

Japan Tourism Topics by JNTO

Japan National
Tourism Organization

October 16, 2025

New Open

1. A luxury newcomer joins Nagoya's hotel scene Oct 1



Nagoya has a new luxury hotel after the Espacio Nagoya Castle opened on Oct 1. Built on the site of the former Hotel Nagoya Castle, the newcomer stands on a prized piece of land just steps away from Nagoya Castle's moat. It aims to carry the legacy of its beloved predecessor and the heritage rooted in 260 years of prosperous rule under the Owari Tokugawa clan. The new 11-story hotel contains 100 rooms, each averaging more than 70 square meters, including one presidential suite. The guest rooms blend modern luxury with the essence of samurai culture, featuring artistic elements that draw on traditional craftsmanship, evoking the tranquil and exclusive feel of an inner palace. Guests can indulge in luxury dining experiences in the hotel's eight restaurants and bars. Two restaurants are headed by Michelin-starred chefs. Other amenities include an indoor pool, luxurious spa treatments, and a fitness center. In addition, the hotel says it has the largest banquet hall in the Chubu region, which can hold a wide range of events, from international conferences to wedding banquets. With such facilities and impeccable service, the hotel is confident of its appeal to well-heeled, luxury travelers worldwide.

[Espacio Nagoya Castle](#)

New Open

2. Hoshino Resorts opens new RISONARE hotel in Yamaguchi Dec 11



©RISONARE Shimonoseki

Hoshino Resorts' hotel brand, RISONARE, will open a new facility in Shimonoseki, a city at the westernmost point of Yamaguchi Prefecture on Dec 11. Hoshino Resorts RISONARE Shimonoseki will offer a unique "strait resort" experience with 187 ocean-view rooms overlooking the Kanmon Strait. Based on the concept, "The Strait's Designer Hotel," it focuses on providing guests with a stay that allows them to fully enjoy the waterway that separates Japan's main islands of Honshu and Kyushu. Guests can immerse in Shimonoseki's maritime heritage through activities like cruises along the strait, where ships pass against the dynamic backdrop of the iconic Kanmon Bridge. Early birds can walk to the lively Karato Market, famous for its fresh fugu (pufferfish). RISONARE Shimonoseki's new resort features an infinity pool that appears to merge with the ocean, offering breathtaking views of sunrise and sunset, and a garden — all designed to help guests immerse in nature. The hotel's dining facilities highlight dishes that are focused on fugu, a prized delicacy in Shimonoseki. Its Italian restaurant weaves fugu into a course dinner to help diners discover its charms. Located five minutes by car or bus from JR Shimonoseki Station, the resort is part of the Arcapoto/Karato Master Plan, a collaboration with Shimonoseki City to enhance the area's appeal as a modern port destination.

[Hoshino Resort RISONARE Shimonoseki](#)

Festival and Event

3. Ancient history comes alive at the Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri in Nara Dec 15–18



The Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri in Nara is an annual festival held at Wakamiya Shrine, situated within the grounds of Kasuga Taisha Shrine, one of the most prestigious shrines in Japan. Held every December 15–18, the festival has remained largely unchanged for almost 900 years, making it one of Japan's most time-honored celebrations. Dating back to the 12th century, it was originally held to pray for national peace and a good harvest. Its biggest moment is the Jidai Gyoretsu (period

procession), which begins at noon on December 17. Volunteers wear elaborate costumes from the Heian to Edo periods, forming a spectacular procession as they wind through the streets of Nara City, giving the public a roadside view. Visitors can also witness rare performances of bugaku (an ancient form of Japanese court dance) and other ceremonial dances, which trace the origins of Japanese performing arts. Designated an Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property of Japan in 1979, the Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri is more than a festival — it is a window into Japan's cultural soul. For visitors, it is a chance to experience history in motion and join in a celebration that has endured for centuries.

[Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri \(Information provided by Nara City Tourism Association\)](#)

Seasonal Topic

4. Marvel at illuminations of nature's art of snow and ice in Aomori from December



©TOWADA TRAVEL

In Aomori Prefecture, certain government-designated “special protection areas” transform into a winter wonderland when waterfalls and streams start freezing, creating ice sculptures under the night sky. These areas can be found in parts of Oirase Gorge and the outer rim of Lake Towada, located in Towada-Hachimantai National Park. Together, they form what can be described as nature's very own art gallery, which visitors can admire through tours on a sightseeing bus, accompanied by professional nature guides. For night tours, visitors can choose between two different courses, which last about two to three hours. During these tours, participants can get off the bus to view five illuminated spots of ice and snow formations that have seemingly been frozen in time thanks to Aomori's harsh winter conditions. To showcase them — and at the same time to minimize negative impact on local flora and fauna — the lighting equipment is "mobile" instead of permanent. That means the equipment is loaded onto a special vehicle that runs alongside the tour bus and illuminated only during stops. For a different experience, visitors can opt for daytime tours, which allow them to see the daytime landscape of Oirase Gorge. Since 2017, these tours have been offering visitors the chance to admire the otherworldly icy formations in an environmentally friendly way.

[Frozen Oirase Gorge Night Bus Tour](#)

Seasonal Topic

5. Beyond Kyoto city: discover a little-known winter food journey on the Sea of Japan



©Kyotango City Tourism Association

While many think of Kyoto as temples and teahouses, Kyotango — a coastal region in the northern part of the prefecture — offers an alternative far from the tourist crowds. A model course, which lays out a three-day Winter Foodie itinerary, is centered around the locally caught Taiza-gani, or “phantom crab,” prized throughout Japan for its rarity. Taiza-gani can only be enjoyed at its source due to strict fishing limits and same-day catch-to-table preparation. Besides partaking in the region’s rich culinary culture, visitors can indulge in a traditional ryokan stay, relax in a soothing onsen, discover the beauty of the Amanohashidate sandbar (designated as one of Japan’s three great scenic views), and explore the photogenic bathhouses of Ine Bay. Visitors can also join a range of other activities, from all-you-can-eat local oysters to making artisanal salt and soba alongside craftsmen. Winter in Kyotango lets visitors savor some of Japan’s finest seafood and hospitality in a setting where nature, traditions, and local flavors deeply intertwine.

[Kyotango winter foodie retreat](#)

Adventure Travel

6. Embark on a night snowshoe adventure in Nagano’s unspoiled wilderness



©SHIGA KOGEN

The Night Snowshoe Tour, set in the UNESCO-recognized pristine environment of Shiga Kogen within Joshin’etsukogen National Park, offers a bespoke winter experience. Shiga Kogen is one of the largest interconnected ski areas in Japan, with a variety of terrain, including subalpine forests at altitudes between 1,300m and 2,300m. During the 1998 Nagano Olympics, the men’s and women’s slalom and giant slalom races were hosted in the area. The Night Snowshoe Tour is organized by the area’s guide association through the Shiga Kogen Nature Conservation Center. It takes visitors into snow-covered, old-growth forests of Japanese hemlock, larch, and white birch under a starlit sky. Led by English-speaking local guides, the tour requires no prior experience, and snowshoes and poles are provided for participants. A tailor-made version of the tour, limited to five

participants per group, is also available. Participants can immerse in unspoiled wilderness, spot local wildlife, and enjoy some of Honshu's finest powder snow. The experience is further enhanced by panoramic views from Mt. Yokote and the ambiance of the night skiing areas in the Ichinose Hotel district, making it a standout adventure for overnight visitors in Shiga Kogen.

[Shiga Kogen nature conservation center winter exclusive night snowshoe tour](#)

Adventure Travel

7. Get up close with winter birds in Hokkaido's Shiretoko-Rausu



Imagine having direct access to wildlife with an opportunity to witness some of the world's most majestic birds in their winter habitats within a UNESCO World Heritage site. Rausu, a town located on the eastern coast of Hokkaido's UNESCO-recognized Shiretoko Peninsula, offers visitors just that. December is the best season for bird-watching enthusiasts in Rausu. Local tour guide Hiro, a fluent English speaker, tracks bird locations daily and offers a curated bird-watching experience for visitors centered on Rausu. The area is a prime winter destination for observing migratory birds. These include the white-tailed eagle and the vulnerable Steller's sea eagle, which mainly feed on fish like chum salmon along rivers during winter. Visitors can also spot other species, including long-tailed ducks, black-headed gulls, and red-breasted mergansers. The guide will tailor each bird-watching experience to suit different visitors' needs and ensure they have access to the best viewing spots in this fishery town.

[Hokkaido winter bird-watching guided tour](#)

Special Experience

8. Walk and play with Akita dogs in their native rural landscape



Akita dogs are a large Japanese breed that originated from Akita Prefecture. Designated as a National Natural Monument by the government, they are widely known as an affectionate and loyal breed. This is symbolized by the statue of the world-famous Hachiko at Shibuya Station, an Akita dog that had faithfully waited for its master even after his passing. Programs are available for visitors to walk and play with Akita dogs while enjoying the rural landscape in Akita. A breeder in Akita's northwestern Noshiro city offers a program for travelers to walk and play with these furry companions. Guests can walk the dogs off-leash, accompanied by the handler throughout the experience. For overseas visitors, the program will be conducted with the assistance of a translation app. Separately, in Mitane town, also in northwestern Akita, Healthcare Design Akita organizes a unique experience for tourists to explore scenic countryside trails alongside an Akita dog. This is one of the "Kurort walking" experiences — a type of nature-walking to improve health. Although it is a year-round activity, the group recommends winter as the best period for frolicking in the snow with the friendly, well-trained dogs in their native land.

[Play with Akita Dogs!](#)

[Kurort Walking with an Akita Dog](#)

Special Experience

9. Savor local flavors on a train and watch bucolic landscapes in Fukuoka roll by



©Nishi - Nippon Railroad Co., Ltd

The Rail Kitchen Chikugo is a traveling restaurant that plies the Chikugo area, south of central Fukuoka. Operated by Nishi-Nippon Railroad (Nishitetsu) since March 2019, the train departs from Nishitetsu Fukuoka (Tenjin) station. While passengers get to enjoy the train ride, savor seasonal cuisine, and watch the countryside scenes roll by, they can also hop on and off the train to explore Dazaifu, one of Kyushu's most picturesque historical towns. Curated lunches for up to 52 people across three cars are prepared in its fully equipped kitchen, which boasts a unique oven. Almost all

the ingredients and beverages onboard are locally and seasonally sourced. The gourmet offerings are served on modern ceramic plates made by craftsmen, and the culinary experience is enhanced by an interior adorned with textile and tiles created by artisans. Operating on Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, and Japanese holidays, the Rail Kitchen Chikugo offers a unique way to explore a hidden part of Kyushu.

[The Rail Kitchen Chikugo](#)

Notice

10. Explore Japan's major arts and cultural spots with a single digital pass



©Japan Arts Council

The Japan Cultural Passport is a digital travel pass that grants access to over 30 major cultural facilities across Japan. These venues are associated with Japan Cultural Expo 2.0, a nationwide celebration of Japanese arts and culture. The pass represents a collaboration between JTB Corp. and the Japan Arts Council, and it is available until Feb 8, 2026. The pass can be purchased with a credit card through the passport's official homepage. Stored digitally on mobile phones or other devices, it offers easy access to a wide array of cultural, historical, and scientific institutions and facilities across Japan. Passholders can set out on an inspiring journey through artworks and exhibits that showcase Japan's refined aesthetics, masterful craftsmanship, and enduring pursuit of scientific innovation in harmony with nature. To help passholders on their cultural journeys, the official homepage maps out a model itinerary that details specific locations and museums or exhibitions. With flexible validity periods (7-, 14-, and 21-day), travelers get to experience diverse aspects of Japanese culture in a convenient and budget-friendly way.

[Japan Cultural Passport](#)

Notes:

- The above details are correct as of the time of publication, and are subject to change.
- Item 8 is based on information from JNTO partner.

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