

# The Bucket List

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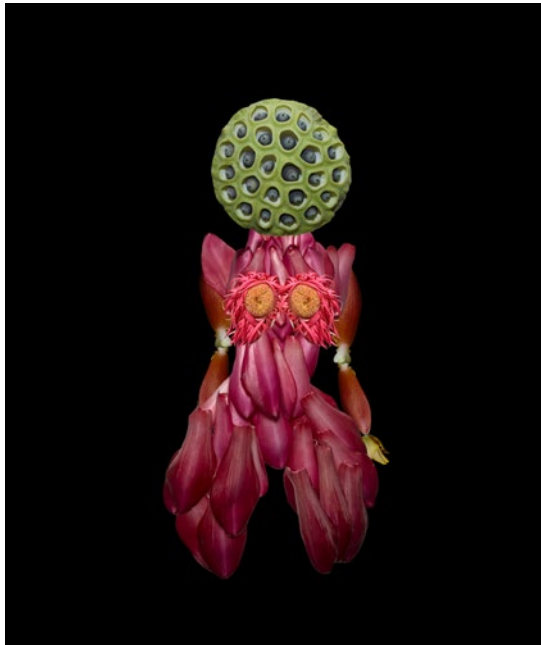
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# Editor's Letter

**I**t's the end of the year, which means it's time for another issue of *The Bucket List*, a special issue of *Tokyo Weekender* focused on extraordinary travel experiences in Japan. This is a time when people set goals and visualize the type of person they'd like to grow into in the following year. This kind of self-reflection is useful when it comes to planning travel, too; it's a cliché to say a single journey can change your life, but clichés endure because they're often true.

In each iteration of *The Bucket List*, we like to focus on the kinds of destinations and experiences that will leave a lasting impression — a trip you'll talk about and think about for the rest of your life. For those looking to challenge themselves and step beyond the familiar, we've spotlighted adventure tourism and culturally rich places well off the beaten path: ridgetop mountain huts nestled near the peaks of the Japanese Alps, remote islands with intriguing histories and places of singular beauty worth traveling a long distance for.

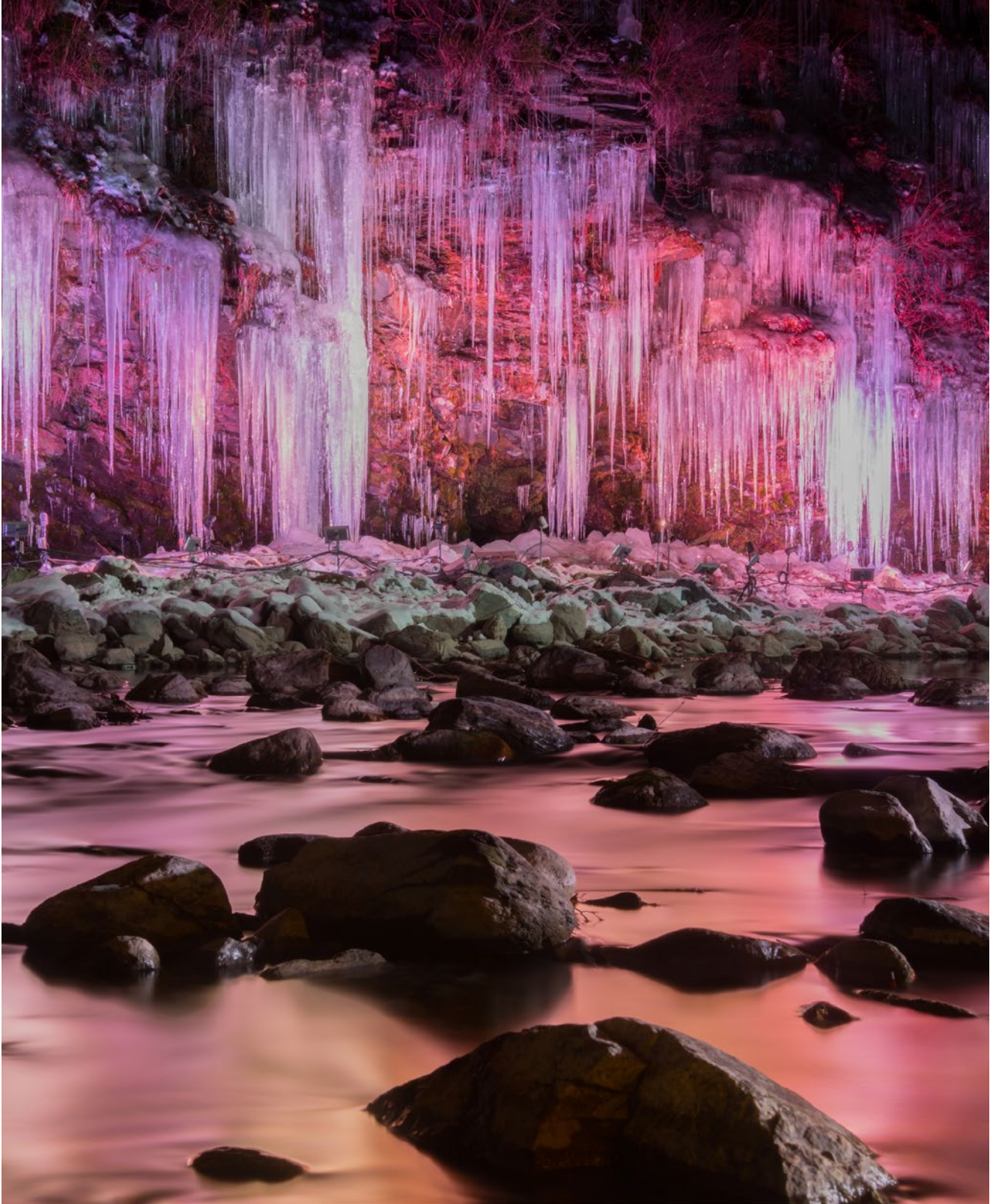
There's also space for unforgettable indulgence. If it's on your bucket list to spend a weekend in a world-class hotel with dazzling views, gourmet cuisine and Edenic amenities, we have you covered there, too. Finally, for those looking to immerse themselves in Japan's spiritual heritage, we have a section focused on mindfulness and spirituality: ancient pilgrim paths you can still walk today, remote Shinto shrines that evoke a sense of the sublime and places of worship that have been reimagined by contemporary architects.

So — where will you go, and who might you become along the way? Hopefully, this issue will help give you some inspiration.

*Callie*

Editor in Chief, Special Issues

# EXPLORE



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# Sleeping Above the Clouds

FIVE DESTINATIONS THAT SHOWCASE THE DAZZLING BEAUTY AND SERENE GRANDEUR OF JAPAN'S DEEP WINTER

WORDS BY WAKABA OTO



**T**he first sound is always the same. Before the sun hits the ridgeline, before the hikers begin tightening their pack straps, a metal ladle knocks against an industrial pot in a dark kitchen. It's 4:30 a.m. at Enzanjo, and the staff are already awake, preparing miso soup for 200 people who slept inside the hut's wooden dormitories the night before.

Outside, the sky is a thin blade of silver. Inside, steam rolls across the dining hall as hikers shuffle in, still half-asleep, still wearing headlamps. They sit at long communal tables, eating grilled fish and rice, their boots

waiting patiently by the entrance in neat lines. This is the choreography of the Japanese alpine hut, practiced for more than a century.

Japan's *sanso*, or mountain huts, are part of the infrastructure that makes the Northern and Southern Alps accessible. They are not hotels, nor are they basic shelters; they are a rare hybrid — part refuge, part cultural artifact — maintained by families and staff who spend entire summers living at nearly 3,000 meters. Each hut is different, with its own history, architecture, food culture and responsibilities. Together, they form one of the most distinctive mountain traditions anywhere in the world.



### YARIGATAKE SANSO: A LODGE ON JAPAN'S MATTERHORN

From Kamikochi — a tranquil valley in Nagano Prefecture — the classic route to Mount Yarigatake climbs past riverside lodges and up the long Yarisawa Valley. Finally, the mountain appears, a thin spear of rock breaking away from the skyline. The peak, 3,180 meters high, has been romanticized for decades as Japan's Matterhorn for its sharply tapered summit.

Just under a hundred vertical meters below the top, at 3,080 meters, sits Yarigatake Sanso. Officially founded in 1926, it is now one of the flagship huts of the range, with capacity for around 400 people and a business season that runs from late April to early November. Helicopters bring in bulk supplies before the main summer season. After that, everything from gas canisters to onions comes up on staff shoulders.

Seen from the approach, the hut looks improbably exposed: a long, low complex of red-roofed buildings clinging to the ridge just below the summit rocks. It has been expanded and rebuilt several times, but its basic function has not changed since the early Showa years. A century-story documentary made about the hut, *At the Top of the Sky*, follows one full season of its operations, from snowmelt to closure in November.

Inside, the experience is structured. Hikers shed boots at the threshold, check in at the front desk and are shown to communal sleeping rooms partitioned by low wooden dividers and curtains. Dinner is served at set times, typically a tray with rice, miso soup, pickles and a main dish — often a thick, Western-style curry or hayashi rice that reflects how these huts evolved alongside early 20th-century alpinism and its fascination with the European Alps. Prices for a night with two meals now sit in the mid-¥13,000 range.



On clear evenings, you step out from the dining hall and suddenly understand why Yarigatake Sanso became the anchor of a whole lodge group. The view sweeps across the entire Hotaka range, the Tateyama massif, the Central and Southern Alps and, on the best days, all the way to Mount Fuji.

### MORE INFO

[yarigatake.co.jp/english/](http://yarigatake.co.jp/english/)



## KARASAWA HÜTTE:

### AUTUMN AT THE BOTTOM OF A BOWL

Several valleys away, the Karasawa Cirque holds a different kind of drama. This is one of the major glacial basins of the Northern Alps, hemmed in by some of the country's highest peaks. The cirque's floor sits at roughly 2,300 meters, almost 900 meters below the ridgeline, and measures about 2 kilometers across. Snow clings to the rock walls late into summer; meltwater streams form the headwaters of the Azusa River that runs down through Kamikochi.

The standard approach from Kamikochi is a two-day, 30-kilometer round trip with around 800 meters of elevation gain. Once they reach the cirque, hikers don't find a vast expanse of wilderness, but rather two substantial huts — Karasawa Hütte and Karasawa Goya — and a wide gravel bench that turns into "tent city" in high season, with hundreds of brightly colored tents.

Karasawa Hütte itself dates back to the mid-1920s, when huts began appearing in the Hotaka range in response to growing numbers of climbers. It operates as a seasonal hostel, typically from late April to early November, serving as both a base for Hotaka ascents and a destination in its own right for foliage hunters. Inside, you get the familiar mountain-hut choreography: rows of futons, low ceilings and a canteen serving hot meals. A curry plate or ramen here will run around ¥1,200 for non-staying guests; an overnight stay with two meals is usually priced in the ¥14,000 range, in line with other full-service lodges in the Alps.

One detail makes the place feel almost surreal: You can sit on the roof terrace, surrounded by vertical walls of rock, eating beef curry and oden and drinking draft beer — the kegs flown in by helicopter — while the entire cirque burns red and gold below the first October snowline.

At night, the bowl traps cold air. The sky turns brutally clear. When dawn comes, the ridges rinse through pink into yellow, a phenomenon the German-speaking staff and early European visitors once called *Morgenröte*, morning red.

## MORE INFO

[karasawa-hyutte.com/](http://karasawa-hyutte.com/)



## ENZANSO ON MOUNT TSUBAKURO:

### QUEEN OF THE NORTHERN ALPS

If Yarigatake is a spear and Hotaka is an amphitheatre, Mount Tsubakuro is an invitation. The mountain, rising to about 2,763 meters in the city of Azumino, is known for pale granite ridges, white sand and sweeping views in all directions. Local tourism boards market it as the "Queen of the Northern Alps," a counterpart to the more severe "king" peaks around it.

The climb from Nakabusa Onsen is steep and direct, gaining roughly 1,400 meters over six hours on a ridge called Kassen-one. At the top, just below the summit, stands Enzanso, one of Japan's most storied huts. Built in 1921 by mountaineer Chihiro Akanuma, it was later expanded into the large, multibuilding lodge that stands today.

Capacity is around 650 people, making it one of the biggest huts in the Alps, with all stays on an advance-reservation basis. The hut is typically open from mid-April to late November, with an additional short New Year operation, and even hosts a summer mountain clinic staffed by Juntendo University's medical alpine club.



Enzanso is where several strands of hut culture converge. It anchors the Omote Ginza traverse, the classic ridge route that runs from Tsubakuro toward Mount Otensho and eventually Mount Yarigatake, one of the most celebrated multiday hikes in the range. It has also become famous among hikers for small luxuries: cake sets and draft beer on the terrace, evening horn performances and an almost panoramic sweep of peaks — Yarigatake and Hotaka, the Jone range, even Fuji and the Southern Alps on clear days. The morning routine is simple. People wake

around 4 a.m., pull on down jackets and step out onto the terrace. Below them, a thick inversion layer of cloud often fills the valleys of Nagano. As the sun rises behind the Yatsugatake range, the ridge turns briefly silver, then gold. Breakfast is grilled fish, rice, pickles, tamagoyaki. Hikers repack their bags and either head higher on the traverse or back down to hot spring steam and paved roads.

#### MORE INFO

[enzanso.co.jp/english](http://enzanso.co.jp/english)



#### THE SYSTEM BEHIND THE SUMMITS

Taken together, these huts describe the shape of Japan's mountain culture more accurately than any map. Their founding years cluster in the early 20th century, the same period when recreational mountaineering, university climbing clubs and national-park policy were taking form. Their operations today still track the mountains' own logic — business seasons set by snowmelt and typhoon cycles, pricing influenced by helicopter loads, reservation caps imposed not for exclusivity but to keep crowded ridgelines safe.

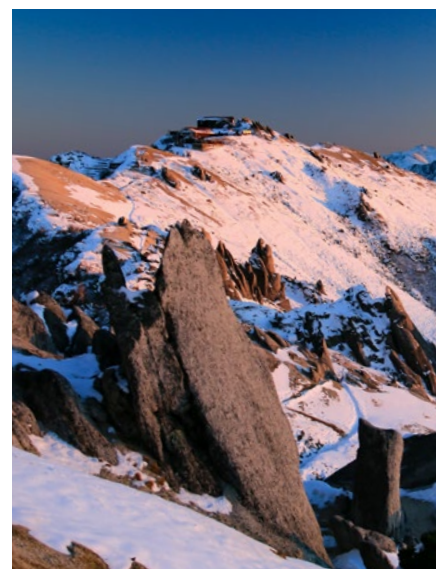
For hikers, the effect is disarmingly simple. You move through forest, rock and weather all day, then arrive at a strip of light on a ridge or the floor of a cirque. Inside, there are rows of slippers, a pot of curry steaming on the counter, hand-written weather boards and a bunk with a folded blanket. At dawn, people step outside at roughly the same time to watch the sky change. People who have nothing in common off the mountain share trays and condense their conversations to the essentials: forecast, route, time.

Japan's hut system doesn't soften the mountains or turn them into an amusement

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”

park. The trails remain serious; crossings like the Daikiretto Gap between Mount Minami and Mount Kita-Hotaka are among the most exposed in the country. What the huts do is quieter: They make these places inhabitable without diminishing their difficulty. They give altitude a human scale — a meal, a dry bed, a bit of order in the wind — and in doing so, they keep access and safety intertwined.

Spend a night in one, and you understand why the system has lasted a century. It isn't comfort that keeps people coming back. It's the way these huts let you live, briefly and respectfully, in terrain that would otherwise push you out.



# The Ancient Allure of Shizuoka City

BELOVED BY JAPAN'S MOST FAMOUS SAMURAI, SHIZUOKA CITY IS A PLACE OF RARE BEAUTY, WHERE TRADITIONAL CRAFTS THRIVE AMONG ROLLING TEA HILLS

WORDS BY CHRISTIAN DAKIN, PHOTOS BY ANNIE ZIESMANN

The Shinkansen curves along the Pacific coast, and suddenly the scenery opens: forested mountains to the right, the glint of Suruga Bay to the left. On clear days, you can see Mount Fuji floating above the horizon. This is Shizuoka city — a place rich in history and natural beauty, both of which are pristinely preserved.

Because the Nozomi Shinkansen passes through Shizuoka city without stopping, it's a destination travelers tend to overlook, rushing onward to heavily touristed spots like Kyoto and Osaka instead. Thanks to this fact, the city has remained a hidden gem despite being just over an hour from Tokyo. It's a place of elegance and calm, where lush tea fields spill down hillsides toward the sea, local seafood arrives fresh from Shimizu Port and the legacy of craftsmanship that once defined the Tokugawa court continues uninterrupted.



## CENTURIES OF CRAFT AND CULTURE

Long before it became a stop on the Tokaido Road, Shizuoka was the chosen home of Tokugawa Ieyasu, who brought master artisans with him when he retired to Sumpu Castle. To this day, the city remains full of workshops, historic inns and even its own vibrant craft village. For visitors, it offers myriad chances for unique hands-on experiences and stays.

Connect to the region's shogunate history at Yamazaki Metal Factory, a local metal workshop located in the city's eastern Shimizu ward. The CEO comes from a long line of metalworkers; her ancestors specialized in creating tsuba, or the hilt section of samurai swords. Visitors can partake in this tradition by making their very own "samurai pick," a miniature samurai sword — polishing the steel, honing the blade and engraving a personal design on the handle.



About a 10-minute drive away, Nagasawa Kawara Shoten has revived the once-lost art of Shimizu roof tiles. Here, you can create your own original onigawara — a demon-faced tile thought to ward off evil — under the guidance of Shizuoka Prefecture's only female onishi (master demon tile craftsman). Choose between a laughing or angry demon, then add detail to its face. By carving its fangs, eyes and horns, you can make your creation as terrifying or as charming as you want.

For another traditional protection charm, stop by Miyahide, a long-established doll shop in the central Aoi ward that offers a special hagoita paddle-making workshop. Originally used in a badminton-like game called hanetsuki, hagoita paddles evolved into intricate folk art, typically decorated with layered fabric designs and lacquered details. At Miyahide, you can personalize your creation with a kanji character of your choosing, turning it into a unique good-luck charm to display at home.

Finally, Takumishuku Craft Valley is a haven for all things craft. Nestled in the mountains, it feels like a small village, with cozy lodgings, cafes, shops, museums, a large public bath and, of course, workshops where artisans work on their crafts and offer hands-on experiences. Try your hand at green tea dyeing, a Shizuoka Prefecture specialty in which cloth is dyed using leftovers from tea production. The finished product is vibrant and striking, and often utilizes patterns designed to resemble tea fields from above.

Set at the valley's entrance, you'll find Craft Inn Waraku, which offers five private villas and three luxurious rooms. The villas each come with a private sauna and cypress wood bath, and the rooms are adjacent to Ocha Spa, where you can indulge in relaxing treatments that incorporate Shizuoka's finest green tea.



## CULINARY JOURNEYS

Shizuoka isn't just defined by its connection to craft and culture — its cuisine, too, is a reflection of centuries of tradition. The prefecture is perhaps most famous as one of Japan's premier tea-growing regions. And given its proximity to the mountains and the sea, it also offers an abundance of fresh, seasonal ingredients, from tender wagyu beef to rich seafood like tuna, bonito and whitebait.

For a truly immersive taste of Shizuoka's tea culture, Le Monde Fujigaya offers refined lunch and dinner courses that artfully combine the region's famed tea with teppanyaki techniques. Designed in collaboration with a certified Japanese tea instructor and a sommelier, each dish is carefully paired to highlight the flavors and aromas of Shizuoka tea, allowing guests to experience the region's identity as a renowned tea-producing region in every bite.

Meanwhile, at Edokoma, visitors can explore the subtle art of Japanese broth-making, sampling three types of dashi — bonito flakes (katsuo-bushi), tuna flakes (maguro-bushi) and mackerel flakes (saba-bushi) — that have been meticulously prepared using deep-sea water

from Suruga Bay. Guests taste each broth, noting the differences in aroma and depth, and enjoy a dashimaki tamago, a rolled omelet, made with their dashi of choice.

At Kaido, a stunning kominka (traditional Japanese house) set along the ancient Tokaido route, those who stay at the lodging have the chance to savor a taste of history, enlisting a fifth-generation wagashi artisan to guide you through the art of Japanese confectionery. The method for creating your own delicate dessert remains the same as it did during the Edo period, and the exact type of sweet you make will change depending on the season — during the fall, for instance, it'll be autumn leaves shaped out of mochi and anko (red bean paste).



## MORE INFO

Shizuoka city is about an hour and 20 minutes from Tokyo via the Tokaido Shinkansen. To book a tour or cultural experience, email [tour@fieja-japan.com](mailto:tour@fieja-japan.com).



# Sado Island: Hidden Histories

BEAUTIFUL, MYSTERIOUS AND ONCE AN OFFICIAL PLACE OF EXILE,  
SADO REWARDS THOSE WHO TAKE THE TIME TO REACH IT

WORDS BY WAKABA OTO

Off the coast of Niigata Prefecture, Sado Island rises abruptly from the sea. From above, it's shaped like two fish circling each other: a set of parallel mountain ranges connected by a lush strip of lowland, with villages tucked into coves. Its natural beauty is reason enough to visit, but its unique history has also made it a subject of fascination. In its coastlines, you'll find traces of exiled emperors, radical monks and shogunate gold miners.

Sado Island sits around 40 kilometers into the Sea of Japan — close enough to the mainland for ferries to run several times a day, far enough to feel self-contained. For more than a millennium, it was an official place of exile. Emperor Juntoku arrived after backing the wrong side of a court dispute; Nichiren was banished here for his radical Buddhist teachings.

Those exiled here had usually committed political offenses, and as such tended to be aristocrats and cultural figures rather than violent criminals. In exile, they brought an infusion of Kyoto's arts and ideas to Sado's shores. One art form in particular took deep root: *noh*. In the Edo period, Sado had more than 200 *noh* stages, built in villages, shrines and even private estates. Thirty-two remain today, the highest concentration relative to population anywhere in the country.

In 1601, gold was discovered in its hills: Japan's own gold rush. A large mine was built near Aikawa in the island's west. Its ports flourished, bringing trade ships laden with goods from Osaka, Hokkaido and beyond. Gold production peaked, then fell. The trading ships slowed. But the cultural sediment — layered over centuries — remains.

## EXPLORING SADO'S MOUNTAINS AND SEAS

The island's scale is deceptive. On a map, it looks compact, yet its coastline runs for roughly 280 kilometers. Distances stretch here because the road follows the contours of the land. You drive around a headland, and a fishing village appears. The road turns inland, and suddenly you're in a basin of rice fields hemmed in by a Japanese cedar and beech forest.

Sado Island is renowned for its crystal-clear waters and dramatic shorelines. These are best viewed from a *tarai-bune* — a kind of round, hand-hewn, tub-shaped fishing boat that's become one of the island's most famous sights. These vessels have worked the coves since the late 19th century, initially designed for harvesting turban shells and abalone where regular boats couldn't maneuver. Today, you can ride one from Ogi Port without advance booking. Alternatively, at the Yajima Experience Exchange Center, you can board a *tarai-bune* with a partially clear bottom and watch kelp sway and fish dart beneath your feet.

Head inland and upward for stunning mountainous landscapes. Mount Donden, officially named Mount Tadaramine, is a plateau of three peaks around 900 meters high, known for its flowers in late spring and cool, open-air trails in summer. It's about a 40-minute drive from Ryotsu Port, with a campground and trailheads for hikes that range from one to six hours. On clear nights, it offers some of the best stargazing on the island.

“  
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you'll find traces  
of exiled emperors,  
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”



On the northern coast, Onogame, a massive, turtle-shaped monolith, rises 167 meters straight from the sea. From late May to early June, the slopes turn yellow with daylilies. The 20-minute walk to the summit is gentle enough for most visitors, with views of the coastline and nearby Futatsugame. There's no entry fee, and it's a popular stop for those driving or touring the northern loop of the island.

#### UNEARTH CENTURIES OF HISTORY

The Sado Kinzan Gold Mine in Aiwaka is now open to tourists as a World Heritage Site. Opened in 1601 and taken under direct shogunate control two years later, it produced gold for centuries. Entry includes access to two historic tunnels, where you can see life-sized mannequins recreating scenes from the illustrated Sado Gold Mine Scroll, as well as preserved facilities.

Roughly 30 minutes away by car, Toki Forest Park offers a quieter kind of history. Once common across Japan, the toki — or crested ibis — disappeared from the wild in 2003. A breeding program here, launched with birds gifted from China, has brought their numbers on Sado to about 480. The park is open daily, with enclosures, a viewing plaza and a small museum.

#### SADO ON THE TABLE

Sado's food is inseparable from its landscape; its cuisine is rooted in the island's terrain and waters. Some of the clearest expressions of this are found in Sado Meshi-ran—certified restaurants, places that commit to using local ingredients as a matter of course.

In Aikawa, Soba Restaurant Yozaemon mills flour from Sado-grown buckwheat in-house. The noodles are cut thick, their perfume opening as you eat, the chew lingering before it breaks. The interior changes monthly with



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displays of Sado's traditional crafts, a quiet reminder that food here is always tied to season and place.

Farther along the coast, Shikisai Kappo Den, run by a husband-and-wife team, works to the same principles. Their sashimi is fresh and meticulously prepared, and can be ordered alongside small-batch sake. On the edge of Mano Bay, Nagahamaso Uodojo runs as both inn and working kitchen. Tanks hold the day's catch just behind the dining room. The owner, a sushi chef with more than 40 years' experience, pulls fish directly from the water to his board.



For all its history and scenery, Sado's real draw is its pace. Nothing here moves in a hurry — not the tarai-bune rocking in the shallows, not the mountain trails looping through rhododendron groves, not the kitchen that sends out sashimi cut to order. Give yourself at least three days. Drive the loops, stop often, eat well. When it's time to go, you'll wish you'd stayed longer.

#### MORE INFO

To learn more about Sado Island, see [visitsado.com/en/](https://visitsado.com/en/).



# Exploring Little Edo

KNOWN FOR ITS RICH HISTORY AND BEAUTIFULLY PRESERVED STREETS, THE RIVERSIDE TOWN OF SAWARA WILL TRANSPORT YOU BACK IN TIME

PHOTOS BY SOLÈNE BALLESTA

Just an hour and a half from central Tokyo, the impeccably preserved Sawara region offers a rare immersion into Japan's history. This riverside town in Chiba Prefecture once thrived as a bustling trading hub, so prominent that it was referred to as Koedo, or "Little Edo" — Edo being the former name of Tokyo. Today, its wooden merchant houses, quiet canals and stone-paved streets remain remarkably intact.

For visitors seeking history, culture and a touch of serenity, Sawara is an ideal destination, unfolding like a living diorama of old Japan.



## WANDERING THE STREETS

Start your visit in the heart of the historical district, strolling along the Ono River and taking in the scenery. Willow trees trail gracefully into the water, and shopfronts carry the patina of generations. Many of these businesses are still run by the families who founded them, such as Nakamura Shoten, which has been in business since 1874, and Fukushin Gofukuten, renowned for its delicate fabric goods. Several former merchant homes have also been converted into cafes and galleries, blending Edo-era craftsmanship with modern charm.

For a different perspective, board the Little Edo Sawara Boat Tour, which drifts gently along the calm waters of the Ono River. From the boat, the town reveals views unseen from the streets. Guides share stories of Sawara's rich history, sometimes even singing an old local song that proudly declares, "If you want to see Edo, come to Sawara. Sawara's superior to Edo."

No visit to Sawara is complete without stopping at Katori Jingu Shrine, one of Japan's oldest Shinto shrines. Said to have been founded in 643 BCE and dedicated to

Futsunushi no Okami, the god of martial valor, the shrine historically drew travelers and merchants, contributing to Sawara's prominence. Walk the approach lined with small eateries and souvenir shops, then linger for a cup of coffee at the charmingly retro Uno Café, where a vintage espresso machine complements the relaxed, reflective mood.

History enthusiasts should also explore the Inoh Tadataka Museum, dedicated to the famed cartographer who spent nearly two decades mapping Japan during the Edo period. His meticulously detailed maps and surveying instruments are on display, and his preserved home across the river offers a glimpse into the life of a man whose work shaped modern Japan's understanding of its own geography.

Finally, if your visit coincides with July or October, the Sawara Grand Festival is unmissable. Towering floats adorned with carved figures and topped with giant dolls parade through the streets while taiko drums and flutes fill the air. Lanterns illuminate the festivities, creating an unforgettable scene. Off-season, the Suigo Sawara Float Museum captures the artistry and tradition of these three-century-old celebrations.



#### STAYING IN SAWARA

For an overnight stay, Nipponia Sawara Merchant Town Hotel offers an immersive experience. Guests sleep among restored merchant homes and former breweries, enjoying modern comforts in a setting steeped in history. The hotel's restaurant, Le Un, serves elegant prix-fixe meals highlighting seasonal, local ingredients. After the day-trippers depart, the lantern-lit streets and calm riverfront offer a rare moment of intimacy, allowing guests to experience Sawara as it has been for centuries.

Small in scale but rich in history, Sawara offers a complete journey through Edo-era Japan. Stroll its streets, glide along its canals, taste its storied flavors and encounter the living legacy of its craftsmen and mapmakers. It is a destination where history is not merely preserved, but experienced — intimately, quietly and beautifully.

#### MORE INFO

To learn more about Sawara and what it has to offer, please see Chiba's official tourism website: [visitchiba.jp](http://visitchiba.jp).



#### WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK

The culinary scene of Sawara and the surrounding regions is inseparable from its history. The area has long been a center of fermentation, producing sake, soy sauce and miso, and its restaurants and cafes celebrate that heritage.

Highlights of the area include Coffee Tamazawa, housed in a former futon store and decorated with vintage items, and Kinmitsudo, beloved for its towering, elaborate sweet potato parfaits. Inou Chujiro Shoten offers an impressive lineup of craft beers, complemented by a selection of freshly made cheeses. If you're looking for a culinary souvenir to bring home, Michi no Eki Hakko-no-Sato Kozaki showcases fermented foods such as miso and amazake from all over the country.

For a full meal, Auberge de Manoir Kittei presents French-Japanese cuisine emphasizing regional ingredients, set against the backdrop of a stunning, 2,640-square-meter Japanese garden. Inae is refined yet approachable, serving a range of seasonal sweets like anmitsu and shaved ice alongside nourishing comfort food.

Sake remains a cornerstone of the local culture. Nabadana Kozaki Brewery (located in the nearby Kozaki town) and Babahonten Sake Brewery — the latter operated by the Baba family for over 300 years — preserve traditional brewing techniques while producing sake that reflects the use of carefully selected rice and water. Visitors can explore historic tools and brewing methods, gaining a tangible sense of the craft that has defined the region for generations.





# Winter Wonderlands

FIVE DESTINATIONS THAT SHOWCASE THE DAZZLING BEAUTY  
AND SERENE GRANDEUR OF JAPAN'S DEEP WINTER

WORDS BY EUGENIE SHIN

**T**ravelers from around the world fly to Japan during the spring or fall to revel in the blushing pink cherry blossoms or fiery carpets of foliage, but many are sleeping on the country's abundance of uniquely beautiful winter destinations. Beyond ski and hot spring resorts, Japan is dotted with dazzling snowscapes, immortalized in paintings like "Evening Snow at Kanbara" by Hiroshige and literature like *Snow Country* by Yasunari Kawabata.

These wintry landscapes are worth seeking out just to admire, allowing you to make the most of January and February — months that are typically considered off-season. From bizarre, towering "snow monsters" to the enchanting sight of bathing snow monkeys, these five iconic locales transform the season's chill into evocative, poetic tableaux.



## SHIRAKAWA-GO AND GOKAYAMA, GIFU AND TOYAMA PREFECTURES

Glowing softly in the embrace of the snow-laden peaks of the Japanese Alps, the regions of Shirakawa-go and Gokayama hold one of Japan's most distinctive and enchanting winter sights. A UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1995, the area is defined by its gassho-zukuri farmhouses — some of which are thought to be over 250 years old — featuring distinctive thatched roofs set at a steep angle to withstand heavy snow. When deep winter descends in January and February, you might be lucky enough to catch the valley draped in a cloak of white, framing a fairytale townscape under a glittering, velvety sky.

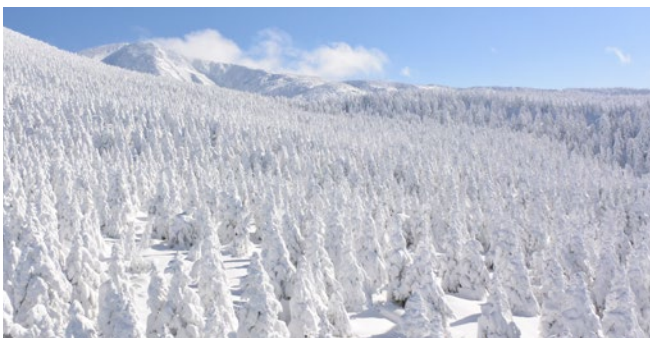
The two areas are home to three traditional villages: Ogimachi in Shirakawa-go and Ainokura and Suganuma in Gokayama. Of these, Ogimachi is the largest and most tourist-friendly, and many of its farmhouses are now home to restaurants or museums. Some have also been converted into minshuku — family-operated, Japanese-style bed-and-breakfasts — allowing for an overnight stay.

On select nights in January and February, the village hosts its famous illumination event; advance reservations are required for entry, and the observation deck is limited to those participating in a tour package or staying overnight.

### MORE INFO

[shirakawa-go.gr.jp/en/](http://shirakawa-go.gr.jp/en/)





#### ZAO SNOW MONSTERS, YAMAGATA AND MIYAGI PREFECTURES

High on the slopes of the Zao Mountain Range, which straddles the border of Yamagata and Miyagi prefectures, a beautiful and eerie natural phenomenon unfolds each winter. Driven by intense subzero temperatures and fierce Siberian gales, the mountain's native fir trees are swathed in layers of ice and compacted snow, transforming them into towering, misshapen figures reminiscent of a Tim Burton film.

Affectionately known as the Zao snow monsters, these icy trees — also called “juhyo” in Japanese — can be most easily seen near the top of Zao Onsen Ski Resort. Winter sports enthusiasts can enjoy skiing and snowboarding among the wintry beasts, though they're arguably best viewed from above — via the Zao Ropeway, which is available to both skiers and non-skiers alike. From Zao Sanroku Station, take the Sanroku Line to Juhyo Kogen Station, then transfer to the Sancho Line, which will take you to Jizo Sancho Station.

From late December to early March, the trees are illuminated at nighttime, creating an even more otherworldly vista, which can be appreciated from a variety of viewpoints around the mountain. There are also night tours available, where visitors can ride in a heated snowcat to see the monsters up close.

The surrounding town of Zao Onsen is an incredibly popular winter sports and hot springs destination, with ample options for lodgings, including both hotels and traditional inns. If you want to see the monsters at their peak, it's recommended to go in mid-February.

#### MORE INFO

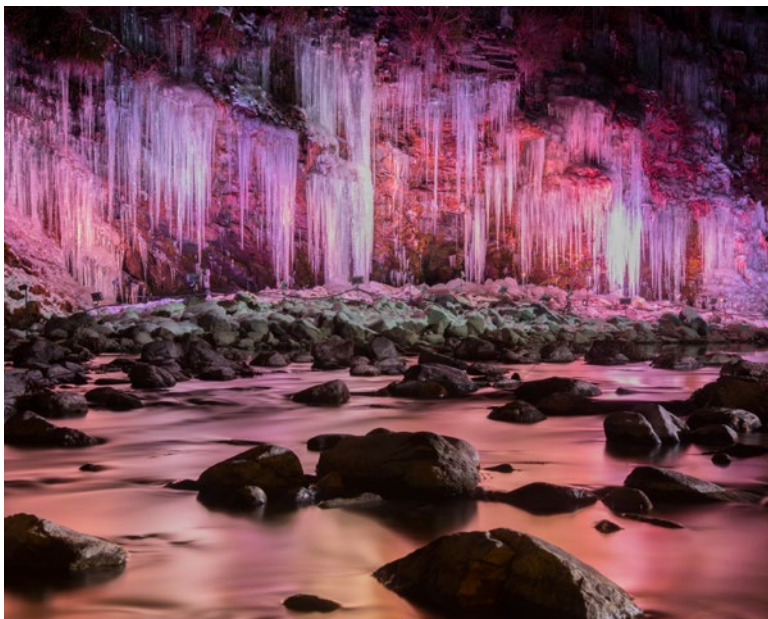
[yamagatakanko.com/en/attractions/](http://yamagatakanko.com/en/attractions/)

#### MISOTSUCHI ICICLES, SAITAMA PREFECTURE

Just over two hours away from Tokyo in the mineral-rich valleys of Saitama Prefecture's Chichibu city is an awe-inspiring natural wonder: the icicles of Misotsuchi. Resembling stalactites, these magical structures reach impressive lengths of up to 8 meters, forming an imposing wall of iridescent, cascading spikes.

The icicles are typically at their most spectacular between mid-January and mid-February, when the area's temperatures are consistently at their lowest; during this period, the sight is further enhanced by a breathtaking illumination display at nighttime, which infuses the crystalline sculptures with shades of pink, green and violet.

The easiest way to access the Misotsuchi Icicles is by car, with limited parking available at a nearby campground. If you're without a car, the icicles are reachable via Shinkansen and public transportation, then a short walk.



#### MORE INFO

[icicles.woodroof.jp/en/](http://icicles.woodroof.jp/en/)

**JIGOKUDANI MONKEY PARK,  
NAGANO PREFECTURE**

In the thermal valley named Jigokudani, or “Hell Valley,” in Nagano Prefecture, a uniquely Japanese wildlife spectacle plays out amid snow-coated evergreens. Shrouded in deep snow for a third of the year, the Jigokudani Monkey Park is famously known as the domain of Japanese macaques, also known as snow monkeys.

From December to March, the macaques descend from the forested peaks to seek refuge and warmth in the steaming, sulfurous waters of the area’s hot springs. Consistently sought after by photographers, the sight is truly iconic: red-faced monkeys, fur powdered with snow, enjoying a relaxing soak with blissful, Zen-like expressions.

Visitors can reach the monkeys via a 25–40-minute walk through a picturesque woodland from the Kanbayashi Onsen bus stop. It’s worth staying overnight to enjoy the charm of the surrounding area. The nearby Yudanaka Onsen is beautiful and historic, with plenty of ryokan to choose from.

**MORE INFO**

[en.jigokudani-yaenkoen.co.jp/](http://en.jigokudani-yaenkoen.co.jp/)



**BIEI, HOKKAIDO PREFECTURE**

Hokkaido Prefecture’s Biei is a beloved winter destination offering some of Japan’s most ethereal snowscapes. Characterized by gentle rolling hills and wide farmlands, the agricultural town acquires a distinctly minimalist, poetic beauty when carpeted in snow. Here, the natural scenery is stripped down to its starkest, most evocative elements.

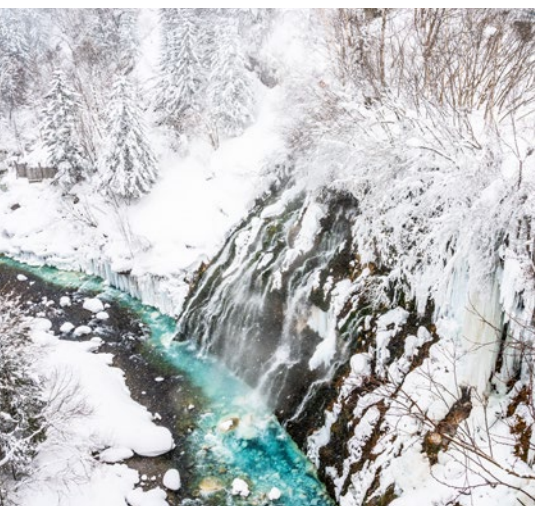
Shirogane Blue Pond is a highlight. In late fall, its milky waters reflect skeletal larch trees dusted in frost, while winter brings snow that blankets emerald-tinged ice. Evenings see the scene softly illuminated in a variety of colors. Nearby, Shirahige Falls offers a dramatic counterpoint, with spectacular curtains of water crashing into the teal Biei River below. Both are easily reached by car from Asahikawa, Hokkaido’s second-largest city after Sapporo, and short walking paths make it simple to explore and photograph these iconic spots even in the depths of winter.

No trip to Biei is complete without driving along the scenic Patchwork Road and Panorama Road areas, where endless snow fields are punctuated by single, isolated trees, some of which have been given their own names — Christmas Tree, Ken and Mary Tree and Seven Stars Tree, for instance — creating scenes straight out of a surrealist painting. The best light is often in the morning and early afternoon, so plan to pause and take in the views.

Warm up at one of Biei’s cozy cafes, where local specialties like creamy corn soup and dairy-rich desserts provide a welcome respite. The town offers a variety of cozy accommodations, from small guesthouses to intimate lodges, making it easy to extend your stay and experience Biei at a gentle pace.

**MORE INFO**

[biei-hokkaido.jp/en/](http://biei-hokkaido.jp/en/)



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Tambi Flower blurs the lines between discomfort and desire

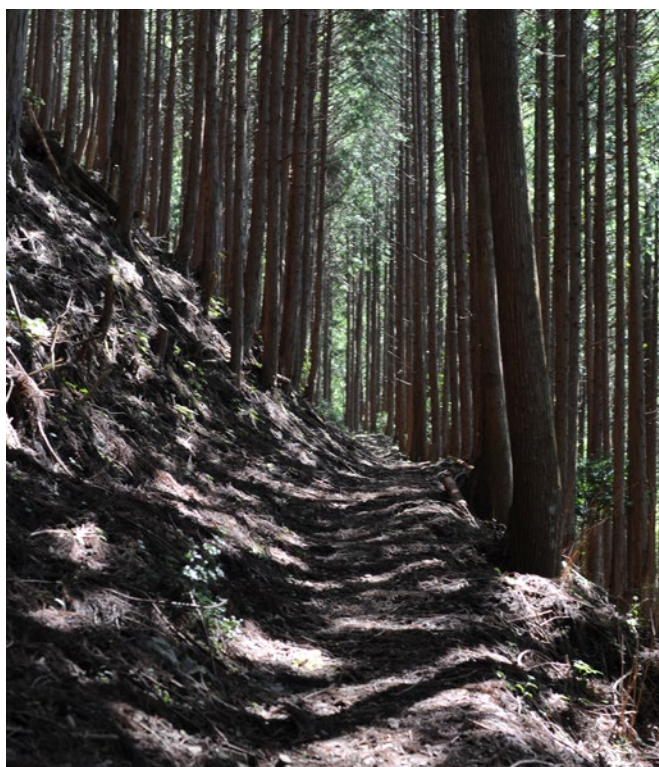
# Japan's Legendary Pilgrimages

THREE ANCIENT PILGRIMAGE ROUTES THAT ALLOW FOR  
AN INTIMATE AND PROFOUND JOURNEY THROUGH THE COUNTRY

WORDS BY WAKABA OTO

**B**efore Japan was linked by expressways and bullet trains, it was held together by footpaths. These narrow trails — cut through forests of Japanese cedar, terraced fields and mountain passes — carried more than travelers. They carried devotion, imperial processions, regional trade and the slow movement of stories from one province to the next. Walking them now reveals how tightly faith, terrain and rural culture were woven long before modern infrastructure arrived.

Rooted in nature worship and shaped by evolving currents of Shinto and Buddhism, an extensive network of pilgrimage routes developed across the islands of Japan over the course of several centuries. Among them, three stand out for their endurance and clarity of purpose: the Kumano Kodo, the Shikoku Henro and the Aizu 33 Kannon. Each developed in a different era, under different religious philosophies, serving different communities. Together, they form a cross section of the country's spiritual and geographic identity.



## KUMANO KODO

Kumano Kodo has been an active pilgrimage system for over 1,000 years, and it's one of only two pilgrimage networks in the world granted UNESCO World Heritage status. Located in the Kii Peninsula, one of the most mountainous and rainfall-heavy regions in Japan, the network winds through Wakayama and extends into Mie and Nara prefectures.

During the Heian period, emperors and aristocrats undertook what were called Kumano-mode, long and often grueling journeys from Kyoto southward into the interior of the peninsula. Their destination was the Kumano Sanzan — the three grand shrines of Kumano Hongu Taisha, Kumano Nachi Taisha and Kumano Hayatama Taisha, which are believed to offer purification and rebirth. But the trails aren't merely a means to an end; the process of walking them, too, is seen as a spiritual experience.

Today, many of the routes that made up the original Kumano Kodo are still intact, with the Nakahechi route remaining the main route, and also the best preserved. The classic Nakahechi trek begins at Takijiri-oji, the spiritual entrance to the sacred Kii mountainscape, and ends at Kumano Nachi Taisha — a distance of around 70 kilometers.

The trail rises through old-growth forest, traverses moss-covered stone stairways and finally drops down to the riverplain that's home to Kumano Hongu Taisha, nestled peacefully in the forest. From there, the hike continues toward Kumano Nachi Taisha, set alongside the sacred Nachi Waterfall, which drops 133 meters in a single, uninterrupted sheet. The highest straight drop in Japan, it creates a natural climax far older than any shrine architecture beside it.

Infrastructure along the Nakahechi is unusually robust for a rural pilgrimage. Accommodation ranges from family-run minshuku, serving homemade local dishes, to refined ryokan with onsen fed by volcanic springs. Trail signage, waystations and interpretive boards make the route navigable even for first-time visitors; it's also possible to skip portions of the trek by using public transportation, should you so desire.

What's striking is how much of the route's character remains intact: small oji shrines once used by imperial processions still stand, hamlets like Chikatsuyu and Hosshinmon retain their historical footprints and teahouses operate much as they did a century ago.



#### MORE INFO

[tb-kumano.jp/en/](http://tb-kumano.jp/en/)

“  
Walking these trails  
reveals how  
tightly faith, terrain  
and rural culture  
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long before modern  
infrastructure arrived.  
”

#### SHIKOKU HENRO

The Shikoku Henro is in a category of its own. This 88-temple pilgrimage loops roughly 1,200 kilometers around the island of Shikoku, which contains four prefectures — Tokushima, Kochi, Ehime and Kagawa. It's one of the world's longest continuous pilgrimage circuits and can take 30 to 60 days to complete in full, though many travelers opt to traverse just a small portion of the circuit at a time.

Historically, the route is tied to Kobo Daishi, or Kukai, founder of Shingon Buddhism, who was born in Shikoku in the eighth century. Every temple on the circuit has a narrative, legend or teaching associated with him. Traditionally, pilgrims would wear white vests or half-length robes called hakui, symbolizing purity, and sedge hats, or sugegasa. Many would also carry a kongozue, a wooden staff representing Kukai himself, who is believed to accompany each pilgrim spiritually.



Unlike the curated clarity of Kumano Kodo, the Shikoku Henro is messy, vast and can feel surprisingly ordinary at points. The landscape along the path has changed over time, and it cuts through urban neighborhoods, fishing ports, mountain passes, farmlands and industrial outskirts. Some temple approaches require steep, punishing climbs — Temple 12, Shosanji, is notoriously difficult — while others are reached via suburban sidewalks next to convenience stores. This friction between sacred and mundane is part of the pilgrimage's identity.

Hospitality, or osettai, is another defining feature. Local residents offer pilgrims everything from tea and snacks to money, rides or lodging — a custom with centuries of precedent.

#### MORE INFO

[shikoku-tourism.com/en/shikoku-henro/shikoku-henro](http://shikoku-tourism.com/en/shikoku-henro/shikoku-henro)



### AIZU 33 KANNON

Where Kumano cuts through deep mountain ravines and the Henro circles an entire island, the Aizu 33 Kannon route sits closer to the ground, threaded through towns, farm roads and valley fields in the Aizu area of western Fukushima Prefecture.

The circuit's origins trace back to the 17th century, when devotion to Kannon, the bodhisattva of mercy, grew rapidly across eastern Japan. During the Edo period, the Aizu domain formalized its own 33-site Kannon pilgrimage, modeled after the prestigious Saigoku 33 pilgrimage in Kansai. The number 33 corresponds to Kannon's 33 manifestations, each capable of guiding or protecting sentient beings.

Unlike the monumental temple complexes of Kyoto or the mountainous grandeur of Kumano, many of Aizu's Kannon halls are small wooden chapels tucked beside rice fields, village cemeteries, orchards or roadside clusters of traditional houses. Some contain significant cultural artifacts; others are simple, caretaker-maintained structures that have served local communities for generations.

The circuit is not sequenced, meaning pilgrims may start anywhere. Some complete the full 33 sites over a weekend. Others make it a recurring practice, visiting a few halls each season. For first-time pilgrims, Aizu offers an introduction to pilgrimage without the physical or logistical demands of long-distance routes.

### MORE INFO

[aizu33.jp/en/](http://aizu33.jp/en/)



“

These paths offer a style of travel defined by sustained attention: to terrain, to weather, to the people who live along the way.

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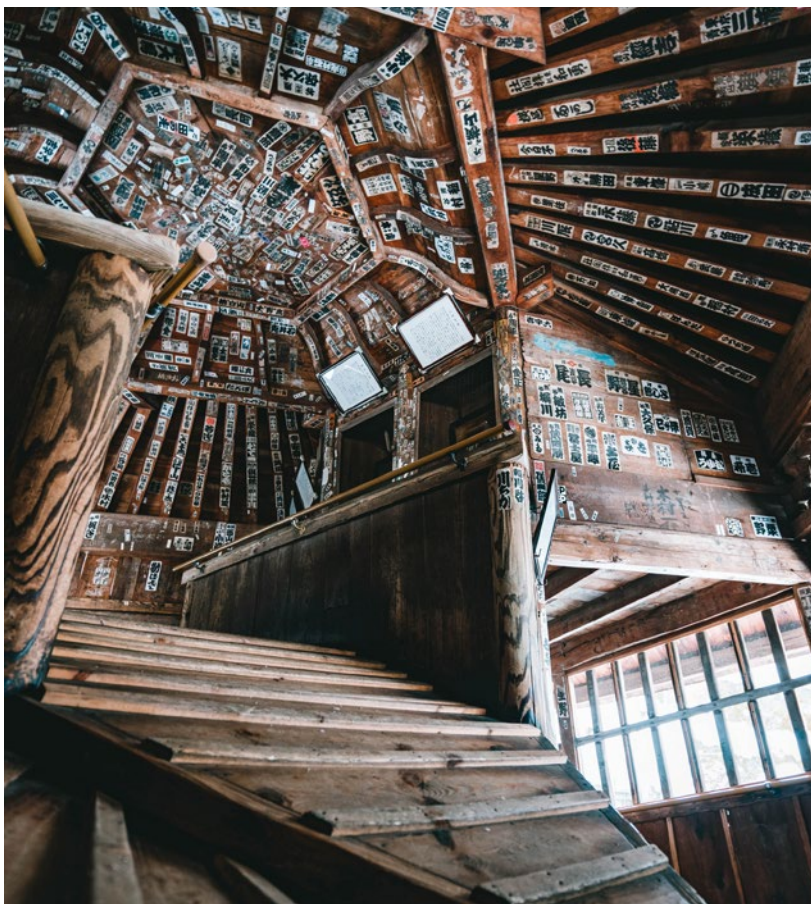
### WHY THESE ROUTES ENDURE

Across all three pilgrimages, a few constants emerge. These paths offer a style of travel defined by sustained attention: to terrain, to weather, to the people who live along the way. They create a framework that's structured but not rigid, spiritual but not doctrinaire and deeply connected to local histories.

The practical appeal is just as clear. Japan's pilgrimage infrastructure is robust — clear trail markers, accessible lodging, reliable regional buses and communities that still see pilgrims as part of their cultural ecosystem rather than an intrusion.

For many, walking a pilgrimage today is less about devotion and more about immersion. The pace forces a recalibration. You start noticing small things again — the shift in light between cedars, a farm dog watching from a porch, the way an elderly caretaker sweeps temple steps each morning.

These routes survive because they still work. They bind geography and story. They let people step outside their timelines and travel through Japan as it has existed for centuries, at the speed of their own footsteps.



# Reimagining the Sacred

CONTEMPORARY SHRINES AND TEMPLES  
WHERE MODERN ARCHITECTURE MEETS CENTURIES-OLD SPIRITUALITY



WORDS BY YNES SARAH FILLEUL

When one thinks of a Japanese shrine or temple, a typical image tends to surface: vermilion torii gates, mossy stone lanterns and centuries-old wooden beams weathered by time. Yet in recent years, some sacred spaces have become sites of architectural experimentation. Across Japan, a new generation of shrines and temples — some redesigned by world-renowned architects, others built entirely anew — is embracing modern materials, unexpected shapes and minimalist sensibilities while preserving their cultural essence.

For visitors, these contemporary sanctuaries offer a different kind of spiritual experience: one that's contemplative yet striking, rooted in history yet forward-looking. Below is a curated journey through seven such sites across Japan.

## AKAGI SHRINE, TOKYO

Located in Tokyo's fashionable Kagurazaka district, Akagi Shrine was completely rebuilt in 2010 under the supervision of Kengo Kuma. Instead of restoring the old wooden hall, Kuma reimagined it as a modern, glass-encased pavilion. The walls are mostly transparent, letting visitors glimpse both the interior of the shrine and the trees beyond. Warm hinoki cypress latticework frames the glass, while traditional roof forms are reinterpreted using folded steel sheets.

Come nighttime, the warm glow from within the glass hall turns the structure into a lantern, beaming softly over the cobblestone streets. The grounds now contain a modern apartment building and a stylish cafe, Akagi Cafe — blending daily life with the sacred.

## MORE INFO

[akagi-jinja.jp](http://akagi-jinja.jp)



## ZUSHOJI TEMPLE, TOKYO

Situated in Tokyo's Minato ward, Zuishoji is a Zen temple that recently underwent a transformation, also led by Kengo Kuma. As the temple's main hall is designated as a Tangible Cultural Property, the 2018 project focused on rebuilding the monks' living quarters and reimagining how the temple connects to its urban surroundings.

Kuma's design utilizes a combination of steel and wood, creating a U-shaped cloister that wraps around a reflective pool. At its center sits a raised platform, which can be used for community gatherings, performances and seasonal events. The most striking feature is the distinct roofline — sharp, slanted and metallic — which cuts a clean silhouette against the Tokyo sky and contrasts with the soft beauty of the courtyard.

## MORE INFO

[visit-minato-city.tokyo/en/places/994](http://visit-minato-city.tokyo/en/places/994)



**MUSASHINO REIWA SHRINE,  
SAITAMA PREFECTURE**

Musashino Reiwa Shrine — officially Musashino Nimasu Uruwashiki Yamato no Miyashiro Shrine — is a rare example of a shrine built entirely in the current era. Designed by Kengo Kuma as part of Tokorozawa Sakura Town, a sprawling entertainment and shopping complex focused on Japanese pop culture, it blends traditional Shinto vocabulary with minimalist, contemporary design. Small red torii gates, reminiscent of Inari shrines, line the path to the main hall, while at night, a massive torii gate glows in neon, creating an unmistakably modern image.

The shrine enshrines the sun goddess, Amaterasu, and her brother Susanoo no Mikoto, the deity who oversees the storms and the seas. Step inside, and you'll be greeted with a stunning ceiling art display painted by Yoshitaka Amano, who has worked on beloved series like *Final Fantasy* and *Vampire Hunter D*.

**MORE INFO**

[musashinoreiwa.jp/en/](http://musashinoreiwa.jp/en/)



**HONPUKUJI TEMPLE,  
HYOGO PREFECTURE**

Architect Tadao Ando is famous for his mastery of concrete, and Honpukuji (also known as the Water Temple), on Awaji Island, is arguably his spiritual masterpiece. From the outside, the temple is almost invisible. Visitors see only a long, curved concrete wall and an oval lotus pond reflecting the sky.

The sanctuary lies not above, but below. Patrons descend a staircase that cuts directly through the center of the pond. Going deeper into the curved corridor, the light shifts, and visitors emerge into a circular underground hall where the concrete is bathed in the light cast by the vermilion main hall. This multisensory experience also echoes the Buddhist concept of spiritual purification and rebirth.

**MORE INFO**

[setouchi.travel/en/trip-ideas/14021/](http://setouchi.travel/en/trip-ideas/14021/)



KORINJI PHOTOGRAPHY: SHIGEO OGAWA; ARCHITECTURE: TAKASHI OKUNO & ASSOCIATES



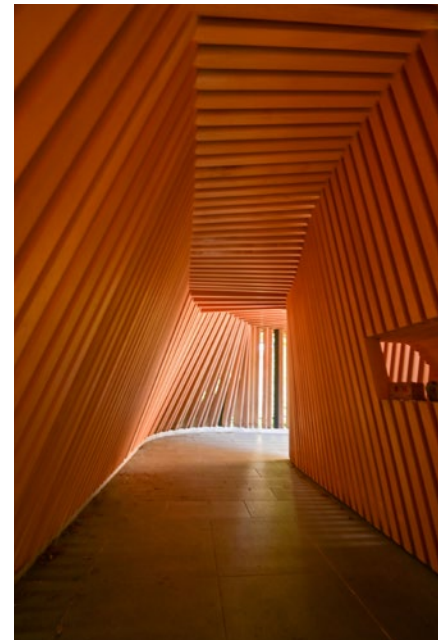
**KORINJI TEMPLE, EHIME PREFECTURE**

While not a temple hall in the traditional sense, Korinji's new ihaido (hall for housing Buddhist memorial tablets) in Imabari city — designed by Takashi Okuno — offers one of the most striking examples of contemporary Buddhist architecture in the Shikoku region. Standing stately among the surrounding traditional temples, the five-story hall is wrapped in hundreds of cypress rafters meant to evoke a pleated hakama garment, punctuated by 88 glass panes referencing both Zen cosmology and the pilgrimage routes in Shikoku.

These panes filter shifting light in a way that conveys "shogyo mujo" — the Buddhist notion that nothing is permanent. For those entering to pay respects to loved ones, the interior opens into warm wooden spaces. The top floor is framed entirely in glass, connecting visitors gently to the surrounding forest.

**MORE INFO**

[okunotakashi.jp/portfolio/](http://okunotakashi.jp/portfolio/)



**ASHIOSHA, HAKUSAN SHRINE, AICHI PREFECTURE**

Located in Nisshin city, Ashiosha is a subshrine of the Hakusan complex, dedicated specifically to the god of feet and legs; it's even been dubbed the "soccer shrine" due to the many soccer players that come to visit. Designed by architectural firm AUAU, this structure rethinks the physical relationship between the worshipper and the divine.

Unlike traditional shrines that enforce a rigid, linear approach to an altar, Ashiosha was designed as a "circulatory" experience, encouraging visitors to wander and linger within the sacred grove. The shrine is constructed from an intricate assembly of thin timber, creating a lattice that allows sunlight to filter through and the wind to pass freely, blending the interior with the surrounding forest.

**MORE INFO**

[hakusangu.org/asiosya.html](http://hakusangu.org/asiosya.html)



**DAZAIFU TENMANGU SHRINE, FUKUOKA PREFECTURE**

Dazaifu Tenmangu is one of Japan's most significant shrines, built over the grave of Sugawara no Michizane, the deity of culture, the arts and academia. With the main hall undergoing renovation until 2026, a "temporary" hall was required, and Sou Fujimoto was enlisted to help.

This iteration is defined by a minimalist black structure topped with an elliptical "forest-like" roof planted with plum trees — an homage to the shrine's legend of the flying plum tree that traveled overnight from Kyoto to Dazaifu to be with Sugawara no Michizane. Inside, textiles created by designer Maiko Kurogouchi's womenswear brand, Mame Kurogouchi, incorporate plum motifs and ancient dyeing methods, further weaving past and present together.

**MORE INFO**

[dzaifutenmangu.or.jp/en/](http://dzaifutenmangu.or.jp/en/)





# The Art of Floral Dominance

INSIDE THE EVOLVING WORLD OF TAMBI FLOWER'S NOA SAKAMOTO,  
WHOSE SCULPTURAL ARRANGEMENTS BLUR THE LINES BETWEEN BEAUTY, DISCOMFORT AND DESIRE

WORDS BY YNES SARAH FILLEUL

I first discovered Tambi Flower the same way many people probably do: in the middle of a late-night scroll through Instagram. His reels appeared on my feed — quick, stylish clips of him making arrangements where he transformed individual plants into sensuous bouquets and sculptures. The edits were sharp and snappy, often synced perfectly to the background music. He never spoke, never narrated. Instead, the camera watched as he trimmed stems with swift confidence, doused flowers in water with a satisfying splash, then assembled everything with a calm precision that felt almost surgical.

Noa Sakamoto, the mind and floral artist behind Tambi Flower,

always looks incredibly chic on-screen. Sometimes he wears a leather jacket inside the studio. Other days, it'll be a carefully tied silk scarf or a beret that makes him look more like a young artist in a Paris atelier than a florist in Hyogo. It's clear he has an eye not only for flowers, but for atmosphere and storytelling, too.

After watching enough of his reels, curiosity got the better of me. Two years ago, I decided to commission a bouquet from him in honor of a loved one's graduation in Osaka. He replied with warmth, and when pickup day arrived, I made my way to his studio, curious to see how this digital world of flowers translated in real life.

## ROOM TO BLOOM

Tambi Flower is tucked inside an unassuming building in the Koshienguchi district of Nishinomiya, Hyogo Prefecture — the kind of neighborhood where university students bike to class and local mom-and-pop shops buzz quietly in the afternoon. It didn't look like the sort of place where an artist with hundreds of thousands of Instagram views would be working.

When I pushed open the door, the space felt like a compact, slightly chaotic little laboratory of living things. Concrete walls and floors kept everything cool and grounded, while metal shelves overflowed with flowers: waxy tropicals, slender branches, velvety petals and long-limbed stems that curled as if stretching toward the light.

Behind the counter, Sakamoto looked up with a friendly smile. Tinted sunglasses cast a slight color across his face. He was in the midst of crafting a bouquet, trimming a spidery flower with quick, rhythmic cuts.

I had ordered my arrangement online with only the vaguest instructions: dark, cool, something unique. I left the rest entirely to him. The bouquet he handed me felt like something out of a Tim Burton film. A violet anthurium, a shell-pink rose and chrysanthemum and a dusky dahlia sat together like a quartet, fringed with black leaves and navy paper. Needless to say, everyone asked about it at the ceremony, marveling at how cool and unusual it was compared to all the standard bouquets that were being passed around for photos.



That day, Sakamoto was warm, soft-spoken and thoughtful. At the time, I didn't know he would become even more in-demand, or that his work would take on an increasingly artistic direction. Years passed, and as Tambi Flower grew, I reached out again, this time as a writer, to interview him for *Tokyo Weekender*.

**AN ORIGIN STORY  
BORN FROM STILLNESS**

Sakamoto's journey into floristry didn't begin with childhood dreams or formal training, but rather in a period of silence and reflection: During the pandemic, he suddenly found himself with hours of unfilled time. One afternoon, on impulse, he decided to get rid of all the furniture in his room except for his desk. When he stepped back to look at what he'd done, the space felt hollow.

"The room looked so lonely," he told TW over email. "So I tried placing some flowers there. That was the first step." The flowers softened the emptiness and made the room feel more alive. He kept buying more. He noticed things he hadn't before — the way the stems curved, the way colors shifted in different lighting and how the textures carried emotion. Slowly but surely, flowers became his language.

"Plants don't argue or complain. They don't talk back. I can face them completely honestly," he explains. "I'm not very good with words, so flowers are always helping me say them."



“  
‘Tambi’ is about  
showing beauty  
through what lies  
behind it, including  
the grotesque,  
the gloomy, the decayed.  
”

**WHERE BEAUTY MEETS DISCOMFORT**

Sakamoto's style isn't about prettiness in the traditional sense. His arrangements often have tension — pairing soft petals with thorny lines, or setting glossy blooms against stems that seem on the edge of collapse. This duality is intentional; at the core of his practice is a concept he calls "tambi," borrowing from the Japanese word for decadence and beauty. His interpretation, however, leans into the darker side.

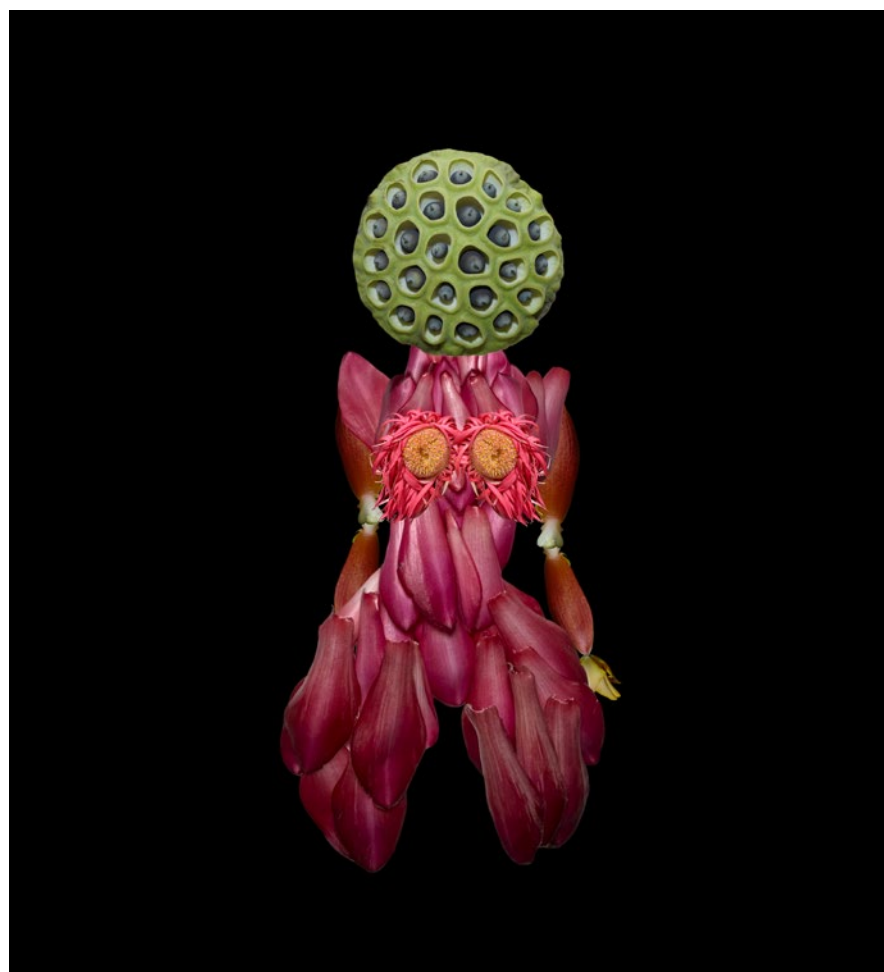


“To me, ‘tambi’ is about showing beauty through what lies behind it, including the grotesque, the gloomy, the decayed,” he says. “It’s not only softness and prettiness.”

This worldview eventually culminated in Floral Dominance, a philosophy that acknowledges the inherent violence in floristry. “We cut flowers — we kill them — and then use them to decorate,” he writes. “That alone places us in a position of dominance over flowers.”

Rather than pretend that this isn’t happening, the artist incorporates that discomfort into his aesthetic. The beauty, he believes, is born not just from the bloom, but from the tension and unease found in the act of arranging.

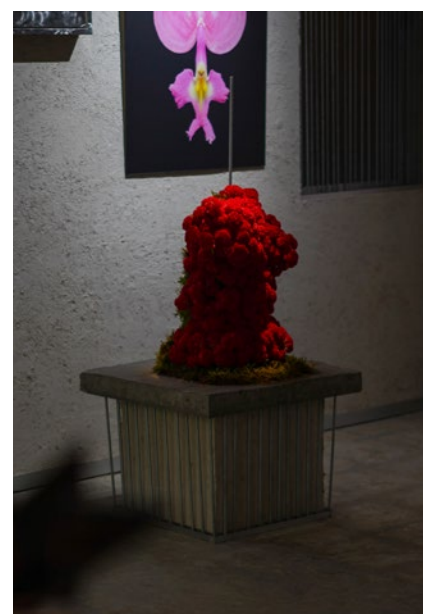
His work also carries sensuality. Flowers are glossy, wet, alive. And when they wilt, they collapse like something breathing its last. “The beauty of decay and the beauty of life feel close to human desire,” he says. “Plants and people share similar patterns of wanting.”



“

The beauty of decay and the beauty of life feel close to human desire.

”





One of the things that makes Sakamoto's work so striking is its sculptural quality. His pieces don't sit passively in vases but jut, curl, unfurl and twist with intention. "Once you decide to use flowers, you're handling life," he notes. "So to me, flowers aren't something I decorate. They're something I'm allowed to use." This sense of responsibility — the idea that flowers permit him to shape them — adds weight to his artistic choices. His work isn't merely about self-expression; it's also a form of collaboration with the plants he chooses to use.

Sakamoto hopes to share this worldview with others. He recently held his first solo exhibition, "Counter," in Pupil, a studio space in Hyogo. Although he designed and set up the exhibition himself, he also invited visitors to create their own sculpture using 50 flowers. Through collage and poetry, the exhibition connected physical form with emotional mapping.



Outside live arrangements, Sakamoto also creates photographic works in which flowers become humanoid creatures. He dismantles plants, then reassembles petals, stems and roots into figures placed against a black background. Some pieces are paired with poems he writes himself. A piece called "My Eyes" shows an eyeless creature with a lotus seed head; another, called "Blooming," shows a creature with auburn leaves as hair wearing a garment made of crumpled petals and dried leaves.

#### TOWARD WHAT COMES NEXT

Today, Sakamoto has more than 335,000 followers on Instagram — a number that still surprises him. But despite his online fame, he remains grounded.

"Social media doesn't directly influence my expression," he said. "But I'm grateful. Warm comments and clients who trust me . . . they're a bit like medicine to me. They reassure me that it's okay to trust my direction and keep going."

Beyond his first solo exhibition at Pupil, Sakamoto has begun stretching his practice internationally, most recently through a collaboration with Berlin-based design and architecture studio Fundamental on the Gravity Vase. It's a steel-and-glass vessel engineered to give floral sculptures a new sense of freedom. Composed of multiple geometric grids, the vessel allows plants to be placed all throughout, from the top or the sides.

As for what comes next, he hopes to continue both his fresh-flower work and his foray into sculpture and mixed media. One day, he wants to fulfill his dream of showing in Tokyo — "the big city," he jokes. From those early days in an empty room to now, Noa Sakamoto's practice has grown into a clear, distinctive voice that continues to evolve as he reshapes how we see and feel floral art.

#### MORE INFO

Follow Noa Sakamoto on Instagram at [@tambiflower](https://www.instagram.com/tambiflower).



# Timeless Fukui

FROM CENTURIES-OLD TEMPLES TO QUIET COASTAL TOWNS, FUKUI OFFERS A SERENE ESCAPE WHERE HISTORY, CRAFTSMANSHIP AND NATURE INTERTWINE

WORDS BY CHRISTIAN DAKIN

Standing in contrast to the relentless energy of Japan's bustling cities, Fukui Prefecture is a sanctuary by the sea — one of the country's best-kept secrets, where forests of Japanese cedar rise from misty valleys and rivers wind toward the coast. Small towns cling to the slopes, temples and shrines emerge quietly from the surrounding trees, and the air is scented with salt and pine.

Famous for its rich spiritual history, local cuisine and centuries-old craftsmanship, Fukui is perfect for travelers seeking depth and tranquility. In a single day, you can immerse yourself in two completely different, yet equally atmospheric worlds: Echizen Washi Village, home to Japan's only shrine dedicated to the goddess of paper, and Heisenji Hakusan Shrine, often called the country's most beautiful moss temple.

Here, you can press a sheet of paper by hand, follow moss-covered temple paths and take in landscapes so serene they feel suspended in time. Read on for a sample itinerary that will fully immerse you in Fukui.



Passing through the main torii gate, the atmosphere shifts. Towering Japanese cedar trees filter the light, and moss clings to stone lanterns and steps. Locals often say the shrine is at its most beautiful in the rain, when the greenery deepens and the forest feels more still. From the front, the shrine building's roofline appears intentionally misaligned — a design choice meant to avoid perfection, which could be seen as a slight to the gods.

## ECHIZEN WASHI EXPERIENCE AT RYOZO PAPER MILL

After visiting the shrine, walk down the street to Ryozo Paper Mill to try your hand at making washi, using traditional Echizen techniques that have been passed down through generations. Paper is made by carefully sifting a viscous pulp into a sheet, which is then patterned using molds. One particularly popular pattern evokes a spider's web, thanks to the delicate holes that punctuate the paper.

The end result is a unique piece of history that fits in the palm of your hands. Both functional and decorative, it can be used to adorn a window while still allowing light to pass through.



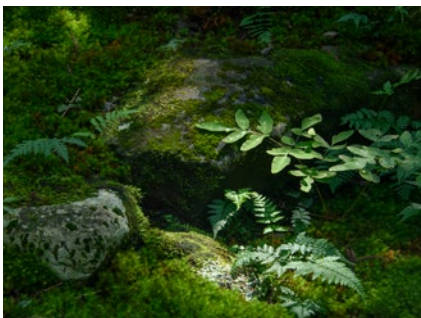
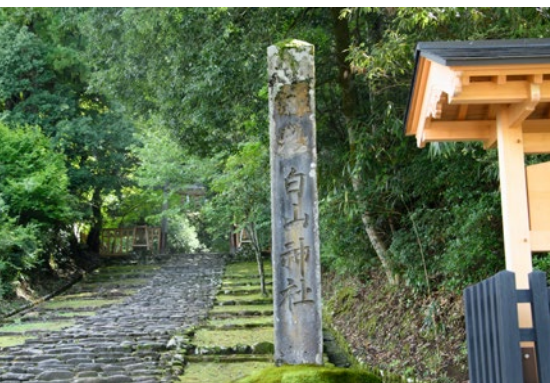
**OKAMOTO-OTAKI SHRINE: HOME OF JAPAN'S PAPER GODDESS** Start the day in Echizen, a region celebrated for its washi paper. Here, you'll find Okamoto-Otaki Shrine, which has a history spanning over 1,500 years; it's also the only shrine in Japan dedicated to Kawakami Gozen, the goddess of paper. According to legend, it was founded after a princess appeared upriver of the village of Otaki and taught the townspeople how to make washi. The current main hall, built in 1843, is recognized as an Important Cultural Property.





More than 25 species of moss grow around the shrine, and over 200 can be found in the surrounding forest, creating a cool but humid environment. If you're drawn to the aesthetic of moss growing on virtually everything, this shrine is a must-visit.

At the height of its power, Heisenji Hakusan housed dozens of shrines and temples, along with living quarters for thousands of monks and workers. Much of the site was destroyed in an uprising in 1574, but the surviving grounds retain a stillness and depth that make it one of Japan's most atmospheric shrines.



#### THE MOSS TEMPLE OF FUKUI

About an hour northeast via car lies Heisenji Hakusan Shrine. Known for its sprawling mossy landscape and ancient Japanese cedar trees, it's one of the most serene "power spots" in Japan. Originally founded as a Buddhist temple in 717 by the monk Taicho, it became a Shinto shrine during the Meiji-era separation of Buddhism and Shinto. The shrine is dedicated to Mount Haku, one of Japan's three sacred mountains.



#### ROKUSAI CAFE

A small path from the shrine leads to Rokusai, a charming cafe. In keeping with the theme of Heisenji Hakusan, Rokusai primarily offers matcha-centric drinks and desserts, which recall the area's mossy beauty — the moss ball cheesecake and matcha latte are especially memorable. The interior is relaxing and quaint, with a tatami mat room. It's an ideal environment for sitting back and admiring the greenery outside.

Whether you're making a fresh press of Echizen washi or sipping a rich matcha latte surrounded by a carpet of moss, Fukui's secret sanctuaries prove that the most memorable travel moments often lie just a bit farther off the beaten path.



#### MORE INFO

Thanks to the extension of the Hokuriku Shinkansen, Fukui is now easier to reach than ever. From Tokyo or Ueno Station, take a direct-service Hokuriku Shinkansen (Kagayaki or Hakutaka) to Fukui Station. The trip takes between three and three and a half hours. This route is fully covered by the Japan Rail Pass and the Hokuriku Arch Pass, offering excellent value for overseas visitors.



# Floating Worlds

SIX STUNNING TORII GATES THROUGHOUT JAPAN THAT APPEAR TO FLOAT ON THE WATER'S SURFACE

**A**cross Japan, a few torii appear to rise from the sea or stand lightly on the surface of a lake. Their character shifts with the tide and time of day — sometimes reflective and still, sometimes framed by waves or mist. Below, you'll find several worth seeking out.

## **HAKONE SHRINE, KANAGAWA PREFECTURE**

Set on the shores of Lake Ashi, Hakone Shrine's Heiwa no Torii is one of Japan's most photographed spots; if you arrive during peak hours, you'll likely have to wait in line for quite a while to take a photo beneath it. But despite being a popular tourist spot, it still invokes tranquility and a sense of awe; the gate stands at the water's edge, forest presses in from behind and the lake expands out toward the horizon.

Many visitors arrive for the classic photograph, but it's worth taking time to walk through the torii's surrounding forested shrine complex, which dates back to the eighth century and contains several historic subshrines.

### **MORE INFO**

[hakonenavi.jp/international/en/spot/523](http://hakonenavi.jp/international/en/spot/523)



## **ITSUKUSHIMA SHRINE, HIROSHIMA PREFECTURE**

Itsukushima Shrine's torii at Miyajima is among the most photographed symbols of Japan, and justifiably so; since the 1600s, it's been considered one of Japan's Three Great Views. First established in the sixth century and rebuilt several times, the gate rises majestically from the Seto Inland Sea, standing in striking contrast with the surrounding mountainscape.

At high tide, it appears to hover; at low tide, visitors cross the seafloor on foot and stand beneath its enormous pillars. The island itself is equally rewarding, with walking trails to Mount Misen, serene shrine buildings built over water and resident deer drifting through town. Stay overnight if you can. When the day-trippers leave, lanterns glow along the shoreline, creating a serene and ethereal atmosphere.

### **MORE INFO**

[itsukushimajinja.jp/en/](http://itsukushimajinja.jp/en/)



**OUO SHRINE,  
SAGA PREFECTURE**

Ouo Shrine can be found in Tara town, Saga Prefecture, a place with a charmingly mystical claim to fame: Because it has the largest tidal range in Japan, it's said to be the place where you can most clearly feel the power of the moon. The torii gates at Ouo Shrine come in a set of three, extending into the Ariake Sea in an arresting procession.

This is perhaps the best place to appreciate the town's famous tidal fluctuations. At low tide, visitors can walk out across wet sand and stones directly toward the gates; at high tide, they appear to emerge from the sea at a distance.

**MORE INFO**

[tara-kankou.jp/spot/post-18.html](http://tara-kankou.jp/spot/post-18.html)

**SAKURAI SHRINE,  
FUKUOKA PREFECTURE**

The dazzling white torii gate at Sakurai Shrine provides a stunning visual, emerging boldly from the cerulean sea. Behind it stand the famous meoto iwa — “wedded rocks” bound by a shimenawa rope. The name refers to the fact that they appear to be leaning toward each other like a loving couple, and they're said to represent the Shinto deities Izanagi and Izanami. This sacred site is thus thought to be especially auspicious for

matters relating to love.

Futamigaura Beach, where the shrine stands, is an easy day trip from Fukuoka city. Known for its relaxed atmosphere and stylish cafes, it's also recognized as one of the country's top 100 beaches, as well as one of the top 100 spots for viewing the sunset.

**MORE INFO**

[crossroadfukuoka.jp/en/spot/12456](http://crossroadfukuoka.jp/en/spot/12456)



**SHIRAHIGE SHRINE, SHIGA PREFECTURE**

Shirahige Shrine sits on the western bank of Lake Biwa, Japan's largest lake, and its offshore torii is known for its quiet beauty. It's a view that's breathtaking in its simplicity: one gate, open water, no competing structures along the horizon. The shrine is dedicated to longevity, and its name, which means “white beard,” suggests an ancient guardian figure.

Sunrise is the most atmospheric time to visit, when the lake surface often reflects the torii so clearly that it appears doubled. Because Biwa is ringed with cycling routes and lakeside inns, the site works naturally into broader itineraries — particularly those connecting Shiga and Kyoto.

**MORE INFO**

[en.biwako-visitors.jp/spot/detail/306](http://en.biwako-visitors.jp/spot/detail/306)

**OARAI ISOSAKI SHRINE, IBARAKI PREFECTURE**

On the Pacific-facing coast of Ibaraki, the Kamiiso no Torii stands on a rock shelf where waves break hard and consistently. Unlike the calm-water environments at Hakone or Biwa, this gate's identity is shaped by movement and force — it stands dramatically on the rugged coastline, and waves crash around its base.

Sunrise is the peak moment; photographers often gather before first light, waiting for the sun to rise directly behind the gate. A short walk inland leads to the main shrine buildings, which have a distinctive feature: In place of the traditional guardian komainu lion-dogs, the shrine has statues of frogs.

**MORE INFO**

[visit.ibarakiguide.jp/en/sightseeing/22355/](http://visit.ibarakiguide.jp/en/sightseeing/22355/)



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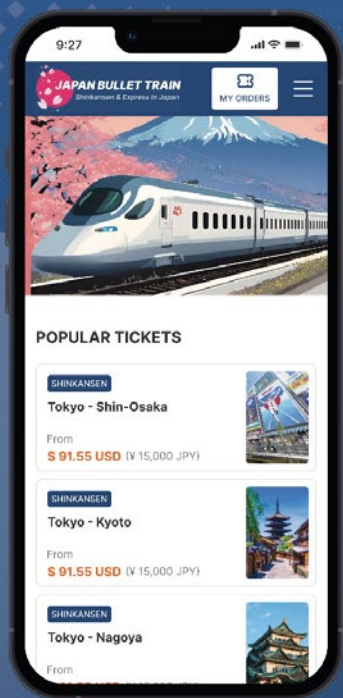
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# ESCAPE



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## JANU TOKYO

Inside the city's newest high-end urban sanctuary

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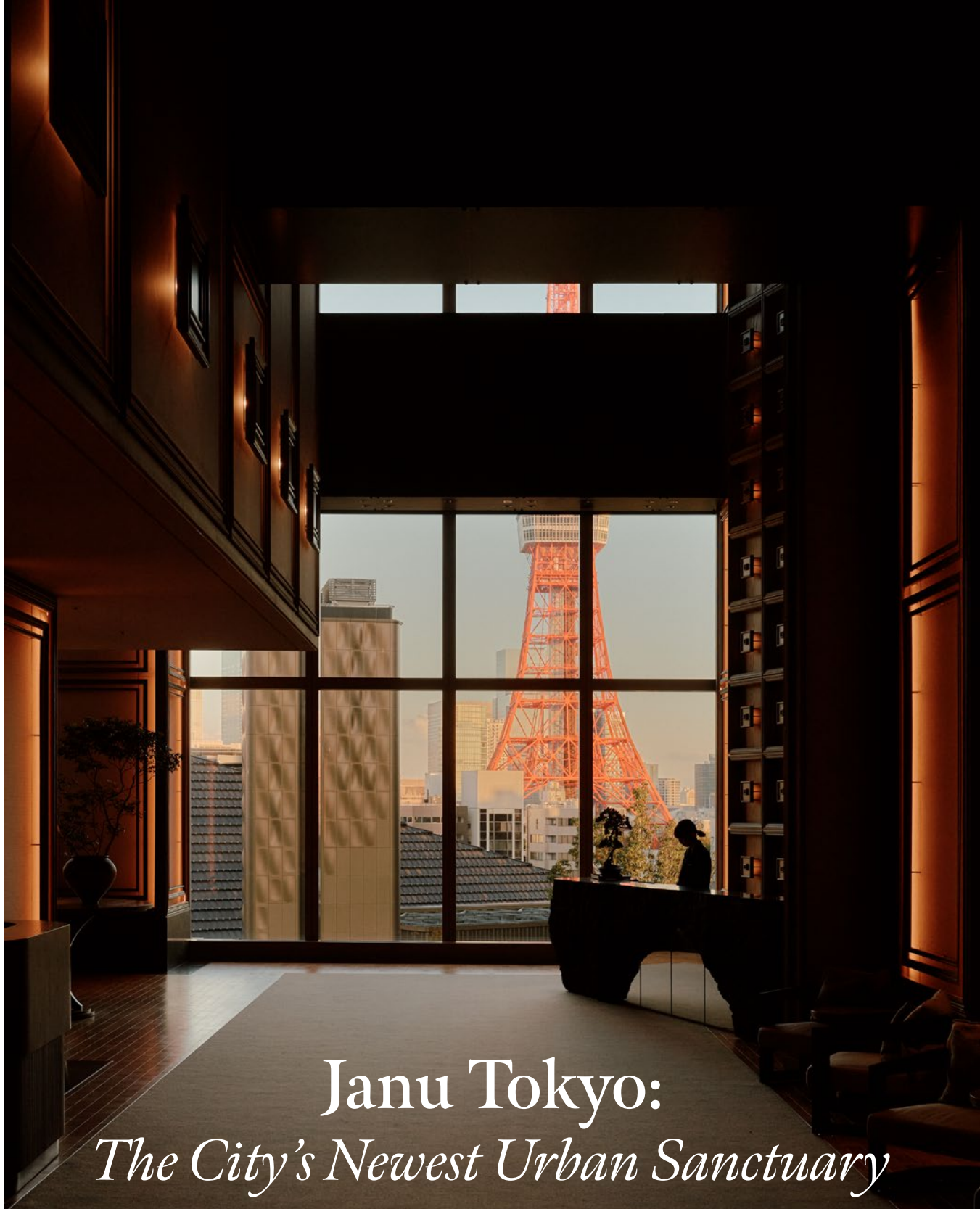
## AUBERGE TOKITO

A hidden treasure tucked away in Tachikawa

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## ESPACIO NAGOYA CASTLE

Combining art and luxury into a stay fit for royalty



# Janu Tokyo: *The City's Newest Urban Sanctuary*

SOARING ABOVE AZABUDAI HILLS, JANU TOKYO IS AN ULTRA-LUXURIOUS  
HIDEAWAY THAT NEVER LOSES SIGHT OF ITS SURROUNDINGS

WORDS BY ALINA JOAN ITO

**T**hough Tokyo has no shortage of luxury hotels, Janu Tokyo manages to stand out. Just under two years old, it's the inaugural location of the Aman Group's newest brand, Janu — a younger, city-loving little sibling to the renowned luxury hospitality group, which is known for ultra-premium service and blissfully serene stays.

Conveniently located in Azabudai Hills, an impressive multicomplex facility that blends greenery and design with the aim of being a “modern urban village,” Janu is designed with connection in mind, with ample space for both wellness and socializing. If Aman Tokyo is a tranquil, private sanctuary, Janu Tokyo feels a bit more lively — an urban escape that draws energy from the city around it, with plenty of places to mingle.

## LIVING LARGE

Stepping foot into Janu's soaring gallery entrance, guests are immediately immersed in the hotel's unique worldview. One of the most striking things about Janu Tokyo is its scale; designed by Jean-Michel Gathy of Denniston Architects, it feels impressively expansive in a city where space is the ultimate luxury.

A granite welcome counter anchors the arrival area, with a stunning view of Tokyo Tower from the floor-to-ceiling windows just beyond it. Thoughtful design details throughout the space blend European and Japanese influences. At the entrance, wainscot-like wall paneling sits alongside intricate lattice woodwork and woven rope detailing inspired by shimenawa, sacred ropes in Japanese culture. The rooms and public spaces are elegant and sleek, decorated in understated hues to encourage a sense of warmth and relaxation.

With 122 rooms and suites — starting at a generous 55 square meters — Janu offers room to breathe. Balconies face the terraced greenery and the sculptural landscape of Azabudai Hills, and many rooms have a view of Tokyo Tower rising beyond the cityscape. The neighborhood itself, shaped by Pelli Clarke & Partners and Thomas Heatherwick, amplifies the hotel's sense of being a refined urban retreat: It's a district of courtyards, boutiques and winding paths that feels like an urban hillside enclave.

## A MONUMENTAL APPROACH TO WELLNESS

Of everything Janu offers, its sprawling wellness center may be one of the strongest draws. At 4,000 square meters, it is one of the largest facilities of its kind in the city, divided into two clear zones: one focused on fitness and performance, the other built for rest and recovery.



The active zone is enough to make any fitness-lover rejoice. The 340-square-meter gym houses state-of-the-art equipment alongside five movement studios, including a spin studio, an entire boxing ring, a golf simulator and a spacious yoga and Pilates studio.

Just beyond the fitness zone, the hydrotherapy and thermal area has a more serene feel. A 25-meter lap pool anchors the room, accompanied by a jacuzzi set beside a fireplace and rows of loungers meant for quiet conversation. In the changing areas, guests can unwind in Japanese-style public baths, cold plunges and saunas. Or you can book one of the two private Spa Houses. Each Spa House includes a treatment room, a living space with a daybed, an outdoor terrace, hot and cold baths and either a hammam (Turkish-style hot steam bath) or banya (traditional

Russian steam bath), with a sauna specialist guiding the session.

Art, too, threads through the space as subtle commentary. Vibrant Irena Orlov canvases bring energy to the fitness areas, while wave-inspired works by Haruko Tsuji and sculptural pieces by Naoto Kashiwagi echo the movement of water around the pools.

## DINING CONNECTION

Food is where Janu leans fully into its social DNA. With seven restaurants and a bar, the hotel functions almost as its own culinary neighbourhood. In contrast to the tranquil oasis of the wellness center, these spaces exhibit a vibrant atmosphere, creating an environment perfect for reveling in the pleasure of gathering.

At the center of this scene is Janu Mercato, a sunlit, all-day dining emporium inspired by

Italian market halls. Floor-to-ceiling windows flood the marble counters in natural light, while a towering olive tree artwork perches stately in the dining room. The restaurant's three open kitchens add a sense of theater: Expect fresh pasta rolled and cut before your eyes, gleaming displays of seafood prepared to order and charcuterie and cheeses carved to your liking. The energy is warm and convivial, suited for animated lunches and early-evening spritzes on the pet-friendly terrace overlooking the garden.

Beyond Mercato, the hotel's dining spaces take on distinct identities: an omakase counter enveloped in

timber and kumiko screens at *Ligura*; *Hu Jing*, a colorful, lacquered space for contemporary Chinese fine dining; *Janu Grill*, a grill with a distinctly Western feel; and a *sumibiyaki* (charcoal grilling) annex with a riveted copper counter at *Sumi*. The hotel's in-house patisserie, *Janu Patisserie*, is perfect for indulging your sweet tooth at any time of day, while the bar, *Janu Bar*, is one of the hotel's many crown jewels. Set in the fifth-floor entrance lounge, it provides an unforgettable backdrop for enjoying specialty cocktails with one of the best Tokyo Tower views in the city.



#### LIFESTYLE IN ACCOMMODATION

Ultimately, Janu is designed as a place to expand — your routine, your social world, your sense of well-being. It balances Tokyo's charged energy with a sense of true calm, leaning into how many travelers — and increasingly, locals — want to navigate a dense megacity: prioritizing wellness and carving out a space for inspiration.

The result is a property that functions as both a hotel and lifestyle framework. Janu's vision extends beyond its rooms and facilities, shaping how guests move through their stay and, ultimately, how they think about daily routines when they return home.

#### MORE INFO

To book a stay at Janu Tokyo, visit [janu.com/janu-tokyo/](https://janu.com/janu-tokyo/).

# Retro Japan by the Sea

DISCOVER THE CHARMINGLY RETRO COASTAL CITY OF ATAMI,  
WITH ANCIENT HOT SPRINGS, SACRED HEIGHTS AND PANORAMIC ART SPACES



WORDS BY YNES SARAH FILLEUL,  
PHOTOS BY LISA KNIGHT

For decades, Atami was famed as Japan's glamorous seaside escape, a place where Showa-era Tokyoites came to unwind in hot springs. Today, it remains suffused with an enchanting retro aura — think charming arcade shopping streets, retro kissaten cafes and misty onsen that feel older than time.

About 30 minutes from Tokyo by Shinkansen, Atami is the kind of getaway that feels almost too convenient — compact, walkable and easy to wander without a plan. And because the city hosts seasonal events like fireworks, festivals and celebrations almost weekly, there's always something happening.

## HOT SPRINGS AND SHRINES

Atami's story begins with water. The town's name literally means "hot sea," a reference to its legendary hot springs dotting its shores. One of its lesser known — and most fascinating — onsen sources lies hidden in an unassuming cave above town. Discovered more than 1,300 years ago, Hashiri-yu is a rare horizontal hot spring source, with waters that gush forth from the cliffside. It's often regarded as one of Japan's three oldest hot springs.

About a 20-minute walk for Hashiri-yu, you'll find Izusan Shrine, a sacred site that

dates back over a millennium and was a center for Shugendo, a form of mountain asceticism. Izusan is also protected by its two guardian deities, a pair of red and white dragons known as Sekibyaku Niryu. The red dragon governs fire, the white governs water, and together they're believed to create the hot springs that have sustained Atami for ages. Their presence explains the shrine's reputation as a potent spiritual "power spot."

## MORE INFO

Plan your trip to Atami on [visitatami.com](http://visitatami.com),  
and follow the tourism bureau's Instagram at [@visitatami](https://www.instagram.com/visitatami).



## PANORAMIC VIEWS, ART AND ARCHITECTURE

For a moment that feels cinematic, ride the vintage cable car up to the Jukkoku Pass Observation Deck. Set on the peak of a mountain, it offers a stunning panoramic view: Mount Fuji rises like a quiet giant in the distance while the sea flashes far below. The space is dotted with photo spots, wooden platforms and hammocks that are perfect for lounging. While you're there, stop by Tengoku Cafe to sip on refreshing drinks while taking in the scenery.

Another can't-miss destination is MOA Museum of Art. Its architecture alone feels worth the trip — neo-futuristic, illuminated escalators, sweeping staircases that overlook the Pacific Ocean. Focusing primarily on East Asian art, the museum has a core collection that contains three National Treasures and numerous Important Cultural Properties. Once you've seen everything, step outside and wind down in a serene Japanese garden fitted with a teahouse that serves up freshly whisked matcha along with seasonal wagashi confections.

# Havens of History

NESTLED IN THE FORESTS OF IBARAKI, SECLUDED KOMINKA (TRADITIONAL HOMES) ALLOW FOR A TRAVEL EXPERIENCE THAT'S TRANQUIL, AUTHENTIC AND TRULY TRANSPORTIVE

PHOTOS BY LISA KNIGHT



Some accommodations feel like a place to sleep; a kominka feels like a world you step into. Kominka are old, wooden residences, many of which are more than 100 years old, built using traditional Japanese construction methods and materials. They can be found throughout the country, scattered through quiet back streets and rural areas like portals to another era.

Ibaraki Prefecture, just north of Tokyo, is an ideal place for a kominka stay. Despite being a short train ride from the capital, the region feels worlds away, with misty forests, wooded gorges and scenic mountains. Once you arrive, the urge to hurry dissipates, and the concrete and conveniences of city life are replaced by natural colors and landscapes.

Staying in a kominka here is an authentic and fully immersive experience. The sound of wind in the trees, the smell of old wood and a slower rhythm of daily life all become part of the visit, letting you experience Ibaraki in a way that's impossible from a hotel room.

#### SHOWA EXPERIENCE INN RIN: A LIVING TIME CAPSULE

Across Ibaraki, several kominka have been restored and opened to visitors. Among these lodgings, a stand-out is Showa Experience Inn Rin. Housed in a building that's over a century old, it's a place that immediately shifts your internal rhythm. Wide wooden floors carry the grooves of generations of footsteps, shoji screens filter morning light into soft gold and an old-style irori hearth radiates warmth.

While here, you can enjoy authentic experiences like dining on rice steamed in a kamado cooking range and submerging yourself in a goemon-buro bath heated by firewood. A dog run ensures those with four-legged friends can bring the whole family, too.

Located in the coastal city of Hokota, Showa Experience Inn Rin is a great base for exploring the prefecture's cultural and historic sites. An hour-long drive brings you to Oiwa Jinja Shrine, a famous and spiritually potent "power spot" that's thought to be one of Japan's oldest places of worship. The atmosphere here is awe-inspiring, with towering Japanese cedar trees that form canopy over moss-carpeted paths.



**SUIGOEN: LAKESIDE STILLNESS AND MODERN COMFORTS**

For a more remote experience, Suigoen is an elegant whole-house rental set on the shores of Lake Kasumigaura, the second-largest inland lake in Japan. It's a stunning and tranquil location, where quiet forests, mirror-like lake views and birdsong at dawn invite you to slow down completely.

The architecture is as impressive as the scenery, preserving the soul of the original kominka — wooden beams, deep eaves, tatami rooms — while adding spacious bathrooms, a second-floor loft filled with natural light and quiet corners for reading, writing or simply doing nothing at all. Upon request, Suigoen can arrange an in-house chef to prepare breakfast and dinner with locally sourced ingredients, letting guests connect with Ibaraki's food culture without leaving the house. Visitors can also opt to stay in its sister location, Kominka Eguchiya, a Meiji-era sake brewery that has been reborn as a quaint guest house.

For a hands-on glimpse into local crafts, visit Tsumugi no Sato in Yuki city, where the delicate and ancient art of Yuki tsumugi silk weaving is preserved. Visitors can create coasters, table runners or other keepsakes using looms and colored threads.



**THE TASTES OF IBARAKI**

Few ways capture a region like its food, and Ibaraki is no exception. Restaurants here reflect the abundance of local produce and the care of those who grow it — a perfect complement to a kominka stay. Fruit lovers will rejoice at Yasudakaju Orchards, which lets visitors pick seasonal grapes, nashi pears or persimmons on-site, ensuring the freshest flavors possible.

If you're looking for a traditional Japanese meal, Mori no Sobaya Seimon is a family-run soba restaurant nestled in a small forest of oak, beech and maple about 20 minutes by car from Showa Experience Inn Rin. Indoor and terrace seating allow diners to enjoy the garden alongside meals of buckwheat soba and unbelievably crispy tempura. A sweet finish of buckwheat ice cream keeps the theme going to the last bite.



For a high-end, intimate experience, Yoshiki Fuji in Hitachiomiya showcases Ibaraki's bounty with a refined, inventive touch. Chef Yoshiki Fuji, who lent the restaurant his name, trained in renowned restaurants throughout Japan and Spain before settling in Ibaraki, drawn in by its robust food culture. His menu highlights local vegetables, self-cured ham and seasonal ingredients. With only six seats per service, every dish feels deliberate and connected to the land.



However you might like to experience a destination, Ibaraki has something that will align with all kinds of travelers, but most importantly, it's somewhere to slow

down — an opportunity seldom found in the city. Connect with the land and its history through the people, craft and cuisine, and take with you the memory of a place that has never forgotten where it came from.



**MORE INFO**

To book a stay at Showa Experience Inn Rin, visit [airbnb.com/rooms/1045225414054133181](https://airbnb.com/rooms/1045225414054133181).

To book a stay at Suigoen, visit [suigoen.com/en/](https://suigoen.com/en/).



# An Oasis of Calm in Tokyo

LOCATED IN A QUIET NEIGHBORHOOD IN TACHIKAWA, AUBERGE TOKITO IS A HIDDEN TREASURE THAT FOREGROUNDS JAPANESE FLAVORS AND AESTHETICS

WORDS BY MATTHEW HERNON



**L**ocated in an unassuming neighborhood on the outskirts of central Tokyo, Auberge Tokito feels like a quiet revelation. This refined retreat — featuring just four suites, a kaiseki restaurant and a dedicated tearoom — offers a tranquil, restorative experience within the city. Designed by renowned architect Shinichiro Ogata, it reinterprets the traditional ryokan through a contemporary lens: clean, minimalist lines; warm, natural materials; an intimate garden; and narrow pathways that guide guests gently through the property.

It's only a minute's walk from JR Nishi-Kunitachi Station in Tachikawa, but it feels worlds away from urban life. The transition from the outside world to the serene atmosphere of the auberge is instant.

## SPACIOUS SUITES

Upon arrival, guests pass through the grand entrance to a softly lit reception lounge accented with vacuum-tube amplifiers and a curated selection of vinyl. A seasonal welcome drink chosen by the in-house sommelier sets the tone, before guests are escorted to their suites — each 106 square meters and approached via a stone-lined garden path. Every room features a private open-air bath fed by mineral-rich hot spring water drawn



from 1,300 meters below the property. Floor-to-ceiling garden views, retro record players and elastic horsehair pillows complete the experience.

The rooms feel like private residences — spacious, deeply comfortable and composed with the same careful intentionality seen throughout the property. Natural textures dominate: pale woods, washi-like textiles, soft lighting that warms rather than illuminates. As a unique perk, each suite includes a dedicated massage room alongside a generous living space and private garden.

#### TOKITO'S FACILITIES

While it must be tempting to spend the whole afternoon relaxing in one's suite — especially for those who take advantage of the in-room spa services — it's also worth exploring the grounds. A variety of activities are available to guests, including a private pottery class with the property's producer, Yoshinori Ishii, in which you can make your own piece. Fired on-site, your creation will be delivered to you

upon completion.

Visiting the enchanting Sabo tearoom is also recommended; it hosts tea experiences with varieties of carefully selected tea, savory bites and confections. (The tearoom is also open to day visitors, but advance reservations are required.)

Dinner is served in the Shokubo dining area, where guests may choose a courtyard-facing table, one of three private rooms or



— space permitting — a seat at the counter, which offers an intimate view of the chef's work (priority is given to overnight guests). Wherever one sits, the experience promises something singular.

#### ARTISAN CUISINE

Food is at the heart of the Tokito experience. Ishii, a world-renowned chef, is invested in every step of the culinary process — he even makes most of the restaurant's plates and bowls by hand. The restaurant, he says, is centered around the culinary concept of "artisan cuisine," with a number of skilled chefs crafting multicourse meals that are unconstrained by the rules of traditional kaiseki techniques. It's an establishment that prides itself on seeking out high-quality and often rare ingredients from all over Japan, sourced directly from sustainable producers, fishermen and experienced hunters, while also using food that might have otherwise been discarded.

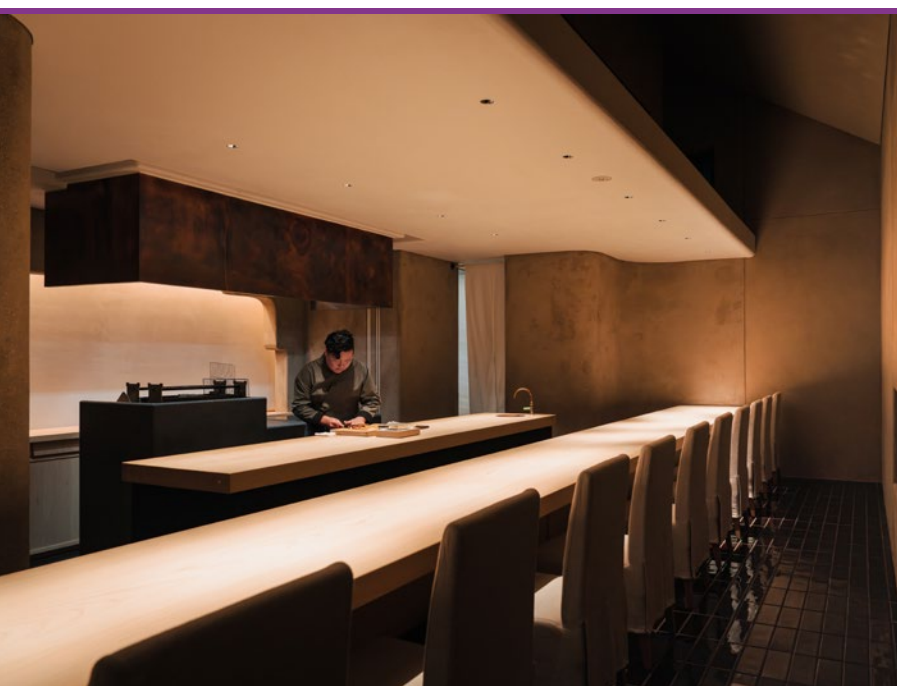


General manager and head chef Kenji Okawara, who leads the team alongside Ishii, believes it's vital for Tokito's chefs to look beyond what is "traditionally" seen as being in season. "March might be the best time to eat mountain vegetables in Kyoto, but in Hokkaido, the situation is different," he says. "Sourcing our ingredients nationwide with a variety of producers gives us more flexibility and allows us to be more creative than, say, an established kaiseki restaurant in Kyoto where ingredients tend to be procured locally. We're less constrained, which means we can surprise our customers."

Menus change every few months, though one constant is *ujio*: a rich, viscous kombu-and-salt seasoning that serves as a substitute for soy sauce. Ishii came up with the idea while working as executive chef at the trendy London eatery Umu. “I saw customers covering their fish in soy sauce, spoiling the flavor of the ingredients,” he says. This alternative, designed to “enhance the flavor of the seafood,” is made from Rausu kombu — a rare, umami-rich type of kelp from the Rausu area of Hokkaido. “It’s proved to be very popular.”

#### A PASSION PROJECT

Ishii and Okawara first met while working at the acclaimed national cuisine restaurant Kyoto Kitcho Arashiyama. The pair became very close before heading in different directions. Okawara enhanced his reputation domestically, working at various Michelin-starred eateries. Ishii, meanwhile, headed overseas, living in New York and Geneva before taking over the reins at Umu, which went on to become the first Japanese restaurant in Europe to be awarded two Michelin stars.



Tokito brought them back together. The property — formerly an 80-year-old *kaiseki* restaurant called Mumon-an — had been purchased by an urban development company called Tachihi Holdings, which contacted the pair and asked if they’d be interested in running it. For both, it’s a true passion project: a culmination of years spent honing technique, intuition and perspective, not only in cuisine but in hospitality and craft as well. At its heart, Auberge Tokito has a simple mission: to share the depth and beauty of Japan — its ingredients, traditions and sense of meticulous care — with guests from around the world.

Despite being rooted in history, the inn is not constrained by it; it’s a considered, luxurious blend of the modern and traditional. “We want to still be here decades from now, and for that to happen, it’s essential that we continue to evolve,” says Ishii. “Our way of thinking here is to respect ancient practices, but not be bound by them.”

#### MORE INFO

To book a room at Auberge Tokito, visit [aubergetokito.com/en/](http://aubergetokito.com/en/).

# Spring Snow

**HAKUBA VALLEY'S LONG SKI SEASON LETS VISITORS ENJOY WORLD-CLASS SKIING AND SNOWBOARDING WELL BEYOND WINTER**

It's easy to see why Hakuba Valley has earned its place among Japan's most legendary snow sport destinations. Stretching for nearly 30 kilometers along the foot of the Northern Alps, it features soaring peaks, serene villages and powdery slopes that stretch for miles, as well as 10 world-class ski resorts — including Happo-one, which hosted the downhill and super-G events for the 1998 Winter Olympics.

When people think of ski season, the busy winter months of January and February usually come to mind. But that's only a fraction of what Hakuba Valley has to offer. Snow conditions in the area rival those of midwinter from late November all the way to early May, meaning that visitors can enjoy so-called “winter” sports well into spring.

## A LONG SKI SEASON

Known for its soft, fluffy powder and an annual snowfall of around 11 meters, Hakuba Valley also stands out for its unusually long ski season. Thanks to the region's deep and consistent snowfall, several of its famed ski resorts are able to stay open for six months a year.

For those seeking an off-peak experience, the springtime shoulder season is the perfect window of time. Spring skiing and snowboarding comes with its own type of magic; the alpine air acquires a vernal freshness and the slopes quiet down, allowing for crowd-free skiing and mindful appreciation of the scenery. In late April, you can even see cherry blossoms shimmering against snow-capped mountains — a beautiful, rare and quintessentially Japanese sight.



## ENHANCED RESORTS, SEAMLESS EXPERIENCE

Hakuba Valley has invested in infrastructure to make the long season even more enjoyable. Tsugaike Mountain Resort recently expanded its snowmaking capabilities, for instance, ensuring consistent slopes even when natural snowfall varies. Hakuba Iwatake Snow Field has renovated its base center, adding state-of-the-art facilities and a rental shop, and Able Hakuba Goryu has expanded its night-skiing area, giving visitors new ways to enjoy the mountains.

Reaching Hakuba Valley is straightforward. It's just under three hours from Tokyo via the Hokuriku Shinkansen and express bus. Once there, snow-blanketed forests, cozy alpine lodges and the gentle hum of ski lifts immediately set the stage for an unforgettable alpine experience. And hitting the slopes is a seamless experience, too — with an all-access Hakuba Valley Day Pass, you can ski or snowboard at any of the snow resorts in the area on the same day without having to purchase separate lift tickets.

## MORE INFO

To learn more about Hakuba Valley's spring season, visit [hakubavalley.com/en/](http://hakubavalley.com/en/).

SKI IMAGES: HIROYA NAKATA





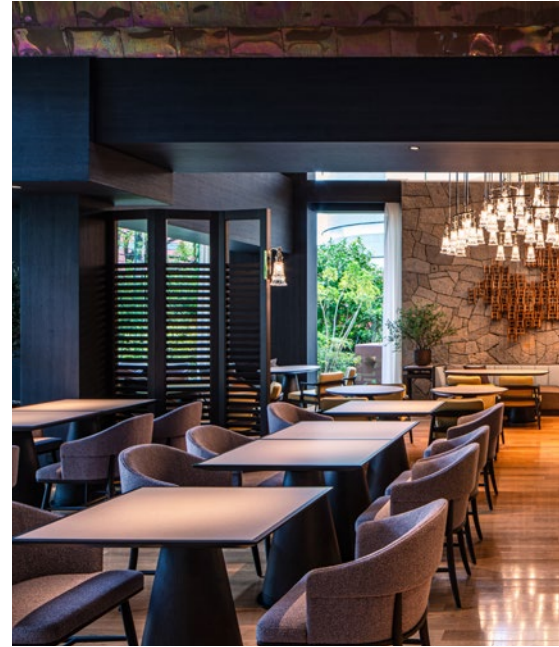
**F**ukuoka is one of Japan's most fascinating cities. Set on the island of Kyushu, it hums with energy, from bustling street food stalls to leafy riverside walkways; it's famous for its regional cuisine, nightlife and easygoing charm. One of the best places to feel that energy is the lively, sprawling Canal City Hakata complex, pulsing with color and energy. Amid this bustle sits Grand Hyatt Fukuoka, a refined and serene urban retreat.

The hotel offers a polished, immersive experience where traditional craftsmanship, modern design and local culture converge — perfect for travelers who want to feel the city's rhythm without losing their own sense of calm. With its newly launched "Hakata Retreat" rooms, lush lounge area and inventive dining and event spaces, it's a place to experience Fukuoka fully, at your own pace.

# A Modern Retreat in the Heart of Hakata

EXPERIENCE WELLNESS, CULTURE AND CULINARY DELIGHTS  
ALL UNDER ONE ROOF AT GRAND HYATT FUKUOKA

WORDS BY ALINA JOAN ITO



## A HAKATA RETREAT

This past July, Grand Hyatt Fukuoka unveiled six exclusive guest rooms under the concept of "Hakata Retreat" — spaces designed to blend Fukuoka's regional heritage with cutting-edge design and holistic well-being.

The rooms are bright and spacious, with plush beds and spacious bathrooms. Each one invites guests into a tranquil world where Japanese craftsmanship enriches modern luxury. In every one, you'll find a personal tea bar where you can prepare your own matcha during your stay. The Premier King rooms and Hakata Suite also have an okiro — a hearth specifically used for tea ceremonies — allowing for a deep immersion with Japanese tea culture.

The six Hakata Retreat rooms have carefully considered details that heighten the stay: art made with traditional Yame washi





seafood donburi station.

Afternoons are quieter, with the lounge offering a comfortable workspace equipped with high tables, lighting and outlets, making it easy to catch up on emails or read while enjoying light refreshments. By evening, the terrace and indoor seating begin to buzz with energy. Guests can sip cocktails and sample small plates that rotate daily while watching the garden glow under soft lighting.

Original artwork by the Tokyo-based design unit Goo Choki Par adds a modern touch to the space. In addition to food and beverages, the lounge also provides check-in, checkout and concierge services.

#### SAVOR AND CELEBRATE

Integrating the hotel's refined luxury into its carefully curated menus, the Grand Hyatt Fukuoka's dining and drinking options are well worth exploring.

The hotel's signature all-day dining restaurant, The Market F, combines the energy of a live kitchen with the approachable elegance of bistro. Its popular Dinner Order Buffet allows guests to enjoy innovative fusion cuisine that combines traditional French dishes with local specialties, with the freedom to mix and match as they like. Each plate highlights freshness, artistry and abundance, capturing the richness of Hakata's culinary spirit.

The hotel's newly refreshed bar lounge, Bar Fizz, occupies a central open atrium and features stylish, contemporary design, creating a lively yet relaxed setting for aperitifs or late-night conversations. For a quieter, more intimate experience, Martini's, located in the lobby, serves classic cocktails with a sophisticated touch, evoking the golden age of hotel bars.



on the walls, Ueno ware ceramics on display and headboards that fill each room with the soft scent of tatami. But whichever room you decide to book, the experience is sure to be memorable — each guestroom features distinct artworks and interior arrangements, transforming the stay into an experience in itself.

#### THE GRAND CLUB

On the hotel's fifth floor sits the Grand Club Lounge, surrounded by greenery and bathed in natural light, spilling gracefully out onto an open-air terrace. Exclusively for guests staying in Grand Club rooms and suites, the lounge shifts with the day to suit different needs. Mornings are bright and inviting, with a full buffet breakfast that includes freshly prepared eggs, French toast and a make-your-own



#### CONNECTION IN THE SPIRIT OF HAKATA

Grand Hyatt Fukuoka also provides an exceptional setting for professional gatherings. Its nine event, banquet and meeting spaces feature state-of-the-art technology and draw inspiration from Hakata itself, allowing for tailor-made events that leave a lasting impression.

For a uniquely local touch, guests can opt for a yatai (street stall) culinary setup, bringing the festive energy of Fukuoka's night food scene indoors — a signature experience that showcases the city's culture to international visitors. From private meetings to grand celebrations, each event space is designed to encourage connection, collaboration and memorable moments.



#### MORE INFO

To book a stay at the Grand Hyatt Fukuoka, visit [fukuoka.grand.hyatt.jp](https://www.fukuoka.grand.hyatt.jp).



# A Castle for the 21st Century

ACROSS THE MOAT FROM NAGOYA CASTLE, ESPACIO NAGOYA CASTLE COMBINES ART AND LUXURY INTO A STAY FIT FOR ROYALTY

WORDS BY ALINA JOAN ITO



**W**ith rich samurai history and a thriving manufacturing scene, Nagoya is one of Japan's most intriguing — and underrated — destinations. It's a city of contrasts, where the imposing silhouette of Nagoya Castle rises above streets filled with centuries-old artisan workshops, avant-garde galleries and sleek modern architecture.

The newly opened Espacio Nagoya Castle was designed to embody these contrasts. It sits across the moat from Nagoya Castle and stands in dialogue with the iconic landmark — it was conceived as “a castle of the 21st century,” with its sleek glass facade rising beneath a tiered roof that recalls the layered eaves of the historic fortress.

Centuries-old artistry, architectural mastery and meticulously curated experiences define every moment of the stay. Not just an ultra-luxury hotel, it's meant to feel like a living gallery: Each corridor, suite and public space is infused with hand-crafted works that celebrate the city's rich artistic heritage.

## CASTLE IN THE SKY

Entering Espacio Nagoya Castle, the “modern castle” concept becomes immediately apparent. Its hallways are lined with hand-carved wood panels and painted fusuma, punctuated by sculptural artworks. The guest lodgings, ornamented with traditional crafts, are meant to recall an inner palace. Each one — from the plush, spacious Deluxe rooms to the soaring Presidential Suite — offers views of Nagoya Castle, towering amid lush greenery, or of the stunning cityscape. Onsen Collection rooms come with their own private hot spring bath; there are also six unique Art Collection rooms, each transformed into its own inner sanctum by a notable Japanese artist.

The interiors balance traditional Japanese craftsmanship with modern design. Stonework textures, polished wood and intricate joinery meet open, clean lines, creating spaces that feel both grounded and expansive. Every element — from the grain of the wood to the subtle lighting — reflects a careful attention to detail, creating a feeling of modern royalty.

## AN IMMERSIVE MUSEUM STAY

Throughout the hotel, over 400 works of art by around 50 artists are on display, many of them created by masters of traditional Japanese crafts. Bold paintings, textiles and sculptures are thoughtfully curated to complement the hotel's design, inviting guests to wander through the property as they would a museum.

Works that reference the concept of “Rin-Poh-Ki-Ryu” appear throughout the hotel. In Japanese, the term is a shorthand for kirin, phoenix, tortoise and dragon deities — all traditionally believed to bring good fortune and signal times of peace. Along the staircase of the main entrance, you'll find an enormous mural by the renowned kimono designer Jotaro Saito depicting these four divine beings.





The halls and dining spaces are adorned with striking homages to Japanese motifs, mythology and seasonal beauty — a sleek white dragon rendered on canvas in plaster, gilded screens depicting pine trees and bamboo forests, intricate wood carvings of auspicious animals. This sense of studied and careful design continues in each room, particularly the suites and Art Collection rooms.

#### FINE DINING OPTIONS

At Espacio Nagoya Castle, dining is treated with the same reverence as the hotel's art collection. The fourth-floor restaurant floor gathers a suite of exceptional culinary experiences, each shaped by a master of their craft.

Brilliance, guided by Shuzo Kishida of the three-Michelin-star Quintessence, offers an omakase-style French menu that spotlights Tokai ingredients with meticulous, almost architectural precision. Elsewhere on the restaurant floor, the focus shifts to Japanese cooking in its many forms. At Jo, Michelin-starred chef Hiroshi Sasaki presents counter-style Japanese cuisine. Owari Sui Inaba serves



refined kappo meals and delicate tempura, while Shoryu by Ukai-tei offers a polished teppanyaki experience centered on regional produce and premium beef.

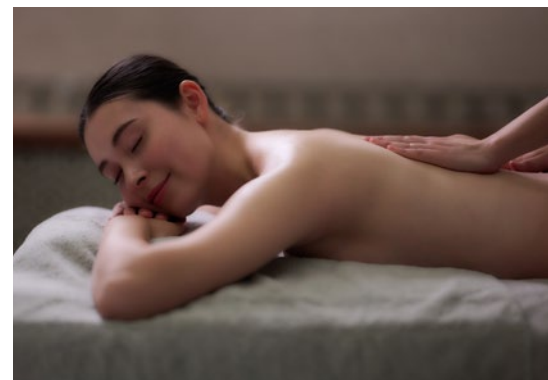
The aptly named Chinese Restaurant Ryujo Nagoya Castle offers elegant Cantonese dining centered on seasonal seafood and delicately executed dim sum, while Sushishunbi Nishikawa presents Nagoya-style sushi at a counter facing the historic landmark, each piece assembled with a light, precise hand. Across all venues, the approach is consistent: exceptional ingredients, exacting craftsmanship and a sense that every meal — like the hotel itself — is designed to be extraordinary.

#### THE ART OF WELLNESS

As well as offering an artful stay, Espacio Nagoya Castle is committed to holistic wellness, encouraging guests to treat the property as both a mental and physical sanctuary. Through tranquil spa rituals and thoughtful wellness facilities, the hotel invites visitors to slow down and reset.

The spa's treatment menu draws on traditional healing methods and unique techniques as well as seasonal Japanese herbs, with restorative therapies designed to melt tension and renew the senses. Guests can slip into the shimmering mosaic-tiled pool or stretch out on the cabana-style daybeds by the water, enjoy a workout in the expansive state-of-the-art gym or unwind in the beautifully illuminated natural hot spring baths and saunas.

Part gallery, part Michelin-level dining destination and part wellness hideaway, Espacio Nagoya Castle reimagines what a city hotel can be — and in doing so, it makes this historic castle city an even more compelling place to linger.



#### MORE INFO

To book your stay at Espacio Nagoya Castle, visit [espacionagoya.com](https://www.espacionagoya.com).



# Souvenirs, Simplified

A CURATED SELECTION OF GOODS EMBODYING JAPAN'S SPIRIT OF CRAFTSMANSHIP

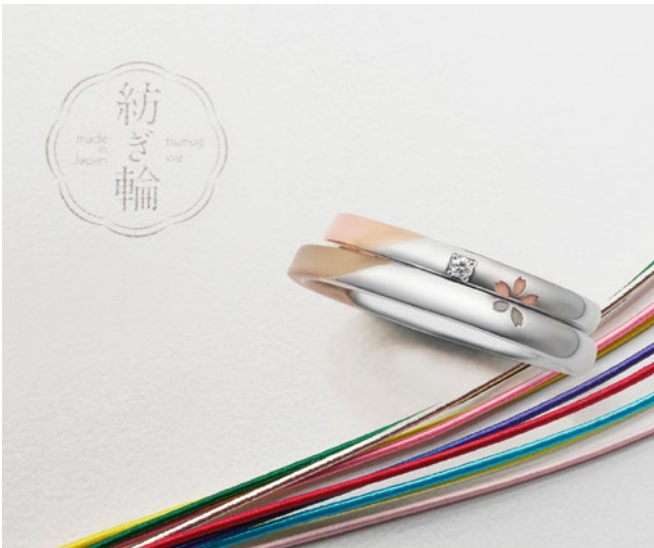
## MATCHA SEED FACIAL OIL HOLIDAY KIT 2025

Matcha powder is a nutritional powerhouse recognized the world over. But did you know that matcha seeds are also packed with body-friendly benefits? The beauty brand Saicha harnesses that goodness in its Matcha Seed Facial Oil, a natural and sustainably produced treat for your skin shown to visibly reduce the appearance of fine lines caused by dryness.

The incredibly rare oil — it takes two seeds to press a single drop — is made using seeds harvested from abandoned farmland in Shizuoka Prefecture, one of Japan's premier tea-producing regions, and each 20-milliliter bottle contains a whopping 400 seeds' worth of oil. Certified as a Real Organic Natural cosmetic by the Natural Life & Beauty Association, the exclusively first-press oil provides total aging care, improving moisture, firmness and radiance. As part of the holiday kit, enjoy an extra mini bottle, perfect for travel or your gym bag.

### MORE INFO

[saicha.jp](http://saicha.jp)



## SAKURASAKU – HOHOEMI

Celebrate your love for each other — and a shared love of Japan — with a set of exquisite, sakura-inspired rings. The set's two wedding bands are meticulously handcrafted by an artisan at the Tokyo atelier of Abe Jewelry, a trusted maker of bridal jewelry. Engraved with colored petals, the rings, when stacked, reveal a cherry blossom motif — an iconic symbol of Japan.

These rings, with their gentle curves and timeless appeal, are imbued with meaning, embodying the promise of a journey together, where two individuals blossom as one. Both rings combine the brilliance of platinum with the warmth of gold — matte champagne gold for the thicker band and polished rose for the thinner. Fusing local iconography and expert craftsmanship, the rings exude a delicate beauty that is distinctly Japanese. Discover the perfect expression of your unique bond with Sakurasaku – Hohoemi, then watch that bond bloom.

### MORE INFO

[tsumugiwa.com](http://tsumugiwa.com)

## EMON

Tradition and modernity, art and wellness come together in a single bite in Emon, a contemporary take on Japan's dorayaki. A pancake sandwich of sorts, often filled with azuki bean paste, dorayaki is a popular treat for young and old. With Emon, Fukura.Fukura — led by a certified dietitian— respectfully revamps the sweet snack, turning it into a hand-rolled, modern Japanese confection that captures the artistry of Japanese cuisine in a bite-sized snack.

It's not just the snack's appearance that's had a makeover, however: The ingredients, too, have gotten an update. The treat's high caloric content has been reined in, and a piece of mochi has been added to maintain a toothsome texture. The result is a reconstructed dorayaki with a refined lightness with an elegant flavor tailored to today's lifestyles.

### MORE INFO

[sites.google.com/fukurafukura.com/eng/home](https://sites.google.com/fukurafukura.com/eng/home)



IMAGE: MASAHIRO HONDA



**HANEYA JUNMAIGINJO TOMINOKAORI**

In sake brewing, precision is what ultimately shapes the final quality — a truth that’s especially evident at Fumigiku Sake Brewery Co., Ltd., makers of Haneya Junmaiginjo Tominokaori. When working with Tominokaori, a hybrid rice with a soft umami and refined sweetness, every step requires meticulous human oversight and unwavering dedication, from cultivation to fermentation. The work is hands-on, zero compromises.

The result of this wholehearted devotion is a sake with sensational depth, one that enlivens the senses, permeates the soul and concludes with an elegant, feather-light finish. This level of excellence, of course, comes with recognition: gold at the International Wine Challenge 2024 and the Jury Prize at the 2024 and 2025 Kura Master competition, among other awards. Ultimately, every drop of Haneya Junmaiginjo Tominokaori proves that unyielding human passion is as essential to great sake as quality rice.

**MORE INFO**

[fumigiku.com](http://fumigiku.com)

**CASHMERE-BACKED LOOPWHEELED FLEECE SWEATS**

FilMelange, the casual wear brand from BBA Association Co., Ltd., set out to create the ultimate sweatshirt — a piece people would reach for every day of winter. The result is the brand’s Urbain, Urbicus and Urbano separates, made with a Mongolian cashmere-backed fleece that stands out for its phenomenal comfort. In addition to its soft, gently warm inner, the fabric features a clean outer luster, adding a refined polish to the leisure wear.

A fabric like this doesn't burst into being; it's carefully engineered. Using its long-cultivated expertise in loopwheeled fleece, a fabric known for its pleasant texture and durability, and its experience with animal hair, FilMelange has crafted a light and fluffy fabric perfect for the chilliest months of the year. Whether you choose the sweatshirt, hoodie or trousers, you'll spend winter wrapped in a cozy, perfectly toasty embrace you won't want to shed until spring.

**MORE INFO**

[@filMelange\\_official](https://www.instagram.com/filMelange_official) (Instagram)



**YASUKE NUTS!**

Nutrient-dense and protein-packed, cashews make a satisfying and delicious snack. With Yasuke Nuts!, specialty nut shop Going Nuts! takes the healthy treat and elevates it, dipping the world's largest cashews in wood barrel-aged soy sauce and roasting them. The result is a taste sensation, where the natural sweetness of organically grown cashews blends perfectly with the umami and aromatic smokiness of the shoyu.

But these nuts aren't just nosh to nibble — they're a nod to history with noble plans for the future. The brand is named for Yasuke, a samurai under Oda Nobunaga who — incredibly — hailed from what is now Mozambique. Until civil war devastated the industry, Mozambique was a world-leading producer of cashews. Going Nuts! aims to nurture a revival, with plans to promote in-country processing to support Mozambique's cashew farmers. Delicious, nutritious and socially conscious: These cashews are worth going nuts over.

**MORE INFO**

[going-nuts.com](http://going-nuts.com)



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*Romancecar is a limited express train that offers direct service from Shinjuku to Hakone*

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