forget!

Setsugetsuka (Kobe beef)

雪月花本店

- [Website](http://www.kobe-setsugetsuka.com/honten)
- [Website](http://setouchitrip.com/food-drink/2362)
Narrow streets lined with alluring red lanterns, enticing you into the coziest of watering holes — Japan is a foodie’s paradise and the friendly and knowledgeable guides at Tohoku Local Secret Tours will take you to places normally only locals know. Soak up the atmosphere of traditional izakaya (Japanese-style pubs), savor regional delicacies and make some new friends along the way as you hop to three back-alley bars. Once the night is over, you’ll feel like a local yourself! Tours run every evening and include an English-speaking interpreter. Sendai is just 90 minutes from Tokyo by bullet train.

**39**

**An authentic Japanese drinking tour in the back alleys of Sendai**

Experience Japanese food culture and nightlife local-style

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**Bring edible art to life at this hands-on wagashi workshop**

Sweet-toothed cultural treats washed down with tea await in Takamatsu

More often than not, Japanese sweets are exquisitely shaped and shaded and wasanbon — a sugar confection originating from the island of Shikoku and served with green tea — is no exception. The workshop, in English and guided by the daughter of a master woodworker, sees participants use her father’s painstakingly-crafted wooden molds to create sublimely sweet works of art. It will also shed light on the traditional Japanese tea culture, with which wasanbon is synonymous. Rounding off the class, your host will whisk you up a cup of frothy matcha tea so you can savor multiple varieties of wasanbon as they are meant to be enjoyed.

**40**

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**In-outbound Sendai Matsushima Inc.**

株式会社インアウトバウン ド仙台・松島

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© mamehana

© 2018 Tohoku 'Local Secret' Tours

© mamehana
**41**

**Otherworldly dining in the heart of Japan’s snow country**

Savor local delicacies in an epic snowscape of huts and glowing lanterns

A charming destination nestled in the mountains of scenic Nagano prefecture, the city of Iiyama is home to Restaurant Kamakura Village, a unique dining destination that comes alive from the end of January to the end of February each year. Come in from the cold to a cozy snow hut and warm mind and body over a bowl of noroshi-nabe, a piping hotpot specialty made from Nagano miso and locally grown vegetables. Farm stayovers are also available nearby, as well as skiing, snowboarding and sledding for the more outdoor types. Iiyama is truly a winter wonderland. Nagano is about 1.5 hours away from Tokyo by bullet train.

**Shinshu-Iiyama Tourism Bureau**

772-6 Iiyama, Iiyama-shi, Nagano

https://www.iiyama-ouendan.net/en/special/kamakura/

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**42**

**A stayover in the green tea heartlands**

Live and breathe Japan’s national elixir, with this hands-on farm stay

Long-prized for its healthful and soothing properties, green tea is one of Japan’s greatest gifts to the world. Now, take this chance to explore the beautiful countryside of Shizuoka Prefecture, the largest tea-producing area in Japan and enjoy staying over at a traditional inn, which was once a farmhouse. You’ll learn all about how green tea is made — including traditional growing techniques recognized by the United Nations as a Globally Significant Agricultural Heritage — and can even help tea farmers in their work. Depending on the time of year, you may harvest leaves, assist at a tea factory, or cut grass to prepare for the next planting season. Just over 90 minutes or so from Tokyo, a transcendental tea experience awaits you.

**Tabinoya**

15-83 Ono, Kakegawa-shi, Shizuoka


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**43**

**Refined macrobiotic cuisine in surroundings over a century old**

Treat your taste buds to a vegan feast in this traditional Japanese farmhouse

At the foot of the lush and verdant Mino Mountain on the northern Kyushu is Le Restaurant du Haze. Chef Atsushi Hirata uses only the freshest locally grown vegetables along with self-concocted fermented delicacies to fashion delicious and nourishing meals sure to delight the health-conscious gourmet. Set in an idyllic and sympathetically renovated 120-year-old building, Haze seamlessly unites simple, natural and modern elements to create a holistic and inimitable dining experience. Lunch or dinner courses can be booked by email or phone (dinners by reservation only).

**Le Restaurant du Haze**

1849-1 Toyoda, Yamamoto-machi, Kurume-shi, Fukuoka

http://simple-moderne.com/english/

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**44**

**Learn the art of Japanese cuisine from a true master**

In Gifu, at the Ozeki Japanese Cooking Class, globetrotting Chef Shuji shares his culinary secrets

Instead of just eating delicious Japanese food – why not also learn to make it yourself? Having lived in Sydney, Australia as a chef for ten years, Chef Shuji Ozeki is a fluent in English speaker. Shuji has been offering hands-on Washoku (Japanese cuisine) workshops to visitors from 40 countries. On the agenda: everything from procuring the freshest ingredients to preparing the healthiest and most delicious fare. Chef Shuji’s passion for cooking, his spirit of Japanese hospitality and his commitment to wellbeing and harmony through food shines through at all times. Amaze yourself - create your own Japanese food tastier than you ever thought possible. What better gift could you bring home?

**Ozeki Japanese Cooking Class**

15 Nishi-machi, Seki-shi, Gifu

http://www.ozekicookingschool.com
45

Insights into a unique diving culture

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

Since times of yore, Japan’s ama (“women of the sea”) have been diving for abalone and other underwater bounty – and most famously of all, for pearls. At Ama Hut Hachiman in Ise-Shima, take the chance for a close-up look at their way of life. Try on elegant ama diving garb, join the divers in a traditional dance and feast on freshly caught seafood (vegetarians also catered for). Their warm hospitality and tales of the sea will move each and every listener. Ise-Shima, equidistant between Tokyo and Osaka, is less than two hours from Chubu Centrair International Airport Nagoya.

46

Your one-stop destination for all things ramen

A noodle-lovers’ paradise at the world-first food-themed amusement park

Longing for ramen? Why not head to the Shin Yokohama Ramen Museum, and savor a wide selection of this favorite soul-food dish. Nine ramen shops, set-up to replicate a 1950's street scene, serve specialty ramen dishes from across Japan – including miso, soy sauce, salt and tonkotsu pork broth among others. Visit the gallery to learn the history of how ramen noodles first came from China and later evolved into the distinctive present-day Japanese delicacy. The museum shop even gives visitors the chance to create their very own brand of ramen! The Ramen Museum is just 45 minutes from Tokyo by train.

47

Experience a Japanese fish market local-style

Feast on fresh catches and take a behind-the-scenes tour in Takamatsu

Takamatsu, on the idyllic island of Shikoku, is home to a fish market bursting with local charm. Show up bright and early and join your guide, a fish market professional, on a complete tour of the premises. You’ll start by watching exhilarating auctions, then stroll around the outer market and learn its history. Rounding things off, your guide will take you to a favorite local eatery to breakfast on fresh sashimi. What better start to the day for any seafood lover? It is a 90-minute flight from Tokyo Haneda to Takamatsu Airport.

Ama Hut HACHIMAN
海女小屋はちまんかまど

Shinyokohama Ramen Museum
新横浜ラーメン博物館

Takamatsu’s Local Fish Market
髙松中央卸売魚市場
48
Savor the rich taste and history of Japanese whisky
Nikka’s Yoichi Distillery: insights for those who love the golden nectar

World-beating Japanese whisky is no oxymoron and here you can see where it all began for one of the country’s foremost whisky producers. Tour the distillery, see firsthand how whisky is made, then visit the museum to learn about the origins of Nikka and whisky production in Japan. Step inside the residence once occupied by Masataka Taketsuru, the father of whisky in Japan. Naturally, rounding off your tour is the chance to enjoy a wee dram or two of Nikka’s smooth products. The Nikka Yoichi Distillery is located in Hokkaido, approximately 1 hour by train from central Sapporo.

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

49
Sample sublime sake at this international award-winning brewery
Taste the brews and explore how they’re made

The Sudohonke brewery in Ibaraki Prefecture, north of Tokyo - the world’s first to offer non-pasteurized sake - has won many awards at the prestigious International Wine Competition. Reserve your tour and take in the sheer beauty of the property, with its towering ancient trees and immaculately preserved traditional storehouses. Learn the inside story on how sake is made. Then comes the fun part – enjoying some fine sake – with the choice of a simple tasting set or a full course complete with food pairings. You’ll come away with a whole new appreciation for Japan’s national beverage.

Sudohonke
須藤本家

50
Experience the best of Japan’s wine country by taxi!
A curated tour of scenic Yamanashi which gourmet foodies will love

Just over 100km west of Tokyo, the Koshu region of Yamanashi is a winery hotbed, housing 80 or so establishments, more than anywhere else in Japan. Hop in a locally-operated taxi and an English-speaking guide/interpreter will join you on a trip to some of Japan’s most prestigious wine producers, including the IWC award-winning Chateau Mercian. Tour the facilities, stroll through sweeping vineyards and – of course – sample sublime vintages together with mouthwatering appetizers. You’ll also visit a museum to learn all about the history of winemaking in Japan. Yamanashi is just two hours from Tokyo by train, making it an ideal day trip for any wine enthusiast!

Yamanashi Tourism Organization
やまなし観光推進機構

© Yamanashi Tourism Organization
Japan’s cities are true temporal melting pots, where age-old traditions coexist alongside modern technology in a singular harmony—and they hold countless one-of-a-kind experiences for the urban explorer looking to step off the beaten path. Visit a museum where you can experience the latest in AI technology, or tour Hiroshima and hear residents’ thoughts on peace first-hand. Climb high atop the world’s longest suspension bridge and thrill at the sight below, or delve underground to a “subterranean temple” worthy of a science fiction epic. Japan’s urban landscapes are a living, breathing microcosm of the nation’s past, present, and future just waiting to be experienced in all their glory.

Odaiba Palette Town, 1-3-8 Aomi, Koto-ku, Tokyo
https://borderless.teamlab.art/

MORI Building DIGITAL ART MUSEUM: teamLab Borderless is a cutting-edge museum sure to shatter your preconceptions about art. Step inside this vast and complex 10,000 square-meter space, and you’ll discover works of light and sound melding and feeding off of each other to create a seamless symphony of creative expression. With the artwork constantly changing and ever evolving, you’ll feel as if you’re a part of the exhibit, shaping the world around you as you explore your surroundings. Should you need a rest, stop by the EN TEA HOUSE, where the fusion interactive art and organic green tea will stimulate your mind and heal the body and soul. teamLab Borderless is located in Palette Town in Odaiba, Tokyo. Tickets may be reserved online or via major convenience stores.

Immerse your body and mind in a high-tech museum without borders

Lose yourself in a world of 3D wonders created by Japan’s hottest high-tech art collective

MORI Building DIGITAL ART MUSEUM: teamLab Borderless

©teamLab
While Japan is known for its super-fast bullet trains, its fleet of luxury trains arguably provide the best experience the rails have to offer. The top-notch luxurious interiors come with all the trimmings — like private bathtubs and spacious living quarters — and the ultra-smooth journey takes you through Japan’s scenic heartlands while enjoying the finest cuisine and stopping at key sightseeing spots.

East Japan’s Train Suite Shiki-Shima transports guests around Tohoku and Hokkaido north of Tokyo in sumptuous, champagne-gold carriages that exude style and promise unsurpassed luxury thanks to an exquisite dining menu and comfortable suites.

The Twilight Express Mizukaze emulates a luxurious hotel — replete with art deco interiors — that circles central/western Japan between Kyoto and Yamaguchi, allowing guests to take in the coastal scenery while indulging in the innovative fare of acclaimed chef Yoshihiro Murata.

Or experience Kyushu from the comfort of the Seven Stars 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.

No matter where your final destination, a ride on one of Japan’s luxury trains is unforgettable.

In Okayama Prefecture, quaint sights of old Japan—without the crowds

Just minutes from Kurashiki Station you will find the historic district. As you walk along the canal lined with graceful weeping willows, you will see warehouse buildings once used to store rice, featuring the unique local architectural style of white plaster with black tile. Stop in at the famous Ohara Museum of Art, just one of many excellent museums in the district. Take a boat ride along the canal, and snap some great photos as you enjoy the sound of the water gently lapping against the boat. When you’ve worked up an appetite, numerous cafes and restaurants are there to tempt you with authentic Japanese flavors in the Honmachi and Higashimachi neighborhoods. Kurashiki Station is less than 90 minutes from Osaka by train.
Prepare yourself for the ultimate Japanese denim experience

Jeans Street is hard to miss, but when you notice just about all around you is clad in denim — including the vending machines — you'll know you're in the right place. Browse more than 40 denim-dedicated shops, many of which offer custom-made jeans, for that one-of-a-kind pair that fits and looks perfect on you! If you want to do the customizing yourself, drop by the Betty Smith Jeans Museum and ask to join a workshop. And no need to carry your completed denimwork with you: they ship internationally. After checking out the shops, indulge your “taste” for denim by trying the denim-blue blueberry ice cream. Get to this denim paradise by a five-minute bus ride — including unique denim seats! — from Kojima Station, just 20 minutes by train from the Okayama JR and bullet train station.

Set sail to the “abandoned city” of Gunkanjima

Rising from the azure waters off Nagasaki City, at the far western tip of Japan’s main islands, Hashima Island has been nicknamed Gunkanjima (literally “battleship island”), reflecting its unique resemblance to a Japanese battleship. Inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2015, it proudly embodies Japan’s strength during the Meiji Industrial Revolution. A coal-mining town since the 19th century, it features dense clusters of concrete towers that housed workers — homes which were abandoned in 1974 and now stand silent and motionless. You may even have caught Gunkanjima in a cameo in the 2012 movie Skyfall. Off-limits to the public for decades, these days you can enjoy the eerie atmosphere of the abandoned island in person, with several companies offering daily boat tours. At the mainland Gunkanjima Digital Museum, meanwhile, you can also safely explore the island’s no-go zones through VR. English audio guide is available for both boat tours and the digital museum.

A deep dive into a rich legacy of manufacturing technology

Founded and curated by Toyota, the world-leading automaker that originated as a manufacturer of textile looms, this museum shines a spotlight on Japan’s remarkable history of technological advancement and modernization. Visitors can observe original hand-operated Toyota looms from the 1920s, which formed the foundation for the manufacturing methods and principles the company employs to this day. Then stroll to the Auto Manufacturing Pavilion, where you’ll get a bird’s-eye view as automobiles are assembled before your eyes. All ages will enjoy Technoland, a hands-on exhibit where you can experience the joy of creation for yourself. Conveniently located just minutes from Sakō Station in central Nagoya, it’s a perfect half-day destination for technology lovers visiting this part of Japan.
58
Expand your vacation between flights
Explore the Narita Airport area with local sightseeing excursions

Head over to the information center in either terminal to find out what's on offer for your layover time. Available options include guided and self-guided tours to suit your timing and budget. English-speaking volunteers help you plan your tour and accompany you, providing valuable insights to make the whole experience even more enjoyable. If you have a half-day to spare, why not try exploring the historic temple town of Narita? Excellent maps and brochures are there to help you decide according to what interests you.

NARITA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT CORPORATION
成田国際空港

Narita Airport, Narita-shi, Chiba
https://www.narita-transit-program.jp/

60
Discover a new Osaka from its waterways
Cruise around this vibrant city by cozy houseboat

Hop aboard the Ofune-Camome sightseeing boat to experience all the wonders Osaka has to offer from a unique vantage point. Choose from a number of itineraries, taking in sights, urban architecture and bridges, night views and more. A once-weekly sake tasting course allows passengers to savor Japan's national beverage while on board, while other seasonal courses feature cherry-blossom viewing, traditional tea ceremony and other uniquely Japanese experiences. For a river cruise in comfort, reserve online in English.

Ofune Camome
御舟かもめ

Hachikenyahama 1-1 Tenmabashikyo-machi, Chuo-ku, Osaka-shi, Osaka
http://www.ofune-camome.net/english/index.html

59
Pedal your way to an unforgettable history lesson
The Hiroshima Cycling Peace Tour gives you the deeper story

Over the course of three hours and on two wheels, experience a guided tour around the Atomic Heritage sites that are globally synonymous with Hiroshima's appeal for world peace. Along the way, you will also discover lesser-known areas in the suburbs that were affected by the atomic bombing. Each site also features unique stories told by a local Hiroshima guide. Cycling past these beautiful modern-day Hiroshima sights, you will learn the inspiring history of how its people came together to rebuild their city and their lives. When the tour ends, you will have a new appreciation for the message of Hiroshima: namely that nuclear weapons should never be used again.

The Hiroshima Cycling Peace Tour gives you the deeper story

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©Hiroshima Cycling Peace Tour with Local Guide sokoiko
©Narita Airport Transit & Stay Program
©Narita International Airport Corporation
©Ofune Camome
©Osaka City Tourism Bureau

61
Kick back like a local in the drinking mecca of Shimbashi
Sup your drink as trains roar overhead for an authentic Tokyo nightlife experience

Glasses of cold beer and warmed sake. Plates of fresh sashimi and skewered yakitori grilled chicken. Laughter all around, interspersed with the clatter-clatter from the train tracks above. Head to downtown Shimbashi after hours and see just why throngs of Tokyoites come here nightly to drown and laugh their sorrows away. Brave the overhead noise, step into one of the many izakaya (traditional Japanese pubs), order a drink and say Kampai! (“Cheers!”) to your neighbor — you’re sure to make friends fast. There’s no better place to enjoy Tokyo’s world-class food and drinking culture on a wallet-friendly night out.

Shimbashi
新橋

©Hiroshima Cycling Peace Tour with Local Guide sokoiko
©Hachikenyahama 1-1 Tenmabashikyo-machi, Chuo-ku, Osaka-shi, Osaka
©Osaka City Tourism Bureau

©Osaka City Tourism Bureau
©Osaka City Tourism Bureau
62
Experience the world's longest suspension bridge from 300m up!
Climb an engineering marvel nearly 4km long

On the western edge of Kobe, 5 minutes from JR Maiko Station, the Akashi Kaikyo suspension bridge, opened in April 1998, is the world's longest. Spanning the Akashi strait, which is criss-crossed by hundreds of vessels daily, the construction of a bridge between the Kobe mainland and Awaji Island was long 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. Ascend 300m to the top of the bridge tower for unforgettable panoramic views and photos. The tour takes around 3 hours. Audio guide is available in English, traditional Chinese and Korean.

Honshu-Shikoku Bridge Expressway Company
本州四国連絡高速道路株式会社
6-114 Higashi-Maiko-cho, Tarumi-ku, Kobe
http://www.jbhonshi.co.jp/english/bridgeworld/index.html

63
An amusement park in Mt. Fuji’s shadow
Ride scream-inducing attractions at the famous Fuji-Q amusment park

Fuji-Q offers the best and most thrilling roller coasters and world-record breaking rides Japan has to offer, against the scenic backdrop of Fuji, its highest mountain. Conquer vertigo on the 50-meter tall swings or plunge from dizzying elevations on the vertical fall. Alternatively, take up the challenge of finding your way out of the Labyrinth of Fear. Meanwhile, the youngest visitors to the park will adore Thomas Land, entirely devoted to Thomas the Tank Engine and his many friends.

Fuji-Q Highland
プリンスハイランド
5-6-1 Shimmishihara, Fujinomiya-shi, Shizuoka
http://www.fujinomiya.jp/en

64
Larger-than-life, ice sculptures downtown
A must-see wintertime Hokkaido showcase

A total of 30,000 tons of snow is needed to build about 200 ice sculptures for one of Japan’s largest winter events, which starts in early February and unfolds at three locations: Odori Park, Susukino and Sapporo. Evenings also feature spectacular musical projection mapping programs at various spots in Odori Park. At the end of the park, meanwhile, check out sculptures from a range of countries battling it out in an international competition. With the theme changing each year, this event is well worth visiting multiple times.

Sapporo Snow Festival Executive Committee
さっぽろ雪まつり実行委員会
Kit 1 Nan 2, Chuo-ku, Sapporo
http://www.snowfes.com/english/index.html

65
Experience authentic drifting at one of Japan’s most popular circuits
A must for motorsport fans: the chance to ride with professional drivers

The sport of drifting originated in Japan, before taking the auto-racing world by storm - and visitors to Ebisu Circuit in Fukushima will quickly see why. Strap yourself into the bucket seat of a Toyota drift taxi (up to three passengers per car) and actual D1 drivers from the renowned Team Orange — true pioneers of the sport — will take you on a thrilling spin around the circuit, showcasing their incredible technique to the max. With a range of courses on offer, you’ll be able to experience Ebisu Circuit from all angles. This petrolheads’ paradise is just over 2 hours from Tokyo. Online English booking makes reserving your tickets a breeze.

Ebisu Circuit
エビスサーキット
1 Sawamatsukura, Nihommatsu-shi, Fukushima

66
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