



Japan.  
Endless  
Discovery.



**JAPAN**  
*A World Apart*

**Avanti**  
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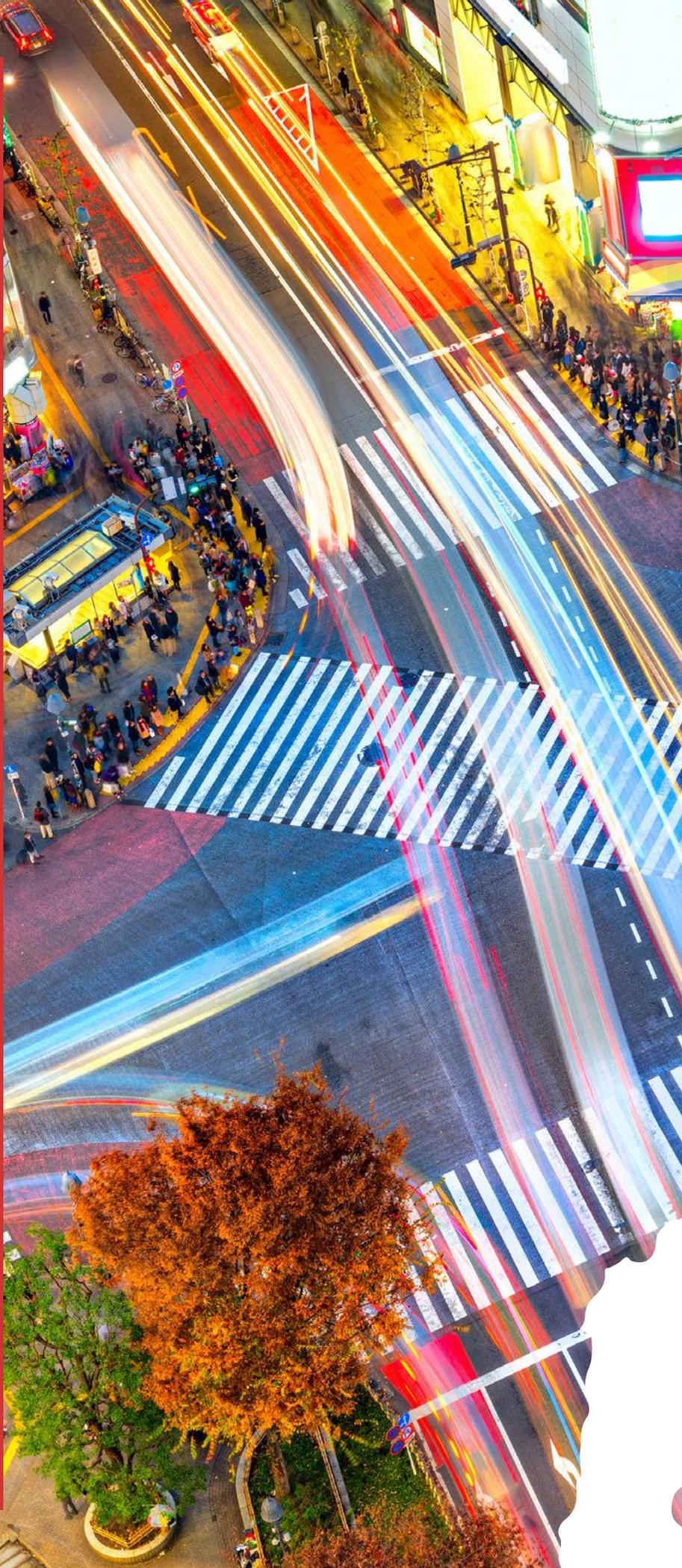
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# ARRIVAL

From the futuristic cityscape of Tokyo to the tranquility of Kyoto's gardens, temples, and shrines – Japan is a wondrous nation with a vibrant history, culture, and way of life. Over 4 main islands, Japan's dramatic landscapes range from white-sand beaches in Okinawa, bucolic sanctity in Shikoku, and to the snow-capped peaks of Hokkaido. Known for its dense and culturally rich cities, most famously the megacity Tokyo. Whether sampling Japan's culinary excellence, exploring its cities, or basking in its natural beauty, Japan can be overwhelming to first-time visitors. However, Avanti is here to help guide travel advisors and their clients in navigating this inspiring nation.

Traveling in Japan from the United States often entails flying into Tokyo at Narita (NRT) or Haneda (HND) airports, or into Osaka at Kansai Airport (KIX). Most American travelers will arrive in Tokyo's Haneda Airport or the Narita Airport, neither one far from the city itself. No matter where you land in Japan, Avanti recommends first-time visitors to Japan book a private transfer from airport to hotel, with a guide, to orient themselves.

Unlike in many other countries, the train network in Japan is a source of national pride, as trains always run on time and are efficient, clean, and comfortable. The Japan Rail Pass is great for travelers planning on traveling long distances across Japan.





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*Kyoto Rail*



*Sensoji Temple, Tokyo*

Visitors to Japan will want to familiarize themselves with the public transit and rail networks of the country, as it is the way to travel like a local and to avoid all the traffic. Public transit in Japan is world-renowned for its cleanliness, efficiency, and reliability – so leave your pre-conceived notion about the train or subway behind when you’re in Japan!

For traveling in Tokyo via the subway system, we recommend buying a pre-charged IC Card rather than buying a point-to-point ticket, saving time and money as it calculates fares from station-to-station as you simply “tap-on” with the card at the ticket gate. Some of the IC cards can even be used to pay for items at convenience stores and vending machines. Day passes for the Tokyo subway are also

available and if used strategically, they can be a great way to save money. Wherever you’re going in Tokyo, Google Maps is a great help as it is thoroughly detailed and will assist you on every step of the way, finding the right station, right gate, and the right train.

Outside of Tokyo, Avanti offers point-to-point tickets and passes such as the Japan Rail Pass, Odakyu Hakone Free Pass, Nagaden Day Pass, and Nankai World Heritage Pass. Taking the train is the ideal mode of transportation within Japan, as the Shinkansen trains (a.k.a. the Bullet Trains) are the fastest trains in the country, delivering passengers from one end of the country to the other quickly and efficiently.

# SEASONAL TRAVEL

Stretching from Hokkaido, not far from Russia, all the way to the sub-tropical Okinawa, Japan's geographic diversity means the weather varies depending on region. Nonetheless, Japan generally has four distinct seasons, each with their own seasonal charm.



# WINTER

Japan's mountainous terrain becomes the star attraction during wintertime, as mountains in the north in Hokkaido become a snowy paradise and a skier's dream. Additionally, winter is less popular with travelers, making it a great season to visit Japan without the crowds present during other times of the year. Japan's national beverage, Sake, produced by fermenting rice starch into sugar and then converting the sugar to alcohol with yeast, is traditionally brewed in the wintertime. Enjoyed while hot, sake is the perfect accompaniment to a snowy Japanese evening. Avanti offers multiple sake brewery tours, including at the Ozawa Brewery just outside Tokyo and a sake brewery in the Fushimi neighborhood of Kyoto. Of course, samples of this sake are complimentary with the tour!

# SPRING

As the cold winter dissipates, the country begins to bloom alongside the iconic Cherry Blossoms, commonly called sakura in Japan. Considered the national flower of Japan, the imminent beauty of the cherry blossoms hold a deep symbolism, valued not only for their pure aesthetic beauty, but for their transience, a reminder of mortality and the inevitability of time. As the fiscal and school year both begin in April, cherry blossom season is often considered the beginning of a new year in Honshu. Cherry blossoms begin blooming in the south before gradually blooming further north. Springtime is considered the most popular season to visit Japan but be warned that Golden Week (late April to May) is when Japanese people vacation, making everything very crowded.

# FALL

Autumn, when the leaves begin to change and temperatures drop into the 50 – 70 degree range, is widely considered the favorite season of locals and tourists alike. Autumn's vibrant colors of the changing foliage, known as Koyo in Japan, are the inverse of cherry blossom in spring, another reminder of the passage of time and the beauty in it all. With pleasant temperatures, lower humidity, and a jaw-dropping landscape painted in reds, yellows, and oranges – Autumn is an ideal time for a trip to Japan. Of course, these benefits mean tourists prefer to travel to Japan during Fall, making it a priority to book far in advance. However, nothing beats relaxing in an onsen (a Japanese hot spring) as the Autumnal colors change around you.

# SUMMER

Stretching from late-May into early-September and through typhoon season, summer in Japan is generally hot and humid. While the temperature usually averages around 85 degrees Fahrenheit, it could go up even higher depending on the location — something to take note of especially for travelers who are more accustomed to cold and dry weather. The climate is much more tolerable in the Japan Alps and Hokkaido, making these already popular destinations even more desirable as vacation options during this time. Despite the heat and humidity, summer is Japan's festival season where plenty of colorful revelry occurs all over the country.



# TOKYO CITY

Describing Tokyo with mere words feels insignificant. How can a true megacity be categorized, delineated, or otherwise be characterized in a manner that truly captures all the minutia that makes Tokyo a transcendent accomplishment of human society and ingenuity. Simply put, Tokyo is one of the largest, most technologically advanced, and most diverse cities in the world.

Thus, the best way to describe Tokyo is to begin by understanding its many neighborhoods, painting a larger picture by beginning with the smaller details. From fashion-forward Harajuku and Akihabara's technophilic ambience, to the harmony of tradition and modernity found in Asakusa or Marunouchi – Tokyo is abundant with history and culture. This melting pot of ideas has birthed one of the world's leading gastronomic communities, as Tokyo has a vibrant and renowned street food scene and the highest number of Michelin starred restaurants in the world. While there are countless neighborhoods in Tokyo that are all equally deserving of their own pages, here are few highlighted Tokyo neighborhoods recommended by Avanti.

→ [View Guide](#)



## IMPERIAL PALACE & TOKYO STATION

Tokyo Station, with its 1900's-era façade on one side and its modern design on the other, is an encapsulation of Tokyo old and new. Visitors flying into Tokyo from Narita Airport will connect at the grand Tokyo Station. Just a few blocks away is the Imperial Palace, with its immaculate gardens and old castle walls.





## SHINJUKU & KABUKICHO

Home to the busiest railway station in the world and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, Shinjuku is a neon-soaked hub for shopping, gastronomy, culture, and fun. Relax with a stroll through the Shinjuku Gyoen garden, once considered Emperor Hirohito's "personal garden".



## HARAJUKU & OMOTESANDO

This maze of streets is packed with boutiques, cafes, creperies, art galleries, food cart pods, and crowds of trendy locals. Takeshita Street and its associated backstreets are the epicenter of fashion-forward Japan. Once the shopping is done, visit the Meiji-jingu Shrine, a famous spiritual site nearby.



## GINZA & NIHONBASHI

Close to Tokyo Station, these neighborhoods are home to some of Tokyo's finest dining and luxury shopping. Amidst the opulence is the traditional Kabukiza theater, a contrast to the surrounding ultra-modern architecture. Nihonbashi is home to many financial institutions.



## TOKYO HIGHLIGHT TOUR

Spend half a day exploring the capital with a knowledgeable private guide, starting with a visit to Asakusa — one of Tokyo's most vibrant neighborhoods which was once a leading entertainment district during the Edo Period. Here you'll get a taste of the past while visiting Sensō-ji (Tokyo's oldest temple) and checking out the traditional craft shops and street-food stalls along Nakamise Street. Head to ritzy Omotesando where you can admire the area's incredible architecture before proceeding towards the famous Meiji Jingū – an important Shinto shrine dedicated to the deified spirits of Emperor Meiji and Empress Shōken. The shrine is now a popular venue for Japanese weddings.

→ *Let's go!*

## LOCAL GOURMET EVENING TOUR

Explore one of Tokyo's bustling neighborhoods by eating amongst locals to experience casual yet delicious comfort food dishes. Based on your palate, a private guide will introduce to authentic delicacies such as yakitori, okonomiyaki, or sashimi.

→ *Let's go!*





# *Tsukiji Fish Market And Sushi Making With Local Chef*

This conglomeration of restaurants and retail stores in Tsukiji's outer market serves fresh fish and seafood delicacies delivered straight from the Toyosu market. With over 450 kinds of fish received daily, from giant tuna to golden brown dried sea slug caviar, the market is a delicious destination. After, visit a local restaurant where a chef will teach you how to prepare different types of sushi. Finally, enjoy eating your handmade sushi for lunch.

*Let's go!*

A close-up profile of a geisha in a red kimono with a white floral pattern. She has a traditional black hairpiece (kanzashi) adorned with pink and purple flowers and a red tassel. She is holding a red umbrella. The background is blurred, showing a wooden building.

## PRIVATE DINNER WITH GEISHA AND MAIKO

Step inside Kyoto's "Flower and Willow World" on this tour of one of the city's Geisha districts. Savor an elegant multi-course dinner showcasing the many flavors of Japanese cuisine at a ryokan before witnessing a traditional Maiko dance. Accompanied by a guide and translator who will guide you, you'll then partake in a traditional Geisha game and hear stories from her life on this rare peek into the life of a Geisha.

→ *Let's go!*

# KYOTO

→ *Watch Video*

Japan's old imperial capital and its cultural heart, Kyoto's long history can be found in its many Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines, imperial palaces, castles, and gardens. Kyoto was the residence of Japan's emperor for much of its history, until as recently as 1868, and as such Kyoto, and nearby Nara, is home to much of the nation's historical, spiritual, and cultural heritage sites. The spiritual center of Japan, Kyoto contains multiple architectural masterpieces including the extravagant Kinkakuji, otherwise known as the Golden Pavilion, the impressive feudal-era Nijo Castle, the Arashiyama Bamboo Grove, and countless other shrines and sacred sites throughout the city. Not only are the city's monuments evocative of an older Japan, the city's traditional wooden townhouses built before World War II, known as

Machiya, can be found throughout the city and can even be rented out to vacationers. Surely, Kyoto is the city for those searching to find traditional Japanese architecture and ambience. The area along the city's eastern hills, known as Higashiyama, is home to several UNESCO World Heritage temples, machiya, and an authentic old-Kyoto feel. Visit the Ginkakuji Temple, known as the Silver Pavilion, the product of a 15th-century renaissance in Kyoto and then enjoy a leisurely stroll along the tranquil Philosopher's Path. The nearby neighborhood of Gion is well known for its ochaya, wooden teahouses, where many of Kyoto's geisha live and work. The city's entertainment district, Gion is home to Kyoto's last kabuki theater, called Minami-za, but geisha-in-training (called maiko) can be seen practicing their craft at Gion Corner.





## CULINARY CAPITALS

Japanese gastronomy is renowned for its excellence, attention to detail, and for how it has been exported and enjoyed across the world. From Hokkaido in the north to Okinawa in the south, expect seasonal specialties year-round but also expect the same high level of craftsmanship no matter where you eat. In Japan's izakayas, restaurants, and ryokans, cuisine is considered an artform. Throughout the country you'll find culinary capitals specializing in local delicacies.

## OSAKA: DOTONBORI & SHINSAIBASHI

Restaurants and bars abound on the neon-soaked and glitzy streets of canal-side Dotonbori in Osaka, a pedestrian district known for its buzzing energy and nightlife. Along the side-streets and alleys you'll find famous crab restaurants, Osaka-style sushi, and stalls serving freshly prepared ramen.

## OSAKA COMFORT FOOD TOUR

Visit the epicenter of Osaka's street food culture, Dotonbori, with a knowledgeable guide. Visit delicious hole-in-the-wall Takoyaki stands and street-side bars serving the finest wagyu beef. Sample some of the local specialties, the famous Takoyaki (known as "octopus balls" and kushikatsu (skewered meat and vegetables).

→ *Let's go!*



## SAPPORO

Sapporo is home to the Sapporo Beer Museum, a sugar factory converted into a beer factory, and now a museum dedicated to telling the story of Japanese brewed beer. Two German-trained brewmasters brought back beer-making techniques to Sapporo and since then Sapporo has become synonymous with its famous beer. Tour the museum, sample the original recipe, and enjoy the museum's on-site restaurants with a beer in the museum's garden.

## YOKOHAMA

Just south of Tokyo is the city of Yokohama, one of the first Japanese ports opened to trade with the west. The city where Kirin Beer was founded, Yokohama is also home to the Yokohama Ramen Museum. This evermore popular noodle dish, originally introduced from China, is memorialized in this museum, displaying the variety of ramen, how it is made, and even replicas of old ramen restaurants from different regions of Japan, all open to visitors wishing to sample regional ramen specialties.



## HIROSHIMA → Watch Video

Sitting on the Seto Inland Sea, Hiroshima City has rebuilt into a lively and fun-loving city of over a million people. Known for its robust culinary scene, Hiroshima is especially known for its Hiroshima-style okonomiyaki – a savory pancake cooked on a base of noodles and stuffed with pork and cabbage.

### HIROSHIMA HIGHLIGHTS TOUR

See the main sites of Hiroshima on this half-day guided tour. Start at the Peace Memorial Park, where the atomic bomb fell on August 6, 1945. Stroll through the park and discover the many memorials, monuments, and statues in the park before heading into the Museum. Finish the tour with a visit to Shukkeien Garden where valleys, mountains, and forests are represented in miniature in the garden's landscapes.

→ Let's go!



## FUKUOKA

Fukuoka, on Kyushu Island, serves up some of the best street food in Japan. The city's yatai, temporary food stalls, are set up across the city every evening drawing visitors and creating a close-knit community of street food lovers. Enjoy freshly prepared culinary staples at these intimate yatai, sharing a bowl of ramen with a stranger.

## KOBE

A foodie's paradise, the city of Kobe is a compact yet vital important port that is synonymous with its world-famous beef. Locally bred and raised, Kobe beef is famous for its taste and the strict standards to ensure that only the best beef is called "Kobe beef". In addition, Kobe is also home to a Chinatown district and offers many Japanese takes on Western-style food.



*Soki Soba*

## OKINAWA

Geographically closer to Taiwan than Japan, the cuisine of Okinawa is known for its fresh seafood and its unique Japanese-Taiwanese fusion that takes on a categorization of its own. Food in Okinawa is prepared with its medicinal properties in mind and as such many Okinawa's cuisine is rich in nutrients and minerals.

### **PRIVATE EVENING OKINAWAN CUISINE TOUR**

Embark on a food safari through Okinawa's capital of Naha. Begin at the famous Makishi Market, where freshly caught seafood is prepared in front of your eyes. Next, your guide will take you to one of the best restaurants in Naha City to eat a bowl of Soki Soba, Okinawan-style noodles served with a tender pork rib brisket, and other traditional Okinawan dishes.

→ *Let's go!*



*Hida Beef*

# CULINARY CAPITALS



*Soba Noodles of Takayama*

## TAKAYAMA

In Japan's mountainous Gifu Prefecture, the rural city of Hida-Takayama is the gateway to the hiking and outdoor activities of the Japan Alps. The city is also famous for its local Hida beef and its soba noodles. Considered the ideal wagyu beef, Hida beef is exceptionally tender and delicious. Using locally sourced buckwheat grains, soba noodles have a rich aroma and pair perfectly with other Takayama delicacies.

# WELLNESS

*Itsukushima Shrine, Miyajima*



# MIYAJIMA SHRINE ISLAND

In Hiroshima Bay lays the island of Itsukushima, popularly known as Miyajima (which is Japanese for “Shrine Island”). This is one of Japan’s most sacred, and most visited, sites. Famous for its Itsukushima Shrine and its “floating” vermilion red Torii gate, the gate appears to be above the water during high tide and is one of Japan’s most iconic and photographed places. The shrine is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Accessible by a short ferry ride, Miyajima is home to around 2,000 people and a host of free-roaming and friendly deer. Be warned, however, that the deer will eat just about anything you don’t keep safe! Overlooking the island is the Daishoin Temple and Shishi-iwa Observatory atop Mt. Misen. The trek to the observatory takes visitors through an ancient forest, takes around two hours, and offers breathtaking views of Hiroshima Bay. Even those who do not consider themselves spiritual will find Miyajima’s reverent and romantic ambience humbling and rejuvenating.

## *HOTEL HIGHLIGHT* *- IWASO*

With views overlooking the Itsukushima Shrine and Hiroshima Bay, the Iwaso hotel offers traditional Japanese-style accommodations with elegant amenities and impeccable service.

→ *Let's go!*



*THE PERFECT PLACE  
FOR YOUR FIRST  
**ONSEN**  
EXPERIENCE*

Not only is Kinosaki one of the top onsen destinations in the Kansai Region, but this quaint resort town is also tailor-made for foreign visitors who want to experience this uniquely Japanese culture for the first time. International travelers who want to check out traditional hot spring resorts and public bathhouses across the country should be aware that having tattoos are considered taboo in mainstream Japanese society, especially body art that is highly visible. This is not an issue in Kinosaki because all the town's public hot springs are accessible even to inked patrons. This, combined with the town's picturesque scenery and its healthy number of markings and signs in English, makes Kinosaki a perfect choice for your introduction to the world of onsens.

*KINOSAKI ONSEN  
HOPPING*

Immerse yourself in this self-guided tour of Kinosaki's ryokan and onsen culture. Relax, rejuvenate, and unwind as you hop between public bathhouses, making quick stops at local arcades, ice cream parlors, or whatever else catches your attention. Enjoy a multi-course 'kaiseki' meal at your ryokan and relax your worries away in this slow-paced town.



# *The sleepy and small riverside town of Kinosaki*

Nestled between the mountains of northern Hyogo Prefecture and the Sea of Japan lays the sleepy and small riverside town of Kinosaki. Ever since hot springs were discovered in the area around the 8th century, Kinosaki has blossomed into a popular onsen destination. The onsen — a traditional bathing facility built over natural hot springs, many of which have existed for centuries — is the Japanese equivalent of the western world's thermal spa. Onsen culture is pretty much interwoven with daily life, and tourism in Kinosaki is powered by its seven public hot springs, the historic Onsenji Temple, and a number of superb ryokans — traditional Japanese inns that typically feature tatami-matted rooms, futon bedding, and inclusive traditional meals called 'kaiseki'. After soaking in an onsen, guests venture out while garbed in their 'yukata' and wooden 'geta' in order to check out Kinosaki's other attractions — draping this resort town with a distinct and communal atmosphere.

*Let's go!*

*Kinosaki Onsen Village, Hyogo*

# JAPANESE GARDENS

Designed to inspire reflection, meditation, and contemplation amongst a naturalistic landscape, Japanese Gardens are a peaceful respite from Japan's modern-day bustle. Many Japanese gardens are characterized by waterfalls, streams with bridges, ponds with natural edges, artificial hills, and guardian stones that often resemble mountains. In many ways, Japanese gardens feel like grand landscapes that have been recreated in miniature, nonetheless retaining the majesty and serenity found in nature.

The Japanese garden has evolved over time, from the minimalistic and zen Dry Gardens to the idyllic Pure Land Gardens. Japanese gardens of today come in many styles but all embody the pervasive Japanese idea of "Mono no aware", expressing a gratefulness towards nature in the face of fragility and the unstoppable passage of time. Known as the Three Great Gardens of Japan, these gardens are likely the most famous in the country and are well worth a stroll.



**OKAYAMA**  
**KORAKUEN GARDEN**

Overlooking the garden is Okayama Castle, known as the Crow Castle, and its six-story keep is a majestic sight above the trees. Covering over 14 hectares and including a tea plantation, aviary, multiple ponds, and tea houses – Korakuen is a must-visit.



**MITO**  
**KAIRAKUEN GARDEN**

Featuring over 3,000 plum trees across 32-acres, the park is lined with a network of paths to stroll upon. Within the garden is Lake Senba, the “Oasis of Mito”, known for its swan population. Due to its size, Kairakuen is a natural venue for many beloved regional festivals.



**KANAZAWA**  
**KENROKUEN GARDEN**

One of Japan's best examples of a strolling-style garden, Kenrokuen is characterized by its spaciousness, seclusion, artifice, antiquity, abundant water, and panoramas. The oldest water fountain in Japan is within Kenrokuen Garden, made possible by a complex water system built in 1632.



# ANIMALS

## SNOW MONKEYS

The Japanese Macaque, otherwise known as the snow monkey, is native to Japan and is the only monkey who lives in areas where snow covers the ground for months at a time. With brown-grey fur and bright red faces, these monkeys are known to be great leapers and even swimmers! These monkeys have been observed to be quite intelligent, developing cultural traits passed amongst generations including bathing in hot springs and rolling snowballs.

## JIGOKUDANI MONKEY PARK AND OBUSE TOUR FROM NAGANO

During the colder months, groups of the Japanese snow monkey congregate at the Jigokudani Monkey Park, an area full of natural onsen to simply relax, bathe, or swim in the hot spring's warm water. Visit these famous hot springs with a guide, seeing these famous monkeys and their group interactions for yourself. They're quite accustomed to humans, even so far as entirely ignoring humans. Afterwards, tour the nearby charming town of Obuse, visiting the town's open gardens, the famous paintings and wood-block prints in the Hokusai Museum, and stop at the Masuichi Sake brewery for a drink!

→ *Let's go!*

## DEER

Seen throughout the forests and even the cities of Japan, Japanese deer are abundant throughout the country. Known as the sika deer in Japan, these deer maintain their white spots throughout their lifetime, unlike many other deer. Since the extinction of wolves in Japan, the population of these deer has rapidly increased to around one hundred thousand. Nonetheless, sika deer are quite friendly to humans, tame enough to roam the streets of Miyajima or Nara alongside their human counterparts.

## NARA TOUR FROM KYOTO

Visit the old capital of Nara with its centuries-old temples and shrines located in Nara Park. In Todaiji temple sits the largest bronze statue of Buddha in the world, weighing an estimated 300 tons. Once the largest wooden buildings in the world, Todaiji is an awe-inspiring monument of ancient Japan. Not far is Shinyakushiji Temple, home to the Medicine Buddha, meticulously carved from a single piece of wood. Throughout Nara Park, visitors and tame deer walk the park in harmony, enjoying the peace and serenity of the park.

→ *Let's go!*



# SHRINES AND TEMPLES

Shinto Shrines and Buddhist Temples are a common sight in every city, town, and village in Japan. In just Kyoto alone there are over 2,000 temples and shrines, giving the city its reputation as the country's spiritual and cultural heart. In addition to the impressive religious architecture, shrines and temples are usually surrounded by tranquil and meticulously kept gardens. However, Shinto Shrines and Buddhist Temples are often confused by foreign visitors and have some key differences that are important to know before visiting.

All shrines are demarcated by a torii gate, the large vermilion gates that have become a cultural and spiritual icon of Japan. These are the boundaries between holy ground and the rest of the world and as such, it is customary to bow once in front of the torii gate and then enter through the gate on the right or the left – never the center path through the gate. Inside the grounds there is a temizuya, a water fountain of sorts that is used for ritual purification.

Here are the steps to properly purify your body before entering any Shinto Shrine:

1. First, scoop up water in a ladle with your right hand and pour water over your left hand.
2. Next, hold the ladle with your left hand and pour water over your right hand.

3. Finally, pour some water from the ladle into your left hand, rinse out your mouth, and spit the water out beside the fountain. Never touch the ladle directly to your mouth.

At the altar, quietly leave a coin in the offering box, ring the bell to greet the deity, bow twice, clap your hands twice, silently say a prayer with your hands still together, and bow one more time.

Buddhist Temples have different protocol to follow during a visit but are generally not as strict in their prayer rituals. Nonetheless, always behave respectfully, follow any written rules, and, if required, take off your shoes.





## **KUMANO KODO**

Japan's ancient pilgrimage route, Kumano Kodo is a network of old roads between various sacred sites on the Kii Peninsula. One of only two pilgrimage routes in the world to be given the UNESCO World Heritage status, walking among the elderly trees and mountains is considered a sacred act unto itself. Although there is no official start and end point, there are various options for a hike through Kumano Kodo, most revolving around visiting the three grand shrines of Kumano on the Nakahechi route (Imperial Route). Near the Kumano Hongū Taisha shrine along the Imperial Route is Japan's largest torii gate, standing over 130 feet tall.

## DAZAIFU – FUKUOKA

Built atop the grave of one of ancient Japan's most famous politician-poet, Michizane Sugawara, this timeworn shrine was built to appease Michizane's spirit, deifying him as the God of literature and learning. The shrine and its grounds feel as though they are in a world of their own, isolated from the rest of Fukuoka. Plum trees surround a pond with a set of three bridges running across it leading towards the shrine. This shrine is very important to students, as Michizane became the God of learning, so visiting the shrine and praying for success is a common practice.

## FUSHIMI INARI

Dedicated to Inari, the deity of good harvest and success in business, the Fushimi Inari shrine in Kyoto is one of the most famous shrines and places in all of Japan. Approaching the shrine, visitors encounter a seemingly endless line of vibrant torii gates guiding pilgrims and tourists up the mountain and to the shrine. Over 10,000 torii gates are on this path and we recommend setting aside at least a few hours for this hike.

## FUSHIMI AND SAKE MUSEUM TOUR

Visit the Fushimi Inari Shrine with a knowledgeable English-speaking guide, learning the history and cultural importance of the site. Afterwards, visit a sake brewery for a tour, seeing the traditional brewing process for yourself, and then sample different sake afterwards.

→ *Let's go!*

## KAMAKURA

Not too far south from Tokyo, Kamakura was once a de facto capital of medieval Japan but is now a resort dotted with Buddhist Temples and Shinto Shrines. Most visited of these is Kōtoku-in, famous for the bronze Great Buddha of Kamakura. The country's second tallest Buddha statue and weighing in at 121 tons and sitting 44 feet high, the statue has survived the typhoons, tsunami, and earthquakes that have destroyed the temple that originally housed the venerable icon of Kamakura.

## KAMAKURA TOUR FROM TOKYO

With a local guide, visit the many temples and shrines of this seaside town. Start with the Kōtoku-in Temple, with its giant bronze Buddha. Then visit the Hasedera Temple, renowned for its garden and the gilded wooden statue of Kannon, the Goddess of mercy, that is housed here. Next, visit the Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine, Kamakura's most important shrine dedicated to the Shinto God of war and home to many festivals and events throughout the year.

→ *Let's go!*

## NAGASAKI

When Christianity first arrived in Japan during the mid-1500s, it spread around Nagasaki and the nearby islands. Today, this region is home to ruins of castles, rebuilt churches, and religious artifacts that survived after the Tokugawa shogunate banned the faith. Nonetheless, these Japanese Christians practiced in secret. On the nearby islands of Amakusa, many of these practicing Christians began to infuse Japanese culture with Christian ideas, creating statues of the Virgin Mary



## ***NIKKO***

The Nikko Toshogu Shrine is an opulent spiritual complex honoring Tokugawa Ieyasu, Japan's most famous shogun. This shrine elevated Ieyasu to divinity. Intricate carvings can be found throughout the shrine, none more famous than that of the Three Wise Monkeys which gave rise to the popular idiom: "see no evil, speak no evil, hear no evil".



## ***KOYASAN***

The Kongobuji Temple in this small town is the epicenter of Shingon Buddhism and the oldest building in Koyasan, with exquisite architecture and an immaculate rock garden. One of Japan's most sacred sites, the Okunoin Temple, can be reached by walking along a pathway that crosses over 200,000 gravestones underneath the ancient forest.

## ART

Japan's artistic tradition stretches back all the way to the beginning of the country's history, sometime in the 10th century BC. Ceramics are some of the earliest known art of Japan, made with inspiring intricacy, while calligraphy was also an important art in Japan's early period. The country's ornate yet austere architecture, religious sculptures, woodblock printing, and painting are all integral parts of Japan's art history.

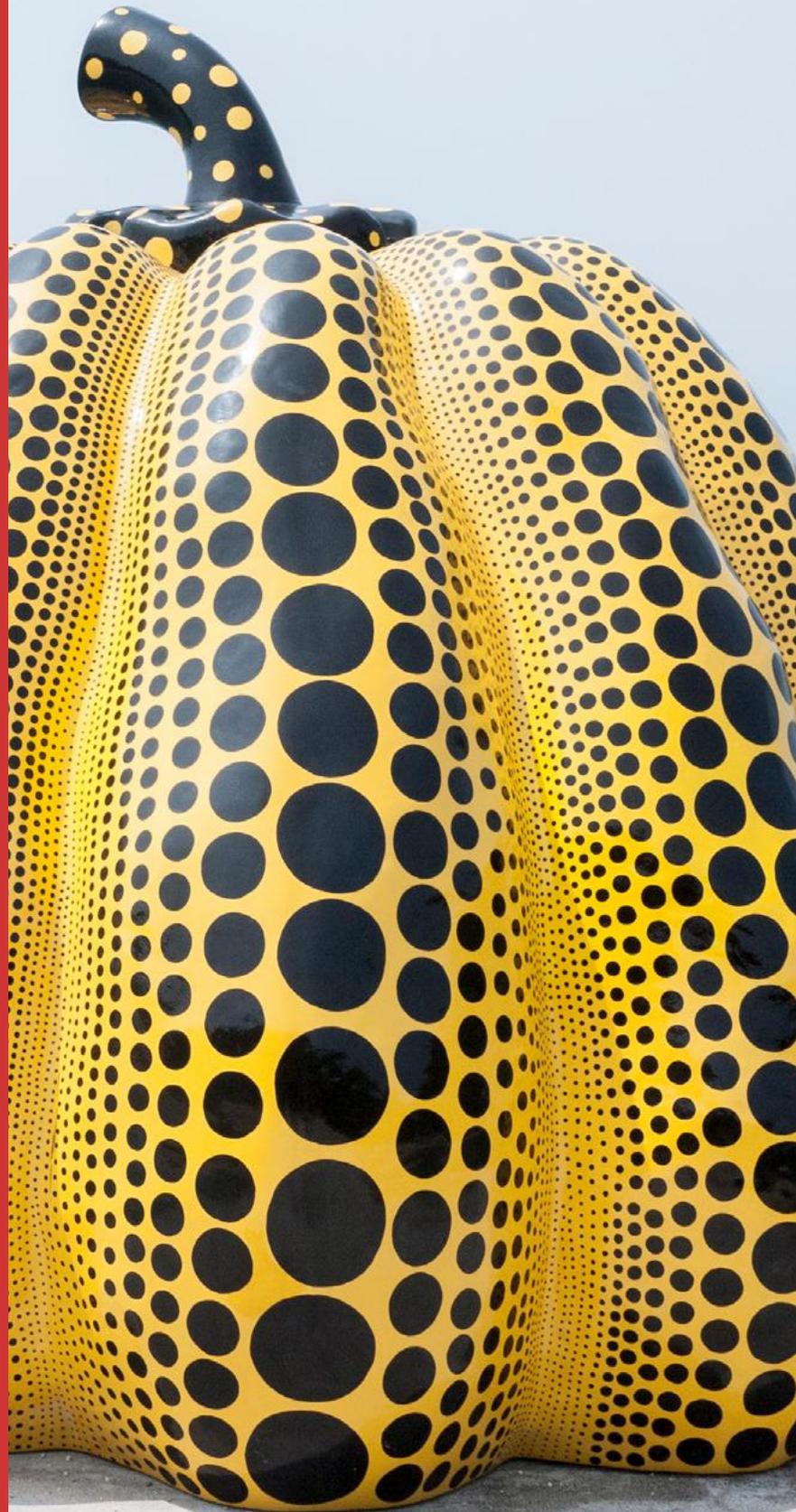
## NAOSHIMA

Within the idyllic Seto Inland Sea is the island of Naoshima, an important component of Japan's contemporary art scene. The island has become gallery space for prominent Japanese artists like Yayoi Kusama and Pritzker Architecture Prize-winner Tadao Ando, housed within converted buildings turned into art museums. Many installations can be found across the island, feeling like a portal from Setouchi to another dimension.

### NAOSHIMA ART ISLAND TOUR FROM OSAKA

Spend a day exploring Naoshima's public art spaces, galleries, and abandoned buildings converted into art houses. The Art House Project has given artists a unique opportunity to convert abandoned buildings however they see fit. Visit the Chichu Art Museum, a work of art unto itself designed by Ando Tado. Finally, visit the Benesse House Museum before leaving the island.

→ *Let's go!*



# ART

## Hakone

A marriage of art and nature, the Hakone Open-Air Museum spreads over 750,000 square feet in the mountains of Hakone. The first open-air museum in Japan, there are 120 sculptures across the grounds, a French-style public park, and a world-class Picasso exhibition of over 300 of Picasso's works.

### HAKONE ARTS AND CRAFTS TOUR

In the area surrounding Hakone are multiple museums in addition to the open-air museum. Begin by visiting the Okada Museum of Art showcasing Japanese, Chinese, and Korean art throughout history. Then visit the French-styled Gora Park to relax amongst the botanical garden and flower garden.

*Let's go!*

## Sapporo

The Sapporo Art Park takes up nearly 100 acres within a forest south of the city, featuring over 70 sculptures and installations throughout the park. In addition, there are two museums (Sapporo Sculpture Garden and Sapporo Art Museum), educational art projects, and exhibitions year-round. As this all takes place in the forest, there are plenty of opportunities for hiking in the summer and a whole host of snowbound activities for wintertime.

## Kurashiki

Kurashiki is home to Japan's oldest private museum, the Ohara Museum of Art, wherein masterpieces by European and Japanese artists are housed behind its Greek-inspired façade. Works by Monet, Picasso, Warhol, and others can be found here.

# Kanazawa

The well-preserved Edo-era town of Kanazawa is a haven for art and culture, with iconic gardens and museums showcasing contemporary art, gold leaf craftsmanship, and samurai history. Be sure to visit Kanazawa Castle and Kenrokuen Garden in the heart of the city to get a feel for old-time Kanazawa.

## KANAZAWA TRADITIONAL CRAFTS TOUR

Learn how two of Kanazawa's most famous crafts are made and then attempt making them yourself! Start by decorating a small plate or a pair of chopsticks with precious gold leaf and then try your hand at kimono cloth dyeing, called kagayuzen, that is a quintessential Kanazawa specialty. Of course, these souvenirs are yours to keep!

*Let's go!*



*Kenrokuen Gardens*



# ADVENTURE

Outside of its cities, Japan is home to a wealth of outdoor activities. Its geographic diversity, ranging from sandy beaches in Okinawa to powdery slopes in Hokkaido, means Japan has an adventure for every traveler. Hike in the Japan Alps, discover sacred sites on Japan's ancient pilgrimage route, bike across the Seto Inland Sea, ski in Hokkaido, or snorkel in Okinawa – no matter what you're looking to do, Japan has it.

## MT. FUJI CLIMBING & HIKING

Summitting the peak of the iconic Mt. Fuji is a memory that will last a lifetime. Official climbing season is July – mid September and there are multiple trails available depending on one's hiking ability and personal preference. At over 12,000 feet, climbing Mt. Fuji should not be taken lightly as the elevation gain and steep inclines make the hike difficult when both ascending and descending. Avoid climbing during Obon Week in mid-August, when the mountain becomes quite crowded.

## PRIVATE KYOTO CYCLING GOLDEN ROUTE TOUR

Kyoto's mountain-valley topography makes it a perfect cycling town. Take a cycling tour along the Kinukake no michi, or Kyoto's Golden Route (not to be confused with Japan's Golden Route), cycling between some of Kyoto's most famous temples, shrines, and UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Start at the Golden Pavilion of Kinkaku-ji, ride to the famous Zen rock garden of Ryoanji Temple, and then continue to Arashiyama's tranquil bamboo forest.

→ *Let's go!*



*Mt. Fuji View*

*MT. FUJI*



# ADVENTURE

## *SHIMANAMI KAIIDO CYCLING*

Connecting the island of Shikoku with Japan's main island of Honshu, the Shimanami Kaido (also known as the Nishiseto Expressway) was designed with a bicycle in mind. Beginning in Onomichi, this 37-mile road and bridge network traverses six islands on route to Shikoku, providing jaw-dropping scenery of the Seto Inland Sea throughout the journey.

## *HOKKAIDO SKIING*

Of all Japan's slopes, Hokkaido has the finest. The rugged, mountain terrain combined with the moisture of the Sea of Japan creates the fine powder snow that Hokkaido is renowned for. Unmatched throughout the country, Hokkaido is the premiere destination for winter sports.

## *SNORKELING*

Okinawa Snorkeling: Japan's southernmost prefecture of Okinawa is known for its sandy beaches and warm, sub-tropical waters. Attracting a large diversity of marine life, the reefs near Okinawa are home to some of the world's best snorkeling. Clear seas, colorful fish, and shallow reef areas make Okinawa a beginner-friendly destination for intrepid snorkelers. With an experienced local guide, head to a secluded island off the coast of Okinawa for an underwater adventure.





# SHIZUOKA REGION

This well-renowned prefecture located on Honshu's Pacific coast just forty minutes away from Tokyo may be underrated internationally, but there's no denying that even the most casual foreign visitors are familiar with its notable highlights and exports. To cite the most obvious, Shizuoka is the home of Mount Fuji — Japan's highest peak and iconic cultural symbol. Aside from 'Fuji-san' — which is best seen from Miho no Matsubara beach — the prefecture also boasts other natural attractions like the Izu Peninsula, Suruga Bay, Kakita River,

and the ancient Nihondaira Plateau. The region is highly regarded for its agricultural products such as green tea, greenhouse melons, wasabi, and mandarins. Shizuoka is also known for its motoring heritage — it's the birthplace of three world-famous motorcycle juggernauts: Honda, Suzuki, and Yamaha. Combined with the area's ideally mild climate, breathtaking vistas, and dramatic coastlines, it's easy for visitors to fall in love with Shizuoka.





### ***NIPPONDAIRA HOTEL 3\****

This ultra-modern accommodation overlooks Shizuoka City's downtown area and offers panoramic views of Mount Fuji, Suruga Bay, and the surrounding countryside. Complimenting the sleek contemporary design and architecture, the hotel features chic rooms with floor-to-ceiling windows, a spacious and minimalist restaurant, and a hip cocktail bar.



### ***ARAI RYOKAN 3\****

Visitors keen on having a more traditional accommodation experience in Shizuoka should consider staying in Arai Ryokan — a registered cultural property located alongside Katsura River and dates all the way back to 1872. The upscale inn features natural hot-spring baths, rooms with futon beds and tatami floors, lush gardens, and art exhibitions.



### ***MARS GARDEN WOOD GOTEMBA 4\****

Located within a mile from Fuji Bussharito Heiwa Park, this modern resort hotel features generously sized rooms with excellent views of Mount Fuji, multiple onsite dining options, full-service spa facilities, and an indoor mineral hot spring. This tranquil property is a superb option for travelers looking to unwind during their stay in Shizuoka.



## **PRIVATE MT FUJI VIEW TOKAIDO COUNTRYSIDE CYCLING TOUR**

Cycling through the picturesque countryside is a fantastic way to explore Shizuoka while taking in the stunning beauty of the surrounding landscape. Immerse yourself in the history of the Edo Period as you travel along Tōkaidō Road to visit sites like the well-preserved village at Utsunoya-tōge Pass.

→ *Let's go!*

## **PRIVATE SHIZUOKA HIGHLIGHT TOUR**

Take the Nihondaira Ropeway to get to the summit of Nihondaira Plateau where you'll enjoy panoramic views of Mount Fuji, Shimizu Port, and Suruga Bay. Visit local attractions including the Kunōzan Tōshōgū Shrine, Nihondaira Yume Terrace, and Miho no Matsubara beach.

→ *Let's go!*



## **PRIVATE CYCLING TOUR TO GREEN TEA FARM**

Find out why Shizuoka is the 'capital of Japanese green tea production' in this scenic cycling experience. Stop by a 150-year-old farmhouse owned by a generational tea-growing family for a tasting experience and to learn more about the prefecture's most famous agricultural export.

→ *Let's go!*

## **PRIVATE MT FUJI HIKE FROM SHIZUOKA**

Towering over 12,300 feet above the ground, Mount Fuji is a spectacular sight to behold. This tour takes you through one of the major paths towards the summit: the Fujinomiya Trail. Along the way, you'll stop by key places such as Hoei Crater — the largest of Mount Fuji's calderas.

→ *Let's go!*

# Shizuoka Adventures



## 2 NIGHTS SHIZUOKA

Get a superb glimpse of what Shizuoka has to offer with this well-crafted 2-night itinerary. After arriving via Shinkansen, get settled in your hotel before proceeding to Nihondaira Plateau to visit notable local attractions including a new observatory called Nihondaira Yume Terrace and Kunōzan Tōshō-gū — the oldest Tōshō-gū shrine in Japan and the original burial place of Shōgun Tokugawa Ieyasu. While in the area, you'll enjoy panoramic views of Mount Fuji, Shimizu Port, and Suruga Bay. You'll also check out Miho no Matsubara, a tree-lined beach regarded as the best place to view 'Fuji-san'.

The next day, you'll explore the countryside dotted by green tea farms as you cycle alongside Abekawa River. Meet up with a local family for an amazing tea tasting experience before capping your trip with optional visits to the historic Shizuoka Sengen Shrine or Sumpu Castle Park.

## INCLUDES

- 2 Nights Accommodation
- Private Shizuoka Highlights Tour
- Private Cycling Tour to Green Tea Farm
- High Speed Bullet Trains – Green Class from Tokyo to Shizuoka
- High Speed Bullet Trains – Green Class from Shizuoka to Kyoto
- Daily Breakfast

*Let's go!*



# *Tohoku* *Region*

*Lake Towada*

## WELCOME TO TOHOKU

Escape to an unspoiled corner of Japan's countryside where deep gorges, lush forests, rugged coastlines, and towering mountains are ripe for exploration. Honshu's northernmost region, Tohoku, consists of six prefectures that are brimming with unique opportunities to experience Japan's cultural heritage and to embark upon adventures into the pristine natural wilderness.

With a multitude of national parks within Tohoku, this region is ripe for intrepid explorers who travel in search of rustic scenery, spectacular coastlines, and stunning panoramic vistas. Here you can reconnect with the power and tranquility of nature by hiking, skiing, canoeing, and so much more. Tohoku is tailor-made for adventures: trek to the top of volcanic mountains covered with fall foliage where hidden temples await, cruise on caldera lakes, and rejuvenate within hot springs at a beautiful ryokan in the charming town of Ginzan Onsen. Armchair historians and cultural enthusiasts can relive centuries of samurai tradition by touring the region's many museums, centuries-old castles, and samurai districts. No matter what you travel for, you'll find it in Tohoku.



## NATURE

From the waves of the Pacific smashing against the cliffs of the rocky Sanriku Coast, to the mountain streams that flow through majestic gorges, and to the placid caldera lakes that boast unrivaled views of the surrounding volcanoes - Tohoku is most famous for its incredible landscapes, from the ocean to the mountains above. The region is covered in lush woods that drape across mountains, dotted with flowing waterfalls creating truly idyllic scenes of nature. One of the region's most iconic destinations is Matsushima Bay, a sheltered bay whose pine-covered islets are considered as one of Japan's three most scenic places, although it is far from the only must-see site that will leave you in awe.

In winter, Tohoku's terrain is blanketed in snow which makes it a perfect destination for skiers who want to warm up in the hot springs afterwards. In spring, flowers bloom and the forest comes to life in spectacular green. In summer temperatures are at their most agreeable and the region's wild lakes take center stage. In autumn the abundant greens are replaced by intricate and dazzling patterns of red, yellow, and orange. No matter the season, Tohoku's untouched beauty is astounding.



*Matsu River*



# TREASURES OF TOHOKU

*2 NIGHTS AOMORI & SENDAI*

Explore the rustic and rural beauty of Tohoku on this suggested itinerary that combines the region's most beloved cultural traditions with its most remarkable natural landscapes with accommodations at the region's most refined ryokans. Hike past the 30 waterfalls of Oirase River, canoe atop the serene Lake Towada, pay homage to sacred shrines embedded in the wilderness, enjoy a cruise within the iconic Matsushima Bay, and much more on this thorough tour of this overlooked region.

## *INCLUDES*

- Private Aomori Highlights
- Private Oirase Gorge Excursion from Aomori
- Private Sendai Highlights Tour
- Private Shiogama and Matsushima Excursion from Sendai
- High Speed Bullet Trains
- Daily Breakfast

→ *Let's go!*

*Fukushima Cherry Blossoms*

## *CULTURE AND TRADITIONS*

Tohoku has a long and storied samurai tradition stretching back to the Edo period, boasting many castles and other relics of the time. From the restored Edo-period architecture of Ouchijuku to the samurai architecture of Kakunodate's samurai district and to the still-standing Hirosaki Castle surrounded by cherry blossoms, the historic legacy of the region is self-evident. Participate in long-standing traditions by paying homage to the three sacred mountains known as Dewa Sanzan, marvel at the ornate floats paraded at the Nebuta Matsuri festival, or visit the lantern-lit snow houses at the Yokote Kamakura Festival.

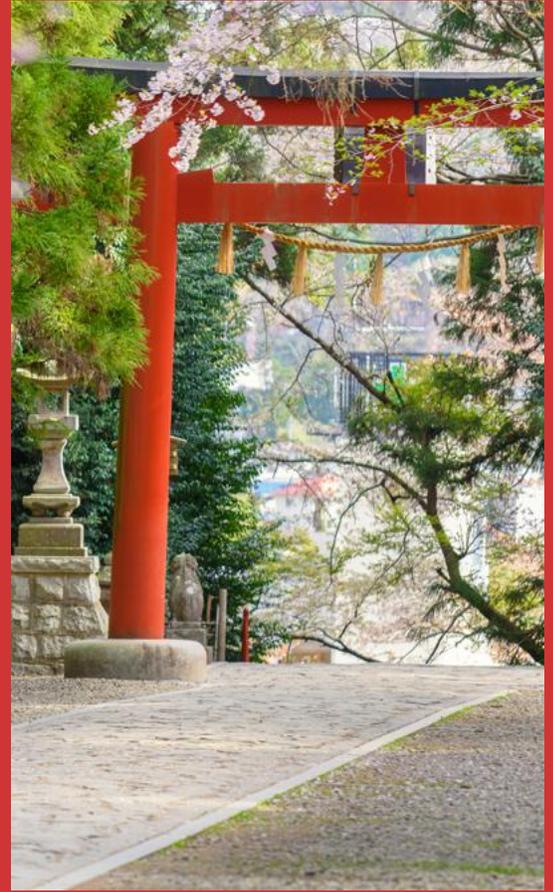
The region's modern culture can be understood by touring its many art museums, including the Akita Museum of Art designed by renowned Tadao Ando, the Towada Modern Art Museum, the Honma Museum of Art, and many more. Foodies will have their palates sated by the various local specialties including the "Three Great Noodles of Marioka", Sendai's beloved Gyutan, and plentiful fresh fish bought from a local fish market. Although largely rural, Tohoku's cultural treasures are as bountiful as its harvests.

# SENDAI



The largest city in the Tohoku Region, Sendai has a long feudal legacy as it was the home city of the Date clan, founded by the legendary daimyo Date Masamune. At the ruins of Aoba Castle visitors can tour the Sendai City Museum that features many relics from the city's feudal period. The city's samurai heritage is on full display within the resplendent and ornate style of the Zuihoden Mausoleum, the pleasant garden of the Rinnoji Temple, and striking design of the Osaki Hachimangu Shrine. Today, Sendai is a thoroughly modern and eye-catching city with its abundant trees and greenery, giving it the nickname "the city of trees". Get lost in the modern-day bustle with a walk down the Ichibancho Arcade, the covered mall that stretches several streets in the downtown area, where you can shop at high-end fashion houses, eat alongside locals at restaurants, and everything in between.

Sendai's proximity to the sea and mountains makes it an ideal home base for excursions into the surrounding wilderness - including the iconic Matsushima Bay. Other popular excursions include a trip to the mountain temple of Yamadera, a trip down the rugged pacific Sanriku Coast, and skiing on Mount Zao.



*Autumn Forest, Sendai*

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