

January 15, 2026

News!

1. Global recognition of Japanese culture grows as UNESCO adds six traditions to the Intangible Cultural Heritage list



Japan's regional traditions often remain deeply local, passed down quietly through generations, but UNESCO's latest decision has brought six more of them into the international spotlight. On Dec 11, an intergovernmental committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage added six elements in total, including techniques indispensable for conservation of cultural properties, traditional craft techniques, and regional festivals to the Intangible Cultural Heritage list. The six items were incorporated as extensions of three Japanese cultural categories already inscribed on the list. The decision marks Japan's new intangible heritage recognition since traditional sake brewing was added in 2024. From Hiroshima, the technique for handwoven "Nakatsugi-omote," a type of tatami surface valued for its durability and refined texture, was endorsed under the category of "Traditional skills, techniques and knowledge for the conservation and transmission of wooden architecture in Japan." The other craft is "Echizen Torinoko Ganpi paper," a type of washi known for its smooth, lustrous finish from the Echizen region in Fukui Prefecture. The traditional practice of making the prized paper from fine ganpi fibers was added to the existing category of "Washi, craftsmanship of traditional Japanese hand-made paper." Meanwhile, four festivals were added to the category of "Yama, Hoko, Yatai, float festivals in Japan." These are the Ofune Festival of Hitachi Otsu in Kita-Ibaraki City, Ibaraki Prefecture; the Murakami Yatai Festival of Murakami City, Niigata Prefecture; the Hojozu Hachimangu Shrine Hikiyama Tsukiyama Festival of Imizu City, Toyama Prefecture; and the Otsu Hikiyama Festival of Otsu City, Shiga Prefecture. All four were recommended for their vital role in community building. Because the six items were submitted as extensions of categories Japan already has on the list, the country's total count of registered items remains unchanged at 23.

[11 December 2025: Decision to extend the inscription on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage](#)

New Open

2. Imperial Hotel to debut a luxurious Kyoto retreat in Gion Mar 5



The exterior of the Imperial Hotel, Kyoto.

*The building is the entrance area of Gion-Kobu Kaburenjo.

Japan's iconic Imperial Hotel, renowned for hosting world leaders and cultural icons, is starting a new chapter of legendary hospitality with a Kyoto property scheduled to open on March 5. Situated in the historic Gion district, an evocative neighborhood where traditional machiya (townhouses) and the culture of maiko (apprentice geishas) still thrives, the 55-room small luxury hotel combines the Imperial's signature comfort with a concept rooted in preserving Kyoto's deep cultural legacy while offering modern sophistication. Imperial Hotel, Kyoto is a restoration of Yasaka Kaikan, a long-cherished landmark of Gion and a nationally registered "Tangible Cultural Property." Originally designed for traditional Japanese theatrical performances, its appearance has been painstakingly preserved by retaining its south and west exterior walls and structural elements, allowing the landmark's legacy to live on. Contemporary design elements, such as floor-to-ceiling windows, frame Kyoto's breathtaking scenery, while guest rooms filled with traditional Japanese aesthetics serve to create a timeless retreat. The hotel boasts a range of room types, from top-tier suites such as the Imperial Suite — which have a balcony or terrace offering panoramic views of the Kyoto cityscape — to Premier Rooms featuring tatami spaces inspired by machiya, evoking Gion's quiet, restorative charm. The dining options feature a French restaurant celebrating Japan's traditional 24 solar terms (a system of subtle seasonal changes), an all-day dining space, a classic main bar, and a rooftop bar (exclusive for staying guests).

[Imperial Hotel Kyoto](#)

New Open

3. Fukuoka Prince Hotel Momochihama to open Mar 17



The Fukuoka Prince Hotel Momochihama will offer panoramic views combined with the soft sea breeze of Hakata Bay when it opens on March 17. Situated in front of Momochi Seaside Park, the hotel boasts 229 rooms, all with ocean views, so guests can enjoy the shifting scenery of Hakata Bay and the Genkai Sea throughout the day. In the first-floor lobby, a striking mural celebrates Fukuoka's maritime heritage. Guests can relax amid a range of facilities, including a restaurant with spectacular views, a club lounge on the top floor, a fitness center, and a function room, where meetings and conferences can be held. The restaurant provides a relaxing setting where diners can take in the natural beauty of Momochihama. About 20 minutes by car from Fukuoka Airport, the hotel is in the seaside area to the west of the city. It is close to many of Fukuoka's symbolic landmarks, including Fukuoka Tower, and just a short distance from Hakata, the main gateway to the entire Kyushu region.

[Fukuoka Prince Hotel Momochihama](#)

Festival and Event

4. Usher in spring with a blaze of tradition at the Sagicho Festival in Shiga Mar 14-15



Omihachiman City in Shiga Prefecture welcomes spring each mid-March with the vibrant Sagicho Festival, designated as a "National Intangible Folk Cultural Property." Happening on March 14-15, the festival is said to boast more than 400 years of history. On the first day, visitors can watch 13 neighborhoods parade colorful floats, towering up to eight meters, through the former castle town. Each float has a main decorative element, known as the "dashi," mounted at the front. The dashi prominently features the year's Chinese zodiac animal, which is crafted entirely from edible materials such as beans and kelp — symbolizing gratitude for the previous year's harvest and a prayer for a successful crop in the current year. Each float weighs about one ton (1,000 kg). The floats are hoisted by dancers in flamboyant costumes, who chant loudly as they move through the streets. After the evening parade, the floats return to Himure Hachimangu Shrine, where winners of the dashi competition are announced. The following day, the festival reaches its dramatic peak as floats collide in "kenka" (fight) contests before being set ablaze in a spectacular nighttime finale at the shrine. The burning serves both as an offering to the deities and a symbolic prayer for protection against fire.

[Omihachiman Sagicho Festival](#)

Festival and Event

5. Ring in spring at Izushi's First Day of the Horse Festival in Hyogo Mar 20-22



©hibocco

The historic castle town of Izushi in Toyooka City, Hyogo Prefecture, will welcome spring with the First Day of the Horse Festival on March 20-22. This is a chance for visitors to join locals in praying for a prosperous year. A 400-year-old celebration rooted in Shinto (Japan's indigenous religion, known as the "way of the gods"), the festival centers around Arikoyama Inari Shrine, known for its stairway lined with vibrant vermilion torii gates. The festival is said to bring prosperity in agriculture and business. Visitors will be able to see local children dressed as fox shrine maidens — messengers of the Inari deity — descend Mt. Ariko in a charming procession. A dance performance will also be held at the Eirakukan Kabuki Theater, one of Japan's oldest playhouses. In the past, this festival was the one day of the year when commoners were allowed to enter the grounds of Izushi Castle. Today, however, visitors are welcomed to join locals in celebration, sample festival foods, and climb the torii-lined path to offer prayers at Arikoyama Inari Shrine — a symbol of renewal and good fortune in Izushi.

[Izushi First Day of the Horse Festival](#)

*The festival's 2026 dates have not yet been updated on the website.

Seasonal Topic

6. Marvel at Yoshinoyama's cherry blossom spectacle on a private guided tour in Nara



© Yoshino Visitors Bureau

Yoshinoyama in Nara Prefecture is renowned in Japan as a premier viewing spot for cherry blossoms. From late March to early April, approximately 30,000 Yoshino cherry trees create a spectacular tiered display as the blooms climb the mountain slopes. Visitors can join a customizable half-day guided tour to fully experience Yoshinoyama's scenery. Led by a local guide, the tour explores the historic mountain

temple district, including the 1,300-year-old Kinpusen-ji Temple, home to Zao-do Hall, which is said to be the second-largest wooden temple structure in Japan. Participants can choose their preferred pace: walk from Yoshino Station for a more immersive journey, or use bus and ropeway services for easier access to higher elevations, including the kami-senbon cherry blossom grove. The Yoshino Ropeway is considered to be the oldest operating ropeway in Japan. The guide will also introduce participants to local specialties as options, such as persimmon leaf-wrapped sushi and kuzu (Japanese arrowroot) sweets. After the guided portion concludes, guests are free to wander among the blossoms or continue to their next destination.

[Private Guided Half-Day Walking Tour in Yoshinoyama](#)
[Mt. Yoshino Cherry Blossoms](#)

Cultural Discoveries

7. Explore Gunma's little-known heritage



©SyorinzanDarumaji



©Tomioka City

Despite its proximity to Tokyo, Gunma is often overlooked as a travel destination, but the prefecture offers a rich journey through two facets of Japan's heritage: spiritual tradition and industrial innovation. Shorinzan Darumaji Temple, the birthplace of the Daruma doll, is located in Takasaki, which is just under an hour from Tokyo by Shinkansen. Here, visitors can learn about the ubiquitous red, round papier-mâché figures believed to bring luck and help achieve goals. There are also workshops in Takasaki, like Daimonya, where they can paint their own Daruma dolls. About a 40-minute train ride from Takasaki lies Tomioka, home to Japan's first state-operated, large-scale modern silk-reeling factory, established in 1872. Tomioka Silk Mill played a pivotal role in the country's industrial revolution, using advanced machinery and employing women in waged work, helping establish Japan's global silk reputation. Now a UNESCO World Heritage site, visitors can explore its meticulously preserved red-brick buildings and even rent a kimono inspired by silk workers' attire, then stroll the streets of Tomioka, immersing themselves in the town's historic ambiance.

[36 Hours in Tomioka and Takasaki](#)

Special Experience

8. Savor coffee and nature on a Yambaru adventure in Okinawa



Coffee has been grown in Okinawa for over a century, yet few people know about it because the small harvests are rarely shipped outside of the prefecture. However, a unique tour offered by the Oriental Hotel Okinawa Resort & Spa could slowly change that. Through its "Learn, Roast, and Taste in the Nature of Yambaru! Okinawa Coffee Nature Tour," the resort invites guests to step into the emerald wilderness of Yambaru in northern Okinawa on a half-day adventure that combines hiking through the region's breathtaking wilderness and a coffee harvesting-and-roasting lesson. Held until May 15, the tour takes guests from the resort to Nakayama Coffee Farm in Nago City, where they learn how to harvest and roast coffee cherries to their desired taste. Next, an expert guide leads them along winding trails through Yambaru's dense subtropical forest, alive with endemic birds, plants, and wildlife. Upon reaching a panoramic mountain viewpoint, they will savor their freshly roasted coffee amid the serene surroundings. Participants can also opt for a plan that includes a breakfast box specially prepared by the hotel for them to enjoy with the stunning scenery. In addition, the tour includes an optional spa visit at the hotel, offering the perfect way to unwind after a journey through Yambaru's lush landscapes.

[Okinawa Coffee Nature Tour](#)

Special Experience

9. Chino's Mountain Traditions: Cook with local grannies in a Nagano village



©Chino Tourism Organization

In the foothills of the Yatsugatake Mountains in Nagano Prefecture lies Chino City. The small rural villages of Chino are collectively known as "Yamaura," meaning "in the mountain's shadow." Despite the name, these villages flourish with rich traditions. Throughout the year, the villagers live in harmony with nature, their gastronomy, farming, and crafts closely attuned to the cycle of the seasons. Winter showcases the local culture at its most distinctive. When frost blankets the land, and temperatures plunge below -10°C, local grannies take advantage of the frigid climate to produce naturally freeze-dried foods such as tofu,

daikon (radish), and kanten (agar). In Sasahara Village, perched at an elevation of 1,100 meters, you can join a local granny for a three-hour program, accompanied by an English-speaking interpreter, to experience daily life in their mountain community. You will cook three or four traditional dishes using fresh seasonal produce, including the unique freeze-dried ingredients. Once everything is ready, sit down together to enjoy the meal and learn how the local grannies utilize the wisdom of their ancestors to turn nature's challenges into opportunities.

[A Taste of the Yatsugatake Mountains](#)

Special Experience

10. Capture the elegance of Japanese bridal wear with a kimono photoshoot in Ehime



© Uchiko Tourism Association

Getting a glimpse into traditional Japanese bridal wear can be challenging for many foreign visitors. But Uchiko town, about a 25-minute train ride from Matsuyama Station in Ehime Prefecture, offers a rare opportunity through the “HANAYOME” program. Whether you are a couple celebrating a milestone, an LGBT couple, or a solo traveler, the program lets you dress in full bridal attire for a photoshoot amid the preserved Edo-period streets of Uchiko, Shikoku’s first “Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings.” Participants begin with a complimentary consultation to select their ensemble — full-color bridal kimono (iro-uchikake) or formal groom attire (haori and hakama) — guided by experienced professionals. On the day of the shoot, local stylists handle hair and makeup before dressing you in your chosen garments. Depending on the type of plan chosen, a professional photographer then leads a 30- or 60-minute session through Uchiko’s historic streets. You will receive five or thirty edited digital photos, plus one instant photo to take home the same day. Reservations should be made at least one month in advance.

[“HANAYOME” Bridal Photoshoots](#)

Notes:

- The above details are correct as of the time of publication, and are subject to change.

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