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Anime & Manga-inspired Travel across Japan



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When people overseas mention Japan, one of the things that comes to mind is “anime,” or Japanese animation. This is its biggest cultural export that put the country on the global pop culture map. Anime is part of Japan’s soft-power strategy — and a gold mine of economic revenue. According to the Association of Japanese Animations (AJA), the industry hit a record \$25 billion in revenue in 2024, up 14.8 percent from 2023, with over half of the market from abroad. The global appeal of anime is also a driver of inbound tourism. A Japan Tourism Agency survey showed that about 11.8 percent of tourists to Japan in 2024 mentioned “visiting movies and anime-related sites” as the purpose of their next trips to the country.



This trend has given rise to what is known as “anime tourism,” where fans visit real-world locations that appeared in — or inspired by — their favorite anime series and films, manga, or video game content. This is known as “seichi junrei,” or sacred location pilgrimages. This issue of Japan Tourism Spotlight features several such destinations from Kumamoto in the west to Sendai in the north. We will take you on a journey to see how anime redefined Japan’s travel landscape.

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1. How volleyball manga “Haikyuu!!” rallies fans to Sendai



©Haruichi Furudate/Shueisha

Every volleyball and manga fan knows “Haikyuu!!,” the popular sports manga created by Furudate Haruichi. Serialized in Shueisha’s Weekly Shonen Jump from 2012 to 2020, this manga about high school volleyball had sold over 75 million copies worldwide by 2025, according to the official website. It spawned an anime adaptation produced by Production I.G., spanning four seasons and 85 episodes, as well as two films — one released in 2024 and a sequel coming up in 2027. Its global appeal mirrors the theme of its story: teamwork, perseverance, and triumph in sports.

Since Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture, is among the manga’s key settings, the Sendai municipal government has actively promoted Haikyuu!!-related locations. The city government appointed its key characters as tourism special envoys — Hinata Shoya and Kageyama Tobio in 2023, Tsukishima Kei and Yamaguchi Tadashi in 2024, and Oikawa Toru and Iwaizumi Hajime in 2025.

A two-day Haikyuu!! tour in Sendai is recommended to allow fans to visit the spots where character monuments have been erected. Beginning at Sendai Station, they can head to Tomizawa Station to see the special utility hole covers and the Hinata-Kageyama monument in Tomizawa Park. Last year, four utility hole covers featuring star players from the schools in Haikyuu!! were unveiled. Besides the commemorative covers, merchandise like acrylic blocks and keychains was also released.

Next stop is MOTOYAMA ENG. WORKS Aoba Arena (Aoba Gymnasium) for the monument of the main team's rivals, Oikawa and Iwaizumi (installed in August 2025). The last stop of the itinerary is the Sendai City Museum to see the duo of Tsukishima and Yamaguchi from the main team. Here, fans can also browse the Jump Shop in Sendai PARCO Mall.

[Haikyuu!! Tour in Sendai](#)

Guiding the pilgrims to sacred sites with the “Anime Spot 88”



The Anime Tourism Association was established in 2016 through the cooperation of content holders, travel industries, and relevant parties to promote further development of the anime industry and locales linked to anime and manga. Since 2018, the association has released “Anime Spot 88” — a list of popular seichi junrei locations updated annually based on a poll by Japanese and international anime fans.

Kawamori Shoji, an anime designer and director known for the “Macross” franchise, took over as chairman of the association in 2024. According to Kawamori, anime tourism enables the fans of anime and manga works to appreciate the relevant background, or the local environment and culture that bred the works, which cannot be quickly searched online. “We aim to promote a kind of chain reaction in which fans of particular anime works or characters will find something new of interest by visiting the related locales,” he said.



Anime tourism has the potential to present fresh values not only to anime fans but also to tourists in general, letting the charms of Japanese travel destinations be known to the wider audience, Kawamori said, adding that merging the power of anime and regional cultures will help make the most of local tourism resources.

It also provides precious opportunities for overseas fans of Japanese anime and manga to

appreciate the country's various allures. In an apparent sign of the growing overseas interest in Japan's anime tourism, the ratio of votes cast from abroad for the association's annual poll has increased to reach 49 percent in 2025.

Furthermore, anime tourism offers a chance for host cities and towns to communicate the charms of each locale, ranging from food culture to natural landscapes and traditional crafts, to visiting pilgrims, Kawamori said, noting that his association hopes to work with local governments across Japan in such efforts.

Kawamori hopes that anime tourism will not end up being just a temporary fad but will evolve into a cyclical process in which stimulus from visitors will lead to the creation of something new. That's how tourism can contribute to creative endeavors, he said.

In the future, Kawamori hopes to create a map for a kind of travel that traces the roots of Japanese manga and anime and explores how Japan has become the world's leading pop culture content power it is today. "A lot of things, from ukiyo-e to paintings from earlier times or folk tales, to literature and ancient myths, constitute the cultural backbone of anime and manga. I'm hoping that we can propose a form of tourism that explores the background of today's diverse anime and manga culture. That should not only interest the overseas fans but also provide a good stimulus to aspiring Japanese creators," he said.

[Animetourism88](#)

2. "ONE PIECE" statues in Kumamoto for quake reconstruction



©Eiichiro Oda / SHUEISHA

Kumamoto-born manga artist Oda Eiichiro's pirate adventure, "ONE PIECE," is the world's best-selling manga series of all time, with over 510 million copies sold globally as of 2022, according to its publisher, Shueisha. The manga has renewed its Guinness World Record set in 2014 for most copies published by a single author. Since its debut in the publisher's Weekly Shonen Jump magazine in 1997, it has captivated millions around the world with its tale of adventure, friendship, challenges, and perseverance. This title has spawned media adaptations such as a TV anime series, 15 full-length films, a live-action series by Netflix (Season 2 coming in 2026), and various merchandise. To say it's a pop culture tidal wave is not an exaggeration.



©Eiichiro Oda / SHUEISHA

This global influence has shown it can foster real-world changes, as proven by Oda’s home prefecture. In April 2016, the devastating earthquakes struck Kumamoto and neighboring areas, causing widespread damage. In response to this calamity, the ONE PIECE Kumamoto Revival Project was launched. The goal of this collaboration between ONE PIECE and the Kumamoto Prefectural Government is to "inspire" the reconstruction efforts in Kumamoto. Oda’s message to his hometown in the wake of the earthquakes served as the emotional foundation for this initiative. The goal was set to support reconstruction and encourage tourism and enjoyment — bringing the series’ theme of community and resilience to life.

The highlight of this project is the 10 bronze statues of the Straw Hat Crew erected in nine towns and cities across the prefecture, with each chosen for its significance and symbolism.

In 2018, Kumamoto Prefecture awarded Oda the People’s Honor Award for his contributions to the recovery effort and to celebrate his achievements as an artist. In his honor, the statue of ONE PIECE’s main protagonist, Straw Hat Luffy, was installed at the Kumamoto Prefectural Promenade to symbolize the prefecture’s post-disaster recovery. Two years later, the statue of Chopper was also erected in Kumamoto City. The locations of the rest of the Straw Hat crew installed in subsequent years are Zoro in Ozu; Franky in Takamori; Nami in Nishihara; Robin in Minamiaso; Sanji in Mashiki; Brook in Mifune; Usopp in Aso; and Jinbe in Uto.

The influx of tourists coming to see the ONE PIECE statues boosted the prefecture’s tourism, becoming a vital engine driving Kumamoto’s economy. For their part, the tourists will have a chance to visit the various Kumamoto locations that offer diverse charms and travel experiences. From March 20 to May 24, 2026, a special exhibition is planned at the Kumamoto Prefectural Museum of Art to mark the project’s 10th year, where visitors can see the prototype models of the statues and learn about the reconstruction initiatives taken over the decade.

[ONE PIECE Kumamoto Revival Project](#)

[ONE PIECE Kumamoto Revival Project 10-year Anniversary Exhibition \(in Japanese\)](#)

3. “Poké Lids” utility hole cover art across Japan

Perhaps no franchise can match Pokémon’s status in terms of global popularity and longevity. Since it was launched in 1996, the Pokémon video game franchise has evolved into a global phenomenon that not only includes multiple video games but also anime, films, trading card games, and merchandise. Total shipments of all Pokémon-related software has reached 489 million units as of March 2025, according to The Pokémon Company’s data.

Pokémon games are about catching Pokémon and bonding with them through battles. One way fans can catch them is by playing Pokémon GO, a mobile game that uses augmented reality technology in smartphones to capture “wild” Pokémon. But there are also other ways to encounter Pokémon in the real world as well.

In 2018, the franchise launched Poké Lids, decorative utility hole covers which are now installed across Japan. This project is an effort between The Pokémon Company and the local governments, in which the former donates one-of-a-kind, region-exclusive utility hole covers. Each lid reflects the local culture and geography while featuring related Pokémon characters. For example, a lid installed in Koka, Shiga Prefecture — home to the famed Koka Ninja — features a ninja-like Pokémon Greninja, while another one near the Tottori Sand Dunes depicts a Pokémon named Sandshrew. The intention of the Poké Lid initiative is to provide opportunities for the local community to become more familiar with Pokémon. The goal is to promote both regional charm and Pokémon itself, and to encourage visitors to explore all sorts of destinations.

As of 2026, the number of Poké Lids installed in 41 prefectures topped 400, according to the official Poké Lids website. The website lists the installed covers, and each has a corresponding Google Maps coordinate to help the visitors.

The lids are not just designs; they also act as PokéStops in Pokémon GO to allow avid players to collect in-game items. In other words, the lid is an interactive feature that transforms sightseeing into a scavenger hunt. This drives fans to hop between prefectures, allowing them to encounter even more of their favorite Pokémon. This is especially helpful to rural areas outside big cities.

Beyond tourism, Poké Lids have also inspired stamp rallies and walking maps. These initiatives reinforce Pokémon’s status as a cultural phenomenon — one embedded directly into Japan’s streetscape.

[Poké Lids: Local Pokemon Acts](#)

4. Events and institutions for anime and manga immersion



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Events like the World Cosplay Summit in Nagoya and institutions such as the Kyoto International Manga Museum not only immerse visitors in the world of anime and manga but also reveal deeper cultural exchanges and historical contexts, encouraging stories that go beyond stereotypes to emphasize authenticity and global connectivity.

Annual World Cosplay Summit coming up in midsummer in Nagoya

The World Cosplay Summit stands as one of the largest international cosplay festivals, drawing participants and crowds from across the globe and energizing the local scene. Held annually since 2003, this three-day extravaganza attracted nearly 250,000 attendees and featured representatives from a record 41 countries and regions last year, transforming the city into a hub of creative expression.



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The 2026 event is scheduled from July 31 to August 2 across venues like Oasis 21 (main venue), Aichi Arts Center, Hisaya-odori Park, and Osu Shopping Street. At its heart is the lively Cosplay Parade through Osu Shopping Street, where roughly 1,000 cosplayers showcase intricate costumes blending anime icons with personal flair. The event culminates in the World Cosplay Championship, where international teams compete through performances that highlight skill,

passion, and cultural representation. It has been announced that the 2027 event will be held in November to avoid the intense summer heat.

What makes the summit particularly rewarding is its emphasis on genuine international friendship and exchange; participants forge lasting bonds across borders, sharing the unifying power of cosplay rooted in Japanese anime, manga, and games. New initiatives like the "Like Card" system allow cosplayers and fans to write and exchange messages, reducing communication barriers and sparking spontaneous connections between people meeting for the first time at the event. The summit embodies true global inclusivity, offering participants a record-breaking platform for cross-cultural collaboration and exchanges through the shared artistry of anime.

[World Cosplay Summit 2026](#)

Cultural exploration at Kyoto International Manga Museum

The Kyoto International Manga Museum — just a few minutes' walk from Karasuma Oike Station in central Kyoto — serves as a vibrant hub for preserving and exploring manga culture. Housed in a former elementary school property from the 1920s-30s, the museum beautifully blends nostalgic architecture with the dynamic world of manga, honoring Japan's past while fostering innovation in pop culture.



©Kyoto International Manga Museum

As one of Japan's largest manga institutions, the museum collects and researches roughly 300,000 items of manga from around the world, spanning from caricature ukiyo-e prints from the 18th century and magazines of the late 19th century to post-World War II rental books, contemporary hits, and international comics. Its iconic "Wall of Manga" stretches a total of 200 meters and houses some 50,000 volumes mainly published since the 1970s, including Japanese manga translated into foreign languages and global comics, all available for visitors to freely pick up and read in an open, interactive, library-like space that invites casual browsing and deep immersion.



©Kyoto International Manga Museum

Highlights include the permanent exhibition "What is Manga?" This exhibit explores the history of manga, its impact on society, changes in the industry, production techniques, artistic styles, and economic realities for creators. It also looks at global readership and connections to cosplay, and features a "Manga Hall of Fame" showcasing award-winning works from the early 20th century to 2005. Visitors can also witness live demonstrations of manga production processes, from sketching to inking, and enjoy personalized portrait drawings by professional artists.

Dominating the atrium is a massive 11x4.5-meter wooden sculpture of "Hi no Tori (Phoenix)" sculpture — the icon featured in the landmark works by the late manga legend Tezuka Osamu — made with techniques used in traditional Japanese handicrafts and woodcarving of Buddhist statues, symbolizing the fusion of ancient craftsmanship with modern fandom.

A visit to the museum elevates a standard Kyoto itinerary, providing a much more in-depth, immersive, and rewarding experience for enthusiasts.

[Kyoto International Manga Museum](https://www.kyoto-manga-museum.jp/)

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