EXPERIENCES IN JAPAN

Find the Japan of Your Dreams!
Japan is a land overflowing with unforgettable experiences. The pamphlet in your hands is a curated guide to one hundred such destinations, hand-picked to appeal to the visitor from abroad looking to delve deeper into the country and its culture. A committee of experts has carefully selected those that offer the visitor hands-on experiences that are distinctively Japanese—sites that tell a powerful story that will stimulate the senses, stir the heart, and leave impressions that will stay with you long after you return home.

The destinations catalogued within comprise seven categories: Tradition, Outdoors, Cuisine, Cities, Nature, Art, and Relaxation. We believe these categories represent 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.

Dear Traveler,
Japan is a nation uniquely in touch with its past. At ancient shrines and in the heart of historic cities, its rich cultural heritage lives on as something not just to be admired from afar, but actively appreciated. From the transformative travel experience of participating in yamabushi—the mountain ascetic tradition—to hands-on practice at a seat of Zen Buddhism, take in the spirit of Japan and its people with all five senses. You’ll come away with a profound understanding of the culture, and rediscover yourself in the process. What better destination for a journey of self-reflection and personal growth? Let Japan’s past be a window into your future.

Passion: 01

An enticing evening with authentic geiko awaits

The height of Japanese hospitality awaits you at Kanazawa’s largest teahouse

Veteran geiko will welcome you into their world at Kaikaro, a stunning Michelin-starred teahouse right in the heart of historic Kanazawa. Lady Baba, the English-speaking landlady, leads a group of elegant entertainers who will treat you to a tour-de-force as they perform traditional song and dance and shed light on the mysterious world of geiko culture and its history. Join the ladies on stage for some hands-on taiko drumming, time-honored party games and a truly otherworldly feeling! This is a special event only held in the spring and fall. Kanazawa is located 2.5 hours from Tokyo via the Hokuriku Shinkansen bullet train.

Higashi Chayagai District Kaikaro

01-14-8 Higashiyama, Kanazawa-shi, Ishikawa

http://geishaevenings.jp

006
007
02

Train with a true mountain mystic in Yamagata

Get in touch with nature by authentically embracing this ancient faith

About 300 km north of Tokyo, in Yamagata prefecture, is a trio of sacred mountains: the Dewa Sanzan. Journey there and immerse yourself in the ways of the local yamabushi, white-robed followers of the ancient Japanese mountain religion called Shugendo. Meet Master Hoshino, who will guide you in an authentic training program to reconnect with nature and refresh mind and body. Various programs offer different activities: stay at the Daishobo pilgrim lodge where you can try vegetarian cuisine, hike sacred trails and even try your hand at waterfall meditation.

Yamabushido Team
株式会社めぐる

- 57 Toge, Haguro-machi, Tsuruoka-shi, Yamagata
- https://www.yamabushido.jp/

03

Dance like no-one’s watching in historic Tokushima

Take part in one of Japan’s most famous traditional dance events

Every year, from August 12-15, beating drums, stomping geta clogs and high-spirited calls of “Yattosa!” and “Yatto yatto!” bring the city of Tokushima alive. Synonymous with summer, nationwide festivals feature this traditional dance, but it all started here, over four centuries ago. This makes it the biggest festival of its kind in the country, drawing people in the hundreds of thousands. Enjoy parading dancers, with an electric atmosphere and infectious energy. Move to the beat and if you’re lucky enough, try the fun first-hand in one of the groups open to non-professionals. The Awa Odori Kaikan offers daily performances at noon, with further insights into the dance at the Awa Dance Museum inside.

Awa Odori
阿波踊り

- 2-5 Saiwai-cho, Tokushima-shi, Tokushima

TRADITION
Learn lost arts at the ancestral home of the ninja!
Eco-tourism, history and martial training amidst the Akame falls

At the 48 falls of Akame — training ground for the famed Iga ninja clan in the 15th and 16th centuries — you, too, can become a ninja for a day. Wearing authentic clothing, you’ll get the lowdown on time-honored techniques of concentration, climbing, and infiltration. Dodge throwing stars and defend yourself in a VR-assisted shuriken throwing star simulation. The 90-minute tour takes in ancient forests and rushing rapids along the way on a course sure to delight the whole family — nature lovers and aspiring ninja alike. Children under seven must be accompanied by an adult. Akame is 2.5 hours by train or car from Chubu Centrair International Airport.

Experience one of Japan’s most exhilarating festivals
A centuries-old tradition roars to life each autumn with this visually striking seasonal ritual

Japan may have more than its fair share of festivals, and among the most enchanting of them all is the Kanuma Autumn Festival, held every second week of October at Imamiya Shrine, near Nikko. The centerpiece of the celebration — itself designated a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage — are 27 massive wooden floats, exquisitely maintained by artisans using ancient skills. These mighty structures are hauled down the streets when they meet up, the musicians on the floats compete musically, adding to the excitement. From the dazzling waterfront fireworks display to streets lined with food stalls serving tasty treats — enjoy this truly otherworldly experience and a one-of-a-kind feast for all five senses.
08

Live like a Japanese Buddhist Monk

Learn about the traditional Buddhist lifestyle while enjoying views of Mt. Fuji

Mount Minobu (Minobu-san) is home to Kuonji Temple, the headquarters of the Buddhist Nichiren-shu sect. Kuonji offers you the chance to embrace traditional Japanese Buddhist customs — the aroma of incense, droning sutra chants and the calming rhythm of copying sutras by hand, are your gateways to an all-new experience. To really do it properly, book a stay at the nearby Gyogakuin Kakurinbo temple lodgings. Eat simple but nourishing shojin ryori — traditional vegetarian Buddhist fare — as you feed your spiritual curiosity. Mt. Minobu is in Yamanashi Prefecture, about 3 hours by road, from Tokyo.

Minobusan Kuonji Temple

身延山久遠寺

https://www.kuonji.jp/english/entop.htm

07

Step back in time at Ouchijuku

Discover a traditional post town setting in Fukushima

This Edo-era post town, established around 1640, was once a stop on the road from Nikko to Aizu but it is now a major destination in its own right. The picture postcard idyllic row of thatched houses is even more photogenic in the winter, blanketed by snow. Step inside Misawa-ya to warm up by the irori (‘sunken fire pit’) hearth, and don’t leave without sampling negi-soba — with a leek in place of chopsticks!

Ouchi-juku

大内宿

http://ouchi-juku.com/index.php/English

09

The Unique Story of Nagasaki’s Hidden Christians

Learn how their faith survived even as Christianity was prohibited

Take a visit to five locations in Nagasaki Prefecture, visited by Martin Scorsese when making the movie Silence: Tomomi Village (Sotome Town), Nagasaki City, the Shimabara Peninsula, Hirado City, and the Goto Islands. Based on Endo Shusaku’s novel, the film depicts how Japanese Christians survived the prohibition of Christianity which started in 1587. In 2018, twelve “Hidden Christian” sites in the Nagasaki area were recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Start at the Twenty-Six Martyrs Museum near JR Nagasaki Station, just as Scorsese did, and learn about the history in English. Oura Cathedral, the oldest church in Japan, is a short tram ride away, and buses to Sotome, Shimabara, Hirado area depart from the station and ferries from Nagasaki Port to the Goto Islands.

After the ban was lifted in 1871 and the era of the “Hidden Christians” ended, tragedy followed when the atomic bomb exploded almost directly above Urakami Cathedral. These sites are sure to strengthen your faith in humanity, no matter what your religious beliefs may be.
In the lush, misty Kii mountains of Wakayama prefecture, you'll find the awe-inspiring Buddhist temple site of Koyasan, founded more than 1,200 years ago. Koyasan is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the most important spiritual locations in Japan. Long a draw for sightseers and day-trippers, Koyasan has since unveiled a more enlightening experience in the shape of its popular temple stays option. For a stay of one or more nights, you can live just like the full-time monks and share their 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: early morning meditation usually starts around 6 am.

Don’t just visit the temple—be part of it! From tourist to temple lodger - Experience Koyasan life like a monk

A true taste of Zen at a Michelin-starred temple

Experience the ascetic life at one of Japan’s most historic Zen Buddhist temples

Visitors looking to find themselves are welcome at the “Sanro” Zen practice program at Eiheiji Temple in Fukui Prefecture, home to the Soto school of Zen Buddhism. In majestic yet austere settings, meticulously preserved since the year 1244, you’ll embrace the life of a monk over two days and a night. Join the monks for zazen (sitting zen meditation) and sutra transcription, dine with them on strict vegetarian fare and rise early in the morning to take part in a morning incense-burning service. All of this takes place in a vast temple complex of 70 buildings set in an ancient forest, housing numerous historical treasures. Fukui Prefecture is just 2 hours from Osaka by limited express train, or 3-plus hours from Tokyo by Shinkansen.

A thrilling pilgrimage to Japan’s most hazardous national treasure

Panoramic vistas and steep climbs await at sacred and scenic Mount Mitoku

The path up Mount Mitoku has been said to mirror the Buddha’s own journey to enlightenment. Begin the hike and you’ll soon see why, as you cling to the mighty roots of primeval trees to scale steep and slippery rock surfaces. You’ll be rewarded for your efforts with up-close looks at ancient temples and breathtaking views of the mountainside along the way. It all culminates with your arrival at the Nageiredo—a striking national treasure set in a sheer cliff face whose origins are shrouded in mystery. When you return from the 90-or-so minute journey and cross the river representing the boundary between this world and the next, you’ll truly feel as if you’ve been reborn.

The whole of the henro: circle Shikoku like a pilgrim

Visit all 88 temples of the famous henro trail on Japan’s smallest main island

Join a centuries-old pilgrimage route on the island of Shikoku as you visit 88 temples connected to the famous monk Kukai (also known as Kobo Daishi). The route, or henro, will take you to serene hidden spots across Shikoku’s four prefectures. Scenery is at its most enticing in spring or autumn, when changing colors brighten the path. It is said that all those completing the entire pilgrimage will have their prayers or wishes answered.
14

Explore the stately garden of a samurai lord
Take in the beauty of Kagoshima’s Sengan-en

Sengan-en is a classic Japanese manor home and garden, a tranquil oasis just 20 minutes from Kagoshima’s city center. Spread over 12 acres, the estate was built in 1658 by the 19th head of the Shimazu clan—a storied lineage of samurai lords who ruled this part of Japan’s far south. Stroll in the footsteps of proud warriors who shaped Japan’s history, and share the inspiration they must have felt gazing out on panoramic views of glittering Kinko Bay and Mt. Sakurajima, an active volcano. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is adjoined by the Shoko Shuseikan Museum, which explores the region’s industrial heritage and the modernization of Japan during the Meiji period (1868-1912). For a closer look at another local export, admire the skilled craftsmanship on display at the Kiriko Glassworks. Here they produce colorful Satsuma Kiriko cut crystal glass, which you can also browse in the onsite shop. Kagoshima is less than 2 hours from Tokyo by plane.

15

Witness colorful carp
Japan is famed for

At the Nishikigoi center, enjoy these fish in a beautiful garden setting

Nishikigoi are the ornamental colorful brocaded carp that attract admirers and photographers to Japan’s many garden ponds. They can be seen up close in the beautiful gardens of the Nishikigoi breeding center in Niigata Prefecture in western Japan. You can learn about the conditions needed to successfully raise these popular piscine species before strolling the exquisite scenic grounds, where the carp are kept in large ponds.

16

Have one of Japan’s most scenic temples all to yourself
In the stillness of night, a sacred and ethereally beautiful experience awaits

Ever wanted to experience a Japanese temple without the crowds? If you’re looking to spend a truly divine night, turn your eyes to Tsubosaka-dera in Nara, Japan’s first permanent capital city in the 8th century. After closing hours, let a monk take you on an exclusive tour of this magnificent temple, which overlooks Mount Yoshino, long Japan’s most famous cherry blossom viewing spot. You’ll learn about the temple’s history, don traditional dress, take part in a Buddhist prayer session and receive a good-luck talisman. All that remains is exploring the grounds to your heart’s content before an enchanting and otherworldly night. Group reservations are welcome.

17

Stroll in the steps of emperors and shoguns
Let an English-speaking guide show you around a historic castle in the heart of Kyoto

Nijo Castle was built by Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616), the founding shogun (supreme samurai warlord) of the Edo period (1603-1867). He commissioned ornate and unique architectural structures, some of which still stand today: the Karamon Gate’s elaborate carvings will amaze you. As you explore the Ninomaru Palace, one of only two castle palaces to survive, marvel at the gleaming and opulent gilded art around every corner, and hear the famous “nightingale floors” squeaking underfoot – a deliberate feature intended to prevent assassins from sneaking in undetected. Nijo Castle also boasts acclaimed Japanese-style gardens, the most famous of which is the Ninomaru Garden. Relax while watching tumbling waterfalls and reminisce about the samurai of old and their elegant kimono-clad ladies appreciating this same tranquil setting. To make the most of your visit, take an interactive guided tour.

Sengan-en and Shoko Shuseikan Museum
山鹿園・尚古集成館

Nishikigoi no Sato
錦鯉の里

Tsubosaka-dera Temple
壷阪寺

Nijo-jo Castle English Guided Tour
二条城英語ガイドツアー

©Sengan-en / Shoko Shuseikan
©KYOTO CITY TOURISM ASSOCIATION
©Sengan-en / Shoko Shuseikan
©KYOTO CITY TOURISM ASSOCIATION
Japan’s natural wonders aren’t just for the eyes—they offer exhilarating activities sure to stir the heart of any outdoor enthusiast.

Go diving in pristine ocean waters. Soar above sweeping sand dunes by paraglider. Venture deep into virgin forests for thrilling rafting down rushing rapids. Snowshoe or rappel your way across stunning snowscapes.

Experience the fusion of Japanese tradition and outdoor excitement as you paddle-board through the famous shrine gates of Miyajima, or go log-riding down the Kitayama River. When you’re done, hop on a bicycle to explore your surroundings, treat yourself to healthful and tasty regional delicacies, or get hands-on with local traditions. With so much to do, you won’t have time to catch your breath!

Ishigaki Island in Okinawa has warm and inviting weather all year round—as you’d expect of a place in Japan’s far south. Scuba diving fans, you won’t find a better spot to watch magical manta rays gliding through calm, crystal-clear waters. And Ishigaki is so accessible: direct flights daily from Tokyo and Osaka, as well as hotels to suit all budgets. Cruise among the coral and discover why Ishigaki is a must-see destination for divers the world over.

An exceptional island paradise

Sensational subtropical scuba diving in Ishigaki, less than 4 hours from Tokyo

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Prime Scuba Ishigaki
2,291-meter Mt. Asahidake may be an active volcano but it is very much open to visitors! Hikers and skiers can enjoy breathtaking views of the Daisetsuzan mountain range as they explore an enchanting snowscape. Just as impressive as the powder snow are the clouds of steam rising from the many fumaroles. For a quick ascent, the Mt. Asahidake Ropeway will carry you 1,600 meters up the slopes.

Swoosh down the snowy slopes of a volcano

90 minutes from Asahikawa, Mt. Asahidake welcomes skiers and hikers

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Swoosh down the snowy
slopes of a volcano

19

Hiroshima prefecture in west Japan is where you’ll find one of Japan’s most beautiful locations, the ‘Otorii’ gates of Itsukushima shrine; 16 meter high, a stone’s throw from Miyajima Island and a UNESCO World Heritage site. But now, instead of just snapping a picture and throwing a coin like most other visitors, why not experience the magic of a self-powered stand-up paddle (SUP) tour through the famous vermilion pillars? MAGIC ISLAND SUP tours are reasonably priced, fit into half a day and have certified staff on hand to ensure even beginners can enjoy a memorable and magical experience. Exciting. Exhilarating. And all captured for posterity with your own commemorative photo. Tap into the energy of this 1,400-year old venue – there’s even a special 2-km course for advanced participants!

Ultimate stand-up paddling awaits

SUP Miyajima: Enter the most famous shrine gate in Japan!

MAGIC ISLAND

©PIXTA

©sokoiko
21

Sea-view cycling at its best

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

The ‘Shimanami Kaido’, Japan’s most famous bikeway, is an elevated cycling trail that links the cities of Onomichi and Imabari, in Hiroshima and Ehime Prefectures respectively in western Japan, spanning around 70km and six islands along the way. There’s no Alps-style climbing either! Even the more reluctant bikers among you will delight in pedaling the mostly level trails, amid stunning scenery wherever you look. No wonder it was voted one of the Top 7 cycling routes in the world by CNN. To make it even easier to enjoy, there are bike-friendly hotels in both terminal cities and numerous points to pick-up and drop-off rental bikes. You can also expect help and support if you run into any problem – so grab a helmet and get your two-wheeled tour underway!

Sunrise ITOYAMA

サンライズ糸山

・〒790-0121 松江市、三江線、近江
・http://www.sunrise-itoyma.jp/archives/english/

22

Experience rural hearts and homes

Bike around Lake Biwa and Lunch with Lakeside Locals

The Tour du Lac Biwa offers an unforgettable and heartwarming rural Japanese experience through local eyes. And a menu of visual and edible feasts! It gets going around halfway up the western side of Lake Biwa, Japan’s largest, around 40 minutes north of Kyoto by train. A bicycle tour is one of the many activities you can partake in before making lunch together with your bilingual hosts, who will welcome you into their century-old homes. It doesn’t get more authentic than this. For friendship, farming experiences and a home away from home feel, look no further. Arrive as a visitor and leave as a newly embraced friend of those for whom Lake Biwa is home.

Tour du Lac Biwa

ツールド湖ビュイ

・〒526-0841 滞在町、池田町、滋賀
・http://www.lacbiwa.com/

23

Soar above sweeping sands by paraglider

Breathtaking vistas await where desert meets ocean at the Tottori Sand Dunes

The Tottori Sand Dunes are one of Japan’s true wonders of nature: up to 50 meters tall and straddling kilometers of coastline — ever-shifting, but dating back millennia. What could be more exhilarating than swooshing through the brisk sea air high above the dunes, riding the wind on a paraglider? Marvel at the Sea of Japan stretching as far as the eye can see. And this thrill is even open to first-timers, with friendly experienced staff ready to help you get airborne and gentle sands ensuring a soft landing. If you’d rather stay on the ground, hop on an off-road “fat bike” and race across the sands with incredible traction. Daily from late March to November. Tottori is a 75-minute flight from Tokyo.

Zero Paraglider School/TRAIL ON

ゼロパラグライダースクール/トレイルオン

・〒687-8712 藤浦町、向日町、鳥取
・http://www.tottorisanddunes.com/
24 Explore a primeval forest untouched by time

Japan’s mightiest, most ancient tree awaits you in the heart of Yakushima

The island of Yakushima is an awe-inspiring destination for any nature lover. Visit its lush, expansive cedar forest—a National Park and UNESCO World Heritage Site—and commune with trees that have stood for thousands of years. Hike into its depths, amidst pristine streams and charming forest creatures like monkeys and deer. In the heart of the wood, you’ll come face-to-face with the Jomon Sugi, a majestic cedar that has watched over the Japanese people for millennia. English-speaking guides are available to teach you all about your surroundings with a variety of courses catering from a few hours hiking to one day trekking. The island offers a great selection of places to stay—from luxury resort hotels to shared budget accommodation. Yakushima is a short 90-minute flight from Osaka’s Itami Airport, and trains and buses are available to take you to the trail route.

Go! Yakushima

/go_yakushimatour/

25 Paddle Shikoku’s clear waters

Rediscover the island as you float down the Shimanto River

See a different side of Kochi Prefecture emerge as you paddle, kayak, or pilot an SUP (stand-up paddle board), gently carried by the Shimanto River. Spot dozens of aquatic species in the crystal-clear waters as you negotiate its meandering curves. And look out for the Shimanto River’s stand-out two dozen chinka bridges; structures without rails that are designed to be easily flooded should the river ever rise.

withRIVER

/o/897x675/25/1841 Misato, Shimanto-shi, Kochi

http://www.withriver.info/english/

26 Kayak on winter waters of diamond-like clarity!

Experience wonderful nature up close on the water and on the shore

Lake Shikotsu: a sparkling jewel within the Shikotsu-Toya National Park in Hokkaido famed for its crystal-clear waters. So pristine, in fact, they’ve been rated the purest nationwide for 10 consecutive years! Nowhere else in Japan can you see so deep into the lake — sights you can now savor to the full on our clear-bottom kayak tours. Autumn visitors can expect a visual feast of colored leaves and sockeye salmon. Winter, meanwhile, sees the lake at its most transparent, with the added magic of surrounding snowy peaks and glimpses of wild deer and foxes on the shores. Less than a 90-minute drive from Sapporo or 40 minutes from Chitose Airport.

Ocean days

/ocean_days/

Bengachi, Shikotsukoonsen, Chitose-shi, Hokkaido

http://h-takarajima.com/detail/index/4120&ml_lang=en

©Ocean Days
If thrills, white water and outstanding outdoor fun are your thing, check out the Canyoning company, based on the Tone River in Gunma Prefecture’s Minakami Town. Owned by a New Zealander with a quarter-century of experience, they are the original canyoning pioneers in Japan, offering a wide range of tours since 1998. What better winning formula?!

Unique to the line-up of packages is the snow canyoning tour: reacquainting you with powder snow in epic style. Alternatively, why not try and tame the Tone torrents, with rapids rafting from April to October, especially spring, when water levels peak? Breaking new boundaries and borders for beginners and epic-level adventurers alike. Pick-up available: a 30-minute bus ride from Jomo-Kogen Station and just 70 minutes by bullet train from Tokyo.

The original and best canyoning
NZ-run with Tone River rapids rafting also available

Come to Kitayama, a historic village tucked away in the mountains of the Kii peninsula, and hop aboard a log raft for an exciting whitewater ride. Part of the Yoshino-Kumano National Park, Dorokyo Gorge is the ancestral home of the river runners—loggers who navigated the rapids long before roads were paved. Your guides will lead you downstream using the same techniques employed by their ancestors. You’ll laugh and scream with joy at every twist and turn of the rushing river, taking in breathtaking scenery along the way. Memories of this off-the-beaten-track adventure will stay with you long after your return home. Kitayama is located about 4 hours from Nagoya, or 5 hours from Osaka, by train and bus. Travelers are encouraged to arrive the night before and spend the night at the rustic Okutoro Onsen hot spring resort.

The Yoshino River, which winds its way for 194 km through the heart of Shikoku Island, offers thrills aplenty and the best rapids rafting and canyoning anywhere in Japan. Leave your next river adventure to the multilingual Happyraft team, many of whom have decades of experience. Excitement, foam, fun and photo opportunities all come guaranteed.

As well as half- and one-day tours, family-friendly rafting experiences are also available at reasonable prices. Located next to Tosa-Iwahara Station, Happyraft is based in central Shikoku, which is bordered by Tokushima to the east and Kochi Prefecture to the south. Ryoma Airport in Kochi Prefecture is just an hour’s drive away. And if you want to stay right next to the action, why not stayover at one of the on-site guest houses? Discount available for tour participants!
31

Set sail to the islands of Kujukushima in Nagasaki

Navigate the clear blue waters from the opening scene of “The Last Samurai”

Just a stone’s throw from the city of Sasebo lies one of Japan’s most stunning ocean views, the Kujukushima islands in Saikai National Park. Literally meaning 99 islands, there are actually more than 200 verdant of them scattered along the coastline and while undeniably beautiful, their real charm only emerges at closer quarters. Head to the Kujukushima Pearl Sea Resort kayaking or a choice of relaxing or uninhabited island cruises. Alternatively, embark on a solo ocean trip with one of the many rental yachts or kayaks at the resort. Finally, during Golden Week or weekends between August and October, why not board a sunset cruise and snap the islands at their very best—the glittering on-water reflection means they resemble dark droplets in a sea of gold. (only available Mar.-Oct.)

Kujukushima Pearl Sea Resort

©Sasebo Convention & Visitors Association
©1058 Kushime-cho, Sasebo-shi, Nagasaki
http://www.pearlsea.jp/english/cruising.html

32

Kick back on sun-soaked Aoshima Beach

Enjoy fun and nature galore at this coastal Miyazaki resort

Aoshima Beach, just south of Miyazaki City, is Japan’s paradise for surfers. Miyazaki, in eastern Kyushu and the far south-west of Japan, boasts balmy weather and postcard-worthy views of the blue Pacific waters. Set in this ideal location, Surf City Miyazaki offers a host of activities to entertain beachgoers of all stripes. In addition to the sublime surfing, there’s also stand-up paddle boarding a popular choice for first-timers. It’s also a haven for yoga enthusiasts, with instructors certified in a wide range of yoga schools leading classes in the studio, on the beach, or even right on the water! Go for a hike or trail run on one of the beach or mountain courses, and take in stunning ocean vistas and other delightful sights, including a Shinto shrine and Japanese torii gate right on Aoshima. All-comers can soak up a relaxed community vibe, with many shops and cafes open in the summer months.

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Warm year-round and coral galore

Kushimoto and the Japan Current will delight all divers and snorkelers

In search of enticing and toasty-warm underwater surroundings? Then you should head to Kushimoto, right at the bottom of Wakayama prefecture. You may be surprised to hear that thanks to the Kuroshio, or ‘Japan Current’, the seawater here, the southernmost point of Japan’s main island, Honshu, never goes below 15 degrees Celsius. This warmth is also what nourishes over 100 beautiful varieties of coral in the area and abundant marine life, from tiny inland sea species to the larger migratory fish in the open ocean. Fully PADI-affiliated, the Kushimoto Dive Station caters to all skill levels and is a stone’s throw from Kushimoto Station. You can reach Kushimoto in under 4 hours from Tennoji, Osaka by the Limited Express Kuroshio.

Kushimoto Dive Station

©Kushimoto Convention and Visitors Association
©642-1 Kushimoto-cho, Kushimoto, Higashimuro-gun, Wakayama
https://www.kushimoto.com/english.html

©Sasebo Convention & Visitors Association
©1038 Kashime-cho, Sasebo-shi, Nagasaki
http://www.pearlsea.jp/english/cruising.html
34 Top-quality skiing at Niseko Hanazono

Find powdery slopes and quality accommodation in western Hokkaido

Few other resorts can rival Niseko in winter, blanketed by over 15 meters of light snow which means ideal winter sport conditions from December through April. Get a ski lesson with top-notch instructors, tackle the slopes yourself or hit the pistes in snowshoes or snowmobiles instead. If warm-weather fun is more your thing, white water rafting, ducky, canyoning, road biking and golf offer more than enough to keep any summer visitors happy too. Once you’ve worked up an appetite, book yourself in for a memorable meal at hotel eatery Asperges, with a kitchen run by a Michelin-starred chef.

35 Learn to “mush” in Minakami

Enjoy a dog-sledding adventure in the Gunma mountains

While most winter resorts offer skiing and snowmobiling, Minakami Kogen is the only place in Honshu where you can try your hand at dog-sledding too. Meet your canine team, hook up your sled and learn how to mush, before they help you wend your way through the snowy wonderland of Gunma’s mountains. Even elementary-school age students are welcome, making this a truly family-friendly activity. And if all that’s not enough, you can also add snow rafting, airboard and cross-country skiing to the mix. Finally, why not finish by unwinding in the resort’s picturesque open-air bath, under the steadily falling snow?

36 Experience extreme fishing at your own private mountain stream

Whether veteran angler or first-timer – anyone can enjoy reeling in tasty native trout at these hidden fishing holes

Tucked away in the scenic forests of Niigata, these pristine waters are nearly untouched by human hand. Take our exclusive guided tour to access areas normally off-limits to visitors and cast your lure into rivers teeming with trout, a population combining both native and fishery-populated species alike. Enough fish to reach out and touch means no one need to worry about going home empty-handed. What’s more, these are ideal conditions to kick back, close your eyes, breathe deeply and take in all Mother Nature’s blessings. Be in no doubt, you’ll return recharged and refreshed—and with plenty of tasty trout to cook up for dinner.

37 Golf with breathtaking views of Mt. Fuji

Japan’s loveliest 18-hole course will delight beginners and low handicappers alike

Japan-bound golfers should look no further than here to get in a round, at the base of Japan’s iconic Mt. Fuji. The course which opened in 1935, making it one of Japan’s historic and prestigious, optimally exploits the natural terrain to serve up stunning sights and challenging rounds. Walk amidst majestic Japanese red pines as you play a truly memorable round surrounded by mountains, then relax and refresh in the hot spring. Round off your day with fine dining at the open-terrace restaurant, featuring seasonal cuisine and a fine selection of local Yamanashi wines, some of Japan’s finest. All this only 80 minutes or so from central Tokyo by car.
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.

Rainbow-Plaza 8F, 1-9-3 Kitanagasadori, Chuo-ku, Kobe-shi, Hyogo
http://www.kobe-setsugetsuka.com/honten
http://setouchitrip.com/food-drink/2362

Setsugetsuka (Kobe beef)

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!
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.

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 sublime 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.

© mamehana
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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 信州いいやま観光局
772-6 Iiyama, Iiyama-shi, Nagano
https://www.iiyama-ouendan.net/en/special/kamakura/

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 旅の舎
1708 Ono, Kakegawa-shi, Shizuoka

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

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 小瀬木料理教室
15 Nishi-machi, Seki-shi, Gifu
http://www.ozekicookingschool.com
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.

45
Insights into a unique diving culture
Meet Ise-Shima’s traditional free-divers and savor seafood delicacies

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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 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.

Shin Yokohama Ramen Museum
新横浜ラーメン博物館
2-14-21 Shin Yokohama, Kohoku-ku, Yokohama-shi, Kanagawa
http://www.raumen.co.jp/english/

Takamatsu Local Fish Market
高松中央卸売魚市場
30-5 Setsouchi-cho, Takamatsu-shi, Kagawa
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.

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!

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.

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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
Explore Japan by luxury train

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

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.
54

Prepare yourself for the ultimate Japanese denim experience

Your denim destiny awaits on Jeans Street!

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.

Kojima Jeans Street
ジーンズストリート
Kojima Ajiro, Kurashiki-shi, Okayama
http://setouchitrip.com/art-culture/1375

55

Set sail to the “abandoned city” of Gunkanjima

Explore a deserted industrial island off the coast of Nagasaki

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.

The Metropolitan Area Outer Underground Discharge Channel
首都圏外郭放水路
Kamikanasaki, Kasukabe-shi, Saitama
http://www.ktr.mlit.go.jp/edogawa/gaiaku/

56

Japan’s “underground temple”: a must-visit for urban architecture fans

Marvel at the size and scope of this cutting-edge disaster prevention facility

50 meters beneath the surface in Saitama — just north of Tokyo — lies G-Cans, quite possibly the world’s most massive and visually striking flood-defense system. As you descend the 6.5km-long tunnel, the 70m-tall, 30m-diameter silos and colossal storage tank supported by 50 towering pillars come into view, akin to the ruins of a lost civilization. A guide will shed light on the history of this project; completed in 2006 after 14 years of construction and explain how the giant complex and tunnels keep Tokyoites safe from overflowing rivers. It’s a lesser-known side of Japan that must be seen to be believed.

Universal Workers – The Gunkanjima Concierge Company
株式会社ユニバーサルワーカーズ 軍艦島コンシェルジュ
Tokyo terminal building, 152, 6-47 Tobu-no-machi, Nagasaki-shi, Nagasaki
https://www.discover-nagasaki.com/spots/detail/202

57

A deep dive into a rich legacy of manufacturing technology

Trace the path of Japan’s industrialization from textiles to automobiles

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.

Toyota Commemorative Museum of Industry and Technology
トヨタ産業技術記念館
720 Kamikanasaki, Kusukake-cho, Sakai-shi, Osaka
http://www.tcmi.org/english/
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
© 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 sightseeing spots, 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.

© Narita Airport Transit & Stay Program
© Ofune Camome
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.

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.

© Hiroshima Cycling Peace Tour with Local Guide
© Hachikenyahama 1-1 Tennabashi-cho, Chuo-ku, Osaka-shi, Osaka
http://www.ofune-camome.net/english/index.html

© Funky Tokyo
**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*

©HONSHU-SHIKOKU BRIDGE EXPRESSWAY CO., LTD.

60-144 Higashi-Maiko-cho, Tarumi-ku, Kobe

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

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**63**

*An amusement park in Mt. Fuji’s shadow*

Ride scream-inducing attractions at the famous Fuji-Q amusement 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*

©FUJIKYUKO CO., LTD.

5-6-1 Shimishihara, Fujisawa-shi, Kanagawa

http://www.fujiq.jp/en

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**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, Tsudome and Susukino. Evenings also feature spectacular musical projection mapping programs at various spots in Odori Park. At the end of the park, meanwhile, check out sculptors 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*

6-1 Nishi 2, Chuo-ku, Sapporo

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

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**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*

¡Ebisu Circuit

1 Sawamatsukura, Nihommatsu-shi, Fukushima


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©FUJIKYUKO CO., LTD.
Perhaps nowhere can the four seasons in all their beauty be appreciated as profoundly as in Japan. Trek through vast primeval forests at Shirakami-Sanchi and Hachimantai National Park, lush and verdant in spring and fiery gold in the fall. Soak in a bath amidst ancient trees and let yourself be spirited away to another time. Stroll through idyllic mountain and seaside villages where the residents still live as their ancestors did, in harmony with the natural world around them. Discover a remarkable variety of wildlife, from hauntingly beautiful Japanese storks—a living national treasure—to delightful bathing snow monkeys in their natural habitat.

Find your spiritual side on the famous Kumano Kodo Trail

Follow in the footsteps of ancient pilgrims on the sacred trails of the Kii Peninsula

Seeking an adventure of self-discovery? The UNESCO World Heritage Kumano Kodo pilgrimage route in Tanabe is a great place to start. Here, you can hike paths trod by pilgrims for millennia through mystical woods. Sign up for a tour, and an English-speaking guide will regale you with 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 the beautiful Kumano Nachi Taisha Grand Shrine, and the dramatic Nachi Waterfall for which it is famous. When you’re done, head into town to dine on fresh seafood and other local delicacies. Only a 70-minute flight from Tokyo Haneda Airport or 2 hours by train from Osaka, the Kii Peninsula is easily accessible, and a host of lodging options from Western-style hotels to ryokan and temple stays are available.
Explore Kumamoto’s active volcano
Mount Aso up close
Eat, stay and play in one of the world’s largest inhabited volcanic calderas

Formed hundreds of thousands of years ago, Mount Aso in Kumamoto Prefecture in Kyushu is one of the most active volcanoes in the world. Even so, amazingly resilient people have been calling it home for the past ten millennia or so. The volcano itself is part of a huge geo park: meat and drink for adventure-seekers! Whether solo cycling, horse-riding, guided hiking across volcanic peaks, paragliding, camping, or even helicopter rides, the choices are almost endless! Craters and calderas aside, forget the still-billowing fumes a moment and head into town for some local sake and specialties cultivated in the rich volcanic soil. All rounded off by a stayover and star gaze from inside the caldera — something few ever experience.

Kumamoto Prefectural Government
熊本県

Explore a ravine in a land of myth and legend
Stroll through natural scenery forged by an ancient volcanic eruption

Takachiho in southern Kyushu is steeped in Japanese mythology, being the spot where the gods descended from heaven and created the Japanese archipelago. Nestled in the heart of its deep forests is Takachiho Gorge, an awe-inspiring ravine encompassing the cobalt blue Gokase River that was born of a massive lava flow from Mount Aso about 90 to 120 millennia ago. Trek down one of the many forest paths to view the chasm from above, or better still, rent a rowboat and admire it from below. If you’re lucky, the 17 meter high Manai Falls may even spray you, which is considered an auspicious sign. Finally, round off your trip with a look at Takachiho Shrine, stay for a kagura dance, or feast on local delicacies like Takachiho beef and Miyazaki-brewed shochu. Takachiho is accessible by bus (reservation required) from Hakata (3.5 hours) or Kumamoto (2 hours). Those looking to stay the night will find a host of ryokan options, with many offering hot springs and beautiful mountain views in surrounding area.
Magnificent unspoiled beech forest in Tohoku

You’ll feel both miles and millennia away from modern Japan on a trek through the primeval beech forests of Shirakami. This sprawling 130,000-hectare region traces its literal roots back 8000 years and its unspoiled environment remains home to such rare species as the Asian black bear and the black woodpecker. Standing in the emerald glades of Shirakami, it’s not hard to see why this magnificent scenery has enchanted and inspired so many of Japan’s artists and creators though the years.

Shirakami Sanchi
白神山地
1-509-1 Matsuoyoriki, Hachimantai-shi, Iwate
http://www.experience-shirakami.com/

Hike the Hachimantai Hills

Whatever the season, take to the trails and enjoy the beauty of Tohoku

The natural beauty of northern Tohoku is truly awe-inspiring in the Hachimantai region, part of the Towada-Hachimantai National Park. In this spectacular natural setting, wander through alpine meadows and leafy trails, either solo or with a hired guide from the Hachimantai Mountain Hotel for a high-altitude adventure. In winter, don’t miss the soaring snow walls, superb skiing or a soak in the region’s famed hot springs.

Hachimantai Mountain Hotel
八幡平マウンテンホテル
1-509-1 Matsuoyoriki, Hachimantai-cho, Hachimantai-shi
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Natural therapy in Nagano’s forests

Take time to unwind by forest bathing in Agematsu

No swimsuit needed for bathing of this kind! The Japanese practice of shinrin-yoku or “forest bathing” invites the weary traveler to purify body and soul by taking in the healing air, sights, and sounds of living, breathing woods. The Akasawa Natural Recreational Forest includes Kiso’s 300-year old Japanese towering hinoki cypress trees and is one of the most beautiful forests in Japan. The area is easily and enjoyably accessible by way of eight scenic trails. The plethora of experiences with English guidance available in this protected corner of Nagano includes a forest railway, open from late April through November. Travelers are encouraged to spend the night at one of Agematsu’s elegant ryokan or rustic guest houses, and partake in local fare like soba noodles, a Nagano favorite. About 4 hours by bullet train from either Tokyo or Osaka, it makes for perfect overnight getaway.

Akasawa Forest
赤沢自然休養林
159-3 Agematsu-cho, Agematsu-cho, Kiso-gun, Nagano
https://kiso-hinoki.jp/en/01akasawa.html#akagai

72

A sheltered and secluded Shikoku Valley

Venture into the hidden wilds of Iya Valley in Tokushima

Few places feel as untouched by the hands of time as Iya Valley in western Shikoku. This sparsely populated region, criss-crossed by rivers and dotted with peaks, preserves Japanese life of yesteryear. Pluck up courage to cross the valley’s double rope bridges, allegedly first constructed by warriors fleeing from a major battle over eight centuries ago. The reward? Stunning views of the beautiful natural setting. You’ll also enjoy a visit to Ochiai Village, featuring a precarious mountainside setting and with thatched roof homes designated as important historical structures.

Sora no Sato
そらの郷
1893-1 Ikeda-cho Sarada, Miyoshi-shi, Tokushima
73 Stroll beneath the majestic Great Wisteria

Just north of Tokyo, Ashikaga Flower Park is a laid-back, fragrant escape. This 52,000 square meter flower park boasts a spectacular main attraction: over 350 flowering wisteria trees. Beginning in mid-April, they create massive umbrellas of red, purple, yellow, and white blooms. The highlight is the 150-year-old Great Wisteria, looking as though it came straight out of a fairytale with its massive, twisting trunk and branches. This tree is so awe-inspiring that Tochigi Prefecture has designated it as a Natural Monument. The park is illuminated in the evening, so you can stroll under canopies of lush wisteria flowers while breathing in their sweet fragrance. Open year-round, the park showcases eight different floral seasons, so there is always a treat for visiting flower lovers.

Ashikaga Flower Park
株式会社 足利フラワーリゾート

74 A singularly scenic expedition across the Japan Alps

Marvel at massive snow walls at this premiere eco-tourism destination. Spanning 90km and covering an elevation change of 2,400 meters, the Tateyama Kurobe Alpine Route astounds nature lovers with some of Japan’s most dynamic mountain vistas. Your journey begins with a steep cable car climb up to a virgin forest of mighty ancient cedars. Then comes a winding bus ride featuring a massive snow corridor with walls as high as 20 meters high. Next you’ll board an electric trolley bus and tunnel through the heart of sacred Mt. Tateyama, emerging to one of the world’s most unique ropeways boasting incredible panoramic views of a steep alpine gorge. Then comes an underground cable car to Japan’s highest arch dam, Kurobe Dam, and the beautiful mountain scenery reflected in the waters of Lake Kurobe. 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 will take 6-7 hours, and is best enjoyed from April to June, when the snow walls are at their highest. Tateyama Station is 3.5 hours from Tokyo by bullet and local train, with abundant accommodation options for those looking to stay overnight.

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

75 All aboard for a tour of scenic, historic Akita

A microcosm of Japan’s natural and cultural wonders—all in a single trip. Just north of Tokyo, Ashikaga Flower Park is a laid-back, fragrant escape. This 52,000 square meter flower park boasts a spectacular main attraction: over 350 flowering wisteria trees. Beginning in mid-April, they create massive umbrellas of red, purple, yellow, and white blooms. The highlight is the 150-year-old Great Wisteria, looking as though it came straight out of a fairytale with its massive, twisting trunk and branches. This tree is so awe-inspiring that Tochigi Prefecture has designated it as a Natural Monument. The park is illuminated in the evening, so you can stroll under canopies of lush wisteria flowers while breathing in their sweet fragrance. Open year-round, the park showcases eight different floral seasons, so there is always a treat for visiting flower lovers.

Ashikaga Flower Park
株式会社 足利フラワーリゾート

A microcosm of Japan’s natural and cultural wonders—all in a single trip. Japan is full of striking natural vistas and historic treasures, and in Akita, you can experience a wealth of them in one go via a singularly delightful local train line. Hop aboard one of the colorful cars of the Akita Nairiku Railway for a 2-hour journey across the untouched countryside. Your trip begins in Kakunodate, an old castle town whose streetscapes and former samurai residences have been meticulously preserved to this day, offering a fascinating window into how the warrior class lived centuries ago. From there, you’ll travel nearly 100 kilometers north amidst rustic villages and rice fields that are decorated with artistic patterns in the summer months, across deep valleys and through verdant forests. The end of the line is Takanosu, birthplace of Japan’s traditional “matagi” hunter culture, where bear cuisine and other delicacies await the adventurous gourmet. Alight along the way at Ani-Maeda Station for relaxing hot spring baths and ski resorts boasting sublime powder snow. With lily flowers and cherry blossoms in the spring to fireworks and festivals in summer, foliage in autumn and stunning snowscapes in the winter—don’t miss the majestic Mount Miyoshi and its famous hoar frost-covered trees—Akita is an enchanting destination in any season, and the Akita Nairiku Railway is an ideal way to see it all.

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

©Ashikaga Flower Park

©Akita inland line

©Ashikaga Flower Park
Spearheading efforts to preserve one of Japan's living national treasures is the Hyogo Park of the Oriental White Stork, an ideal venue for any eco-conscious tourist. Stroll through lush green wetlands and enjoy the awe-inspiring beauty of these birds in their natural habitat, where they are bred and raised for reintroduction to the wild. Visit the museum and research center to learn all the work done to bring the stork back from the brink of extinction; cementing your bond with these beautiful creatures and their hard-working human saviors. Admission is free, though donations are welcome. Located just a 15-minute bus ride from Toyooka Station (about 2.5 hours from Osaka/Kobe or 3 hours from Kyoto by train). Spend the night and relax yourself at the nearby Kinosaki Onsen hot spring resort.

Enjoy the majestic sight of soaring white storks
This one-of-a-kind wildlife sanctuary is a must for all nature-lovers

Majestic Japanese cranes soaring into the clear winter sky, before landing within the snowscape for their graceful mating dance. A scene sure to enthrall any bird watcher or nature lover. From the middle of January until the beginning of March, visitors can take a chartered tour of Kushiro Marsh in Hokkaido — an ancient wetland and food source for almost all Japan's cranes — and appreciate these magnificent birds in their natural habitat, alongside stunning snowscapes and other natural and wildlife wonders. If you’re staying in the Kushiro area, hotel pick-ups are available for even easier access to this unique experience.

Japanese cranes dancing and soaring in a winter wonderland
Up close guided tour of Kushiro Marsh National Park’s natural beauty

Majestic Japanese cranes soaring into the clear winter sky, before landing within the snowscape for their graceful mating dance. A scene sure to enthrall any bird watcher or nature lover. From the middle of January until the beginning of March, visitors can take a chartered tour of Kushiro Marsh in Hokkaido — an ancient wetland and food source for almost all Japan’s cranes — and appreciate these magnificent birds in their natural habitat, alongside stunning snowscapes and other natural and wildlife wonders. If you’re staying in the Kushiro area, hotel pick-ups are available for even easier access to this unique experience.

Famous bathing snow monkeys will steal your heart
Visit their pristine winter wonderland in the scenic mountains of Nagano

Wild Japanese macaques saunter out of the snowy forest and slip into a steamy hot spring. This truly unique wildlife scene is sure to warm your heart on even the coldest winter’s day. At Jigokudani (meaning “Hell Valley”), where the monkeys roam free in their natural habitat, you’ll see that they appreciate a relaxing soak just as much as you do! It’s 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.
The ancient and the modern, the natural and the 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. Admire exquisite lacquerware. Turn your eyes to the present, and you'll find modern art museums coexisting in perfect harmony with nature, open-air music concerts, immersive exhibits of cutting-edge digital art, and more. Experience the full range of artistic expression from Japan's past to its present, and you're sure to come away with lasting memories and an appreciation for the timeless quality of its aesthetic beauty.

320 Furukawa-cho, Yasugi-shi, Shimane
https://www.adachi-museum.or.jp/en/

ADACHI MUSEUM OF ART
足立美術館

Passion: 06

Get your cameras ready – for six unique and exceptionally photogenic gardens within this 41-acre creatively landscaped all-season attraction. Weave your way through the museum, where pride of place goes to Yokoyama Taikan's paintings. Originally named Sakai Hidemaro and born in 1868, he is among the finest exponents of modern Japanese painting and known for having painted over 1,500 pictures of Mount Fuji. Alongside, enjoy a wide range of other highly renowned Japanese artists and take in Adachi Zenko's dream of harmonious art and a garden expressed as a single oversized painting. A must-stop on your Shimane Prefecture itinerary. Shimane Prefecture has never been easier to reach: a discounted bus for international travelers from Hiroshima prefecture, easy access from Kansai and incoming cruises also available from Tottori Prefecture.

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Voted as the best Japanese garden in the world
See Japan's greatest artworks and a top-rated garden in one

Get your cameras ready – for six unique and exceptionally photogenic gardens within this 41-acre creatively landscaped all-season attraction. Weave your way through the museum, where pride of place goes to Yokoyama Taikan's paintings. Originally named Sakai Hidemaro and born in 1868, he is among the finest exponents of modern Japanese painting and known for having painted over 1,500 pictures of Mount Fuji. Alongside, enjoy a wide range of other highly renowned Japanese artists and take in Adachi Zenko's dream of harmonious art and a garden expressed as a single oversized painting. A must-stop on your Shimane Prefecture itinerary. Shimane Prefecture has never been easier to reach: a discounted bus for international travelers from Hiroshima prefecture, easy access from Kansai and incoming cruises also available from Tottori Prefecture.

ADACHI MUSEUM OF ART
足立美術館

©Adachi Museum of Art

©Adachi Museum of Art
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Experience the wonder of art on a canvas of islands!

A leisurely journey of artistic discovery on the islands of the Seto Inland Sea.

Explore the enticing Benesse Art Site Naoshima project to enjoy and experience interactive works of art on three different islands. Promoting a beautiful blend of contemporary art and architecture, the initiative also lets you interact with locals and contributes to the surroundings. Centering on a network of galleries, installations and museums on Naoshima, Teshima and Inujima, an inspiring holiday highlight awaits. Examples include Inujima Seirensho Art museum – a former copper factory reborn as a unique art installation, with plant-powered filtration, solar energy and repurposed factory parts emphasizing its eco-friendly credentials. Or the Chichu Art Museum on Naoshima itself, designed by renowned Japanese architect Tadao Ando and housing numerous masterpieces, including works by Claude Monet and Walter De Maria.

Benesse Art Site Naoshima
ベネッセアートサイト瀬戸内
@http://benesse-artsite.jp/en/

81

A world-class modern art museum in the heart of scenic Aomori

Creative expression and the cityscape connect at the Towada Art Center

A downtown cultural hotbed, the Towada Art Center lets you immerse yourself in a dynamic gallery of larger-than-life, three-dimensional works of art and architecture – both inside and outdoors – in an environment painstakingly curated to complement its urban surroundings. Alongside art by Yoko Ono, Yayoi Kusama and Ron Mueck, don't miss the 5.5 meter high Flower Horse outdoor monument, by artist/designer Choi Jeong Hwa, which boldly symbolizes the aesthetic mission of the museum and the city. Outside of town you'll find Lake Towada, offering stunning vistas and hiking courses for the outdoor enthusiast. Stay overnight at a local ryokan or hotel, and sample specialties like freshwater fish, Kuraishi beef, and sembei rice cracker soup, an Aomori soul food. Towada is a 2 hour bus ride from Hachinohe Station, which is in turn 4 hours from Tokyo by bullet train.

81

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82
Create your own lacquerware masterpiece to take home
Go hands-on with one of Japan’s most beautiful and time-honored crafts

Japan has been famous for its lacquerwork since ancient times, and it still fascinates us today. Your gaze sinks into its endless glossy depths, as your fingertips caress its delightfully smooth finish. Sabae City in Fukui, a short trip from Kyoto, is home to the 1,500-year-old artistic tradition of Echizen lacquer. Here, you can watch master artisans at work, and even take part in the process yourself with three hands-on workshops to choose from: painting a design on a bowl, a photo frame or a hand mirror, carving a design on a lacquer plate, and applying lacquer to a round wooden tray. Once you’ve completed your personal masterpiece, head over to the gallery and see magnificent festival floats, handmade by local craftsmen using techniques passed down from generation to generation. Sabae is 90 minutes by train from Kyoto.

83
The secrets of bonsai unveiled: living works of art
At the Omiya Bonsai Art Museum, revel in bonsai’s miniature beauty

A tree small enough to fit on a tabletop, yet decades or often centuries old—carefully coaxed by generations of experts into a sublime, harmonious shape. That’s the traditional Japanese art of bonsai. The Omiya Bonsai Art Museum is a world-first publicly run museum devoted to bonsai, which has one of the world’s most impressive collections on display. With English audio guides available to give you greater insight into these amazing creations, you’ll be a bonsai connoisseur by the time you leave. Located less than an hour from central Tokyo, it makes for a perfect half-day destination—or take some extra time to explore the surrounding neighborhood, home to the lovely Omiya Park as well as a number privately-run bonsai gardens, nurseries, tool shops, and even a bonsai café.

84
East Asian art galore in a striking, scenic setting
Ancient and modern works exhibited in perfect harmony with nature

The hot spring paradise of Hakone, just a stone’s throw from Tokyo, is also home to one of Japan’s newest and boldest art museums. Opened in 2013, the Okada Museum of Art boasts some 5,000 square meter of exhibition space in a five-floor building that blends seamlessly into the surrounding forests. The regular exhibition features 450 works from Japan, China, and Korea, including paintings, ceramics, and religious art from ancient to modern times. Once you’ve seen everything, visit the footbath café to enjoy a drink and relaxing soak while beholding a majestic mural of Japanese wind and thunder gods, then take a stroll through the exquisitely maintained Japanese garden. With a number of world-class museums nestled in its picturesque mountainscape, Hakone is a perfect day trip destination from Tokyo, or spend the night in one of the luxurious Michelin-starred ryokan resorts or hotels. The stylish Romance Car express train will take you from Tokyo’s Shinjuku Station to Hakone in only 75 minutes.

85
Explore Japan’s rich history of cultural exchange with the continent
Exhibits that educate and inspire in this modern Kyushu museum

The Kyushu National Museum is one of Japan’s four national museums—along with Tokyo, Kyoto and Nara—and the first outside the main island of Honshu. The museum is located in the historic city of Dazaifu in northern Kyushu, which served historically as the main gateway between Japan and its Asian neighbors. The museum houses an impressive 3900-square-meter permanent exhibition focused on international cultural exchange, and showcasing a wide range of treasures representing the long history of cultural exchange. The museum building itself is also an architectural marvel, boasting a soaring entrance hall and spacious galleries. If you’re traveling with young children, the Ajippa hands-on interactive center provides hours of entertainment, and the museum shop and café make it easy for the family to pick up souvenirs or relax and get a bite to eat. Located just 35 minutes by train from central Fukuoka(Tenjin) and adjacent to the famous Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine—dedicated to the deity of learning and culture Michizane Sugawara and famous for its 6000 plum trees—it’s a perfect day trip destination for Kyushu travelers with an eye for cultural history.
East meets West at Niigata’s House of Light: a singular work of art and lodging all in one. Artist James Turrell united skylights and fiber-optics with Japanese touches like shoji screens and outside porches to create an immersive experience meant to catalyze discussion and meditation amongst guests. The facility caters to both stayover guests and day-trippers seeking tours of this architectural gem, with reservations easily booked online in English. The surrounding city of Tokamachi is also well worth exploring, with multiple art museums showcasing everything from the most impressive prehistoric pottery collection in Japan to contemporary masterworks. It is home to healing hot spring waters and stunning scenes of nature, including virgin beech forests, stunning gorges, and some of the most beautiful terraced rice fields in all of Japan—and with car rental and sightseeing taxi services readily available, it is easy see it all. For supper, why not try the best rice in Japan and enjoy a sip of Niigata’s sublime sake. Located just over 2 hours from Tokyo by bullet and local trains, it’s an enchanting destination that’s surprisingly accessible.

**House of Light**

- Address: 2991 Ueno-Ko, Tokamachi-shi, Niigata
- Website: [http://hikarinoyakata.com/eng/](http://hikarinoyakata.com/eng/)

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**Art, meditation, light and shadows**

**86**

A unique guesthouse in Japan’s snow country

East meets West at Niigata’s House of Light: a singular work of art and lodging all in one. Artist James Turrell united skylights and fiber-optics with Japanese touches like shoji screens and outside porches to create an immersive experience meant to catalyze discussion and meditation amongst guests. The facility caters to both stayover guests and day-trippers seeking tours of this architectural gem, with reservations easily booked online in English. The surrounding city of Tokamachi is also well worth exploring, with multiple art museums showcasing everything from the most impressive prehistoric pottery collection in Japan to contemporary masterworks. It is home to healing hot spring waters and stunning scenes of nature, including virgin beech forests, stunning gorges, and some of the most beautiful terraced rice fields in all of Japan—and with car rental and sightseeing taxi services readily available, it is easy see it all. For supper, why not try the best rice in Japan and enjoy a sip of Niigata’s sublime sake. Located just over 2 hours from Tokyo by bullet and local trains, it’s an enchanting destination that’s surprisingly accessible.

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**Wood, washi paper and world-class works of art**

At one with nature: nurturing comics, culture and closer community ties

The Comico Art Museum Yufuin, in Oita prefecture in Kyushu, blends seamlessly into the beautiful local surroundings while showcasing abundant visual feasts of its own. Galleries feature works by masters such as the world-famous Takashi Murakami, prolific proponent of Japanese modern art and Hiroshi Sugimoto, whose monochrome ‘Seascapes’ series intensifies the pre-existing black and white interplay of the building. For cultural arts and comics and novels in a setting that melts into the landscape, Comico delivers. 1 hour guided tours are available. Please note that an online reservation is required to enter the museum. Yufuin is located in Kyushu, Japan’s southern island, about a 2 hour flight and 1 hour train ride from Tokyo, via Oita Airport.

**Comico Art Museum Yufuin**

- Address: 2991 Ueno-Ko, Tokamachi-shi, Niigata
- Website: [https://camy.oita.go.jp/](https://camy.oita.go.jp/)

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**Rock out at Japan’s largest outdoor music festival**

Navigate the woods of the Fuji Rock Festival to find your favorites

Every summer sees global music lovers flock to Naeba Ski Resort in Niigata for a huge rock festival that has been going strong since 1997 and is often lauded as Japan’s number one music event. While the sheer number of amazing homegrown and overseas artists is more than enough to blow you away, it’s Fuji Rock’s atmosphere that keeps people coming back. Navigating between performances means negotiating deep forests decorated with otherworldly glowing orbs and trotting along woodland boardwalks. Dozens of food stalls tout high-quality fare and there are countless activities for kids too, including a forest play area. Tickets for individual or multiple days can be reserved online in English. Rent or bring along a tent and sleep over at the site, or stay at a traditional inn nearby and recharge with a hot spring bath. With an amazing line-up guaranteed each year, this is not just a music festival — it’s an adventure! From Tokyo, the site is just a 90-minute bullet train and shuttle bus ride away.

**Fuji Rock Festival**

- Address: 2991 Ueno-Ko, Tokamachi-shi, Niigata
- Website: [http://fujirock-eng.com/](http://fujirock-eng.com/)
Blessed with stunning natural beauty and a time-honored spirit of hospitality, Japan offers myriad destinations to provide a respite from the stress of modern society. Leave the city behind to discover idyllic mountain 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. Japan is home to a remarkable variety of regional cultures—and how better to experience it than as a guest of the locals? When you return to everyday life, you’re sure to do so with your body and mind refreshed.

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Luxury floating ryokan in Setouchi

Inspire yourself with an energizing cruise around the Seto Inland Sea

Departing from Hiroshima’s Onomichi, come aboard guntû and enjoy the ultimate ryokan (Japanese inn) experience while at sea. Designed by architect Yasushi Horibe, the spacious timber-lined cabins envelop passengers in unrivaled comfort – with baths, sauna and spa treatments also on offer to help you further unwind. Enjoy fine dining and ocean views for an unforgettable voyage around the scenic islands of the Seto Inland Sea.

gunû

©guntû Photo:Tetsuya Ito

URL: http://setouchitrip.com/relaxing-stay/7912

http://guntu.jp/
Stayover at this unique new Yamagata concept hotel

Discover a countryside landscape you never knew existed

SHONAI HOTEL SUIDEN TERRASSE opened in 2018 as a venue not just for guests to stay in but also experience and feel. 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, a library and a conference room. 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.

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A night to remember at a traditional boathouse

Classical architecture and stunning ocean views await you at Kura

The fishing village of Ine on Kyoto’s northern peninsula is a hidden gem untouched by time. Experience it to the fullest with a stayover at Kura, a traditional inn set in a renovated funaya boathouse right on the sea. Soak in a luxurious bath and feel the ocean breeze as you gaze out over the bay. Take in the charming and historic homes that line the gently curved shore. Bask in the warmth of your hosts’ hospitality and feast on the seasonal bounties of the ocean while sipping sublime locally brewed sake. With only one party admitted per night, you’ll have these idyllic surroundings all to yourself, and ample amenities ensure a comfortable stay for any traveler. Located just over 2 hours by train from central Kyoto, it is just a stone’s throw from Amanohashidate, one of Japan’s three most scenic vistas, and a great place for a dip in the ocean. Reservations can be booked online in English. A perfect overnight destination close to Kyoto.
Paradise awaits at a UNESCO world heritage site

Recharge and revitalize yourself at this luxury spa, in the primeval forests of Yakushima

Authentic Japanese hospitality, lavish comfort and matchless natural beauty await all guests who stay at sankara hotel & spa YAKUSHIMA. Attractions range from towering trees and stunning ocean views, reminiscent of ancient Japan, to lavish suite rooms, spa treatments and fine dining – all with locally-sourced cuisine and all the modern comforts you’d expect. Wake to birdsong, then let your mind, body and soul embrace this holistic healing experience.

sankara hotel & spa YAKUSHIMA
sankara hotel & spa 屋久島
9253 Haginoue, Mugio, Yakushima-cho, Kumage-gun, Kagoshima

Starlit camping on the Goto Islands

Discover the timeless beauty of this East China Sea archipelago

Escape from the modern world to the cozy oasis that awaits those who visit the Goto Islands, with a glamping stay at the first Nordisk Village property in Asia. You’ll bed down for the evening in spacious canvas tents including all modern conveniences and feast on island-grown food in the village’s restaurant, housed in a tastefully converted schoolhouse. Take in the islands’ natural wonders from land, sea or air – try scuba diving in the crystal-clear waters, where the Tsushima current bring fish from north and south together, fishing, cruising, horse riding or even chartering a sightseeing flight over the archipelago for even more write-home-about experiences.

Nordisk Village Goto Islands
Nordisk Village Goto Islands
1233 Tao, Tomie-cho, Goto-shi, Nagasaki

Luxury lodging in Japan’s paradise

Escape to relax in the southern islands

For an island break you’ll always remember, book a room at the stylish Ritz Carlton Okinawa, set in the serene grounds of the Kise golf course in northern Okinawa. Foodies will enjoy sampling locally raised Kuroge wagyu beef and other island specialties in the hotel’s collection of restaurants, with cuisine options across the board. Alternatively, enjoy a spot of afternoon tea in the Lobby Lounge, which may feature locally made sweet treats or the uniquely Okinawan frothy tea known as bukubukucha. Still stressed? The Okinawan detoxing body treatment called Yambaru Umikaji, using tiger clam shells and local essential oils, is sure to leave both mind and body at peace.

The Ritz-Carlton Okinawa
ザ・リッツ・カールトン 沖縄
1343-1 Kise, Nago-shi, Okinawa
©sankara hotel&spa Yakushima ©The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company L.L.C.
©Nordisk Village Goto Islands ©Nordisk Village Goto Islands
Embrace rural charm in one of Japan’s most scenic villages

Stay at Shirakawa-go: experience life in a traditional thatched farmhouse

Tucked away in the mountains of Gifu Prefecture in central Japan lie a cluster of 114 or so historic farmhouses in an alpine valley. Each sits cozy under its gigantic thatched roof; sheltered from winter’s deep snows and summer’s heat. This fairytale-like setting is Shirakawa-go, an authentic rural landscape from a bygone era and those who call it home still keep the old customs alive. Its beauty and well-preserved traditions earned Shirakawa-go UNESCO World Heritage Site status in 1995. Book a stay at one of these farmhouses, whether a home or guesthouse and get a true feel for Japan’s rustic roots. The remote and unspoiled setting simply add to the charm, well worth the journey from Tokyo by bus and train – just 3.5 hours via Toyama station.

Heartwarming farm stays in rural Japan

Akita’s Odate region offers the perfect respite from hectic urban life

Get in touch with a different side of Japan in Odate, home to the world-famous Akita dog. Stay over, bond with your farming hosts and experience a day in their life. Tending to rice fields, pickling vegetables or harvesting apples— even clearing snow off roofs in winter - there’s always something to be done. Then, after sundown and when it gets chillier, huddle around a piping hot pot and learn how to make kiritanpo-nabe stew, a local specialty. Revel in the opportunity to mingle with locals and make lasting memories. Odate is just a 70-minute flight from Tokyo’s Haneda Airport.

Lose yourself at an inn truly at one with its surroundings

A night of transcendent seaside luxury awaits at Ryotei Kuki

If you venture off the beaten path to the fishing town of Esashi in southwestern Hokkaido, you are rewarded with Kuki, a stand-out hotel combining striking modern Japanese design with a commitment to ecologically sound hospitality. The seven oversize rooms include the services of an on-call butler, ready to meet guests’ every whim. Feast on sumptuous local cuisine, including fresh-caught seafood from the port and meat and vegetables from the inn’s privately-operated organic farm, which is also open to guests. Heal body and mind with a soak in the natural hot springs, then tour Esashi town for historic architecture and the oldest shrine in Hokkaido. For a heartwarming and magically memorable stay, Kuki ticks the box.
Experience the rich tradition of an old castle town at Hotel NIPPONIA

Journey back in time to the Edo period at this unique Hyogo hotel

Just one hour by train from Osaka lies Sasayama, a picturesque castle town dating back over four centuries in northern Hyogo Prefecture. Certified as one of Japan’s 100 beautiful historic towns, this enviable collection of traditional architecture and culture offers all visitors a wealth of living history. And why not delve even deeper into its charming nostalgia by staying at one of Hotel NIPPONIA’s five residential villas? Each has its own unique story: one was a former geisha house, another the private home of a bank magnate. The houses retain a traditional atmosphere alongside seamless modern amenities to make your stay as comfortable as possible. To make the most of the experience, book a meal here — you’ll dine on local delicacies like succulent Tajima beef, Matsutake mushrooms and more.

Onyado Chikurintei

Adjoining the sacred Mt. Mifune in Saga in Kyusyu is Onyado Chikurintei, a striking Japanese inn set within a 49.5-hectare garden of towering trees and beautiful flowers. There are eleven guest rooms to choose from, in both Japanese and Western styles, each uniquely designed with year-round panoramic views of the surrounding natural splendor. Soak in the healing waters of Takeo Onsen beside a bamboo grove—or reserve a room with a private bath for true tranquility. In the evening, you’ll dine on a full kaiseki course exquisitely crafted for the season and your surroundings—no two meals are alike. Whenever you like, step outside to freely explore the vast garden in all its glory. You’ll never be more at one with nature.

Bettei Otozure

Arrive at Bettei Otozure — a luxurious venue that hosted a summit between Japan’s Prime Minister Abe and President Putin of Russia in 2016 — and what strikes you first is how the tasteful Japanese architecture blends seamlessly into the verdant Yamaguchi peaks. Then step inside to a virtual museum, where stunning ceramic artwork and lush gardens await. Each guest room comes complete with its own private open-air bathing area, allowing you to take in the soothing waters and stunning natural vistas in peaceful bliss. Gourmets will be just as delighted with full-course Kaiseki meals, prepared using fresh-caught ingredients from the nearby Sea of Japan. Further dining, shopping, and entertainment options await at the sister Otani Sanso Inn next door, while historic sites like Tainei Temple and Akasaki Shrine are just minutes away by car.

Stayover in a garden paradise

Find peace and serenity at this Michelin-starred mountain oasis

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