

EXPLORE DEEPER

*Sustainable
Travel Experiences in
JAPAN*



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As an island nation with a wide-ranging north to south geography, Japan offers visitors a diverse array of natural beauty to explore through four distinct seasons. The country's extensive forests and mountain ranges are fed by abundant rainfall, and the surrounding seas are rich in marine resources. This vast range of climate, ecosystems and biodiversity has nurtured a culture in which the Japanese live in accordance with the changing seasons and in coexistence with nature.

Against this backdrop, we introduce this guide for travelers to some of Japan's most remarkable sustainable experiences. We hope to take you on a meaningful and inspiring journey that connects you to Japan's natural beauty and leads you through authentic cultural experiences that emanate from inherited values passed down through generations.

Step into the great outdoors, explore pristine ecosystems and stay in eco-friendly accommodations that respect the natural habitats that surround them. We encourage you to eat ethically sourced food, soak yourself in ancient hot springs and come to know Japanese beliefs rooted in a respect for nature. We also invite you to experience living history in traditional towns, enjoy performing arts and traditional festivals central to Japanese cultural identity, and delve into a rich history of Japanese craftsmanship.

Your participation in sustainable travel in Japan will take you to the soul of the country, giving you a deeper understanding of the customs that local residents have cherished through their deep connections to the natural world. We hope these authentic experiences with the environment, culture and community will make your travels transformative—and even regenerative. Japan is one of the world's ideal destinations for sustainable travel. Come and experience it for yourself!

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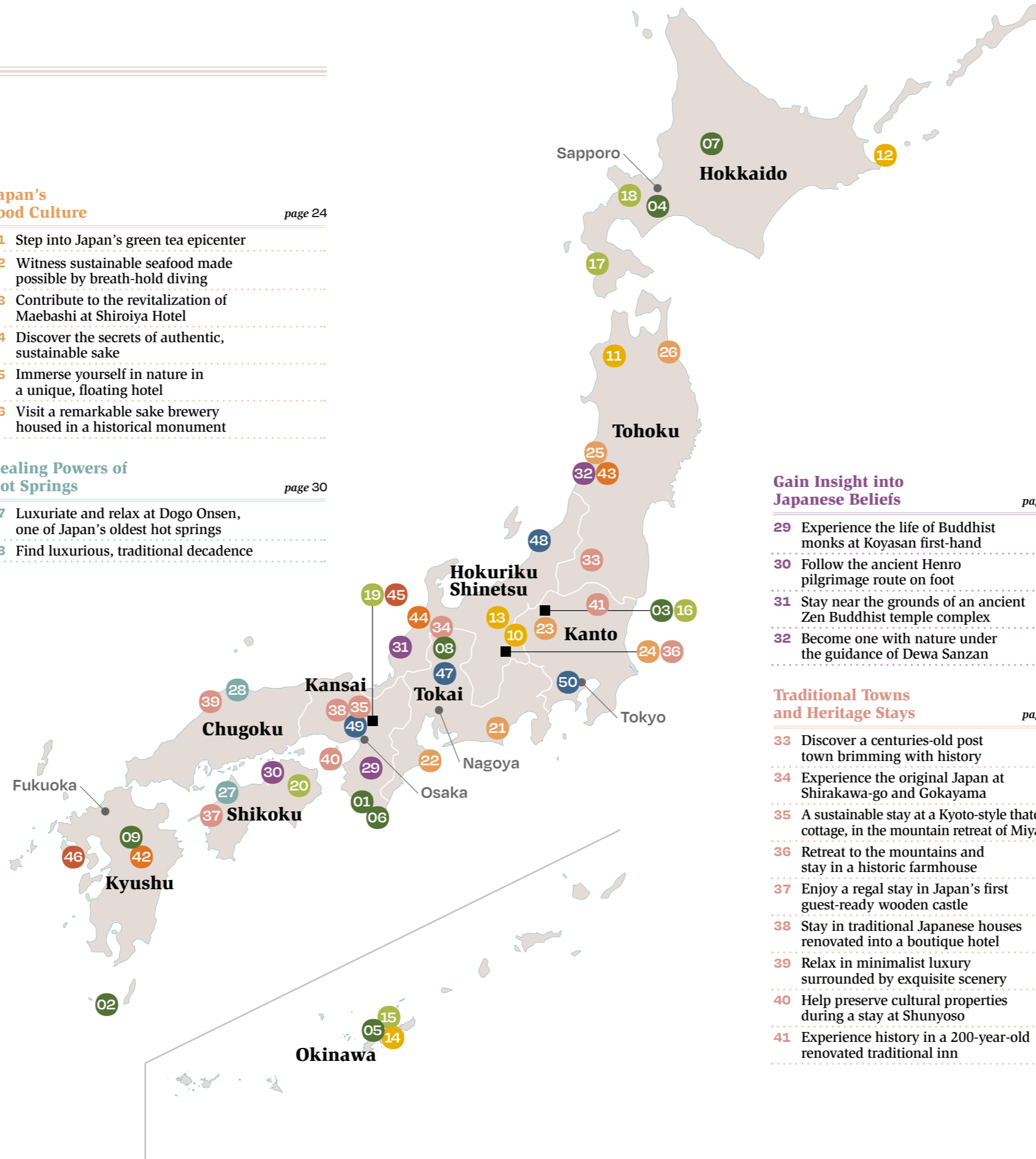
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01

Experience 1,100 years of history on the Kumano Kodo Pilgrimage Routes

Reconnect with nature and discover Yoshino-Kumano National Park

As a UNESCO World Heritage Site located within Wakayama Prefecture, winner of Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2021 sustainability award, the pedigree of the Kumano Kodo Pilgrimage Routes speaks for itself. Arriving at the Kii Peninsula and entering the majestic Yoshino-Kumano National Park reveals a world of time-honored splendor in nature. For thousands of years, pilgrims have hiked these spiritual trails that pass by exquisite features, including the Kumano Nachi Taisha Grand Shrine, towering Nachi Waterfall and enchanted forests. Even before organized religion existed in Japan, these forests and mountains were considered sacred for the pilgrims that traveled here on solemn journeys in awe of nature's power. Now, you can follow in their footsteps and join a local English-speaking guide on your own sojourn of peace and serenity. As a valuable travel location prized for its basis in sustainable outdoor activity, you can connect deeper with this tradition on a 1-hour, 3-hour, or multi-day trek.

Kumano Travel

14-6 Minato, Tanabe-shi, Wakayama

<https://www.kumano-travel.com/en/tours-activities/kumano-trek-english-speaking-guides>

Adventure in the Great Outdoors

Nearly 70% of Japan's terrain is blanketed by forest, making it one of the world's greenest destinations and a haven for outdoor explorers. Nature lovers are spoiled for choice, with rich bio-diverse woodlands, snow-capped mountains, rushing rivers and 32,800 kilometers of coastline to explore. In this deep wilderness, traditional Satoyama communities who have lived harmoniously with nature for generations are also being rediscovered through sustainable outdoor activities. From guided treks through untamed forests to canyoning in wild rapids, kayaking in serene nature, hiking along sacred pilgrimage routes, snorkeling in otherworldly surroundings, cycling through national parks and more, Japan's great outdoors abounds in recreational opportunities for travelers. Get off the beaten track and plan an adventure surrounded by natural beauty.





02

Embark on a guided tour through ancient forests

Walk amongst towering trees embodying more than 5,000 years of history

The ancient cedar forests on the island of Yakushima, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, are truly extraordinary. Alongside countless trails that give you the chance to see the Japanese wilderness in its primeval state, this celebrated national park and designated Special Natural Monument is also home to the Jomon Sugi, one of the largest and most revered trees in Japan. Discover the secrets of the forest on a specialized tour with qualified guides who live on the island and are versed in both local history and wilderness training for overnight expeditions. Trek deep into the forest and see the mist envelop the imposing cedars that have matured for millennia. The tour fee and donation made to the national park authority help to maintain this delicate ecosystem. These guardians of the forest are dedicated to its preservation, and your visit helps ensure sustainable travel to Yakushima is possible for generations to come.



Go! Yakushima
797-21 Koseda, Yakushima-cho, Kumage-gun, Kagoshima

<https://goyakushimatour.com/>

03

Succumb to the wilds of nature on an exhilarating canyon adventure

Connect with nature and discover Japan's most breathtaking canyons all-year round

Located in the Minakami UNESCO Eco Park, the Tone River is home to some of Japan's most beautiful canyons. These canyons are perfect for exhilarating outdoor adventure sports too. In summer, you can experience wild rapids on a raft or canoe. In winter, the area is transformed into a winter wonderland, where water sports are replaced with snow canyoning. There's no better way to appreciate the power of nature than by immersing yourself in it. The companies that operate in the Tone River are dedicated to preserving the area's natural wonders and have worked together to develop the best, most sustainable solutions for the region. Combined with the government's own efforts for official guidance and training programs, these initiatives promote further coexistence with nature on your visit to Minakami.

Canyons

45 Yubiso, Minakami-machi, Tone-gun, Gunma

<https://canyons.jp/en/>



04

Traverse stunning Lake Shikotsu on a kayak tour immersed in nature

Find crystal clear waters on a peaceful excursion

Located within the Shikotsu-Toya National Park, Lake Shikotsu Caldera was formed by an enormous volcanic eruption more than 40,000 years ago, and is a true natural wonder. Observing the environment here across all seasons will reward visitors, including resplendent views of trees blooming on the nearby mountains in spring, or salmon darting across the lake's transparent, emerald-green waters in autumn. For over ten years in a row, the waters of Lake Shikotsu have been recognized as the clearest in Japan. This clarity offers incredible views of the lake bottom, and the surrounding mountains are reflected on its surface like a mirror. There's no better way to enjoy this stunning location than by kayak. Not only does this enable you to explore the lake at your own pace, but you are helping to preserve its purity by leaving the boat engine behind.



© Ocean Days

Ocean days

Bangaichi, Shikotsukoonsen, Chitose-shi, Hokkaido

<https://ocean-days.com/tour-english/#kayak>



05

Dive deep into Okinawa on a cave spelunking tour

Enjoy responsible cave diving and snorkeling in otherworldly surroundings

Okinawa's Blue Cave is truly breathtaking. Teeming with tropical fish and home to outstanding rock and coral formations, you'll be blown away by the opportunity to immerse yourself in this incredible aquatic environment. Whether you are an experienced diver or completely new to the activity, your experience in Okinawa will be sure to inspire you, and there are options for every level of ability. The tour provider, Murunu-shi, is committed to supporting the Green Fins initiative in Okinawa. This worldwide campaign is working tirelessly to protect the planet's coral reefs and is supported by UN Environment Programme (UNEP). As part of their commitment, Murunu-shi has abolished disposable plastic products in their facilities and further conveys the non-plastic message with divers before each tour. Delve deep into nature and reconsider your own daily practices at Okinawa's majestic Blue Cave, for a sustainable, memorable and unique diving experience as a responsible diver.



Murunu-shi

915 Takashiho, Yomitan-son, Nakagami-gun, Okinawa

<http://www.murunu-shi.com/en/index.html>

06

Head beneath the waves on an aquatic adventure in Kushimoto

Experience diving and snorkeling tours in subtropical waters

There are few better ways to escape the stress of modern life than by heading into the water and exploring the ocean. Whether you prefer to go all-in on a scuba diving adventure or stick with a more relaxed snorkeling trip, the seas around Kushimoto rarely fall below 15°C, providing the perfect environment for year-round experiences. The warm waters attract all kinds of animals from both tropical and temperate waters, and you'll be amazed by the sea creatures swimming alongside you. Join harlequin shrimp, sharks, exotic frog fish, squid, sea horses and more as you explore the abundance of light green table rock coral that typifies the landscape. The Kushimoto coastal area lies within the Yoshino-Kumano National Park and was recognized by the Ramsar Convention in 2015, an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. The well-maintained marine park environs of Kushimoto are a natural wonder, and your visit helps ensure they continue to thrive.



MARINE STAGE

638-1 Kushimoto, Kushimoto-cho, Higashimuro-gun, Wakayama

<https://dive-in-japan.com/shop/marine-stage>





07

Cycle through Biei's rolling hills with a guided tour

Discover some of Hokkaido's most celebrated natural sights

Situated in the Daisetsuzan National Park, Biei is well known across Japan as one of the most beautiful towns in Hokkaido. Located in the foothills of the Tokachidake Mountain Range, the town is celebrated for the lush green fields, undulating hills and carpets of flowers that surround it. The best way to enjoy this natural beauty is to join a sustainable cycle tour with a local guide and discover all the area's most memorable sights without impacting the environment. Better still, climb aboard an emissions-free electric bike so you can go further and see more at a steady, enjoyable pace. In 2021, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) selected Biei as one of the towns it would be working with as part of its upgrade program for "Best Tourism Villages by UNWTO." Visit Hokkaido and explore its natural wonders deeper on a relaxing cycle tour.



Guided Cycling Tour Biei
1-1-7 Omachi, Biei-cho, Kamikawa-gun, Hokkaido
<https://field-north.com/en/biei.html>

08

Join a cycle tour in the idyllic town of Hida



© SATOYAMA EXPERIENCE

Amble down quiet lanes and discover a rich pastoral culture

When you arrive in Hida, a quaint, traditional village in rural Gifu Prefecture, you'll instantly be struck by how peaceful it is. For generations, locals in the area have practiced Satoyama (mountain village) culture, a unique, sustainable way of life that encourages them to live harmoniously with nature. As a result, the fields around the village are rich with crops, the streams gurgle with pure spring water and the local produce is untouched by mass farming techniques. A local resident will guide you on your cycle tour of the area. With a vast knowledge of the traditions and culture of the region, you'll be treated to a learning experience while taking in the sights. Your ecologically conscious experience in Hida also helps to support the local economy and enable village culture to continue thriving.

SATOYAMA EXPERIENCE
11-32 Nino-machi, Furukawa-cho, Hida-shi, Gifu
<https://satoyama-experience.com/>

09

Take part in a private rural tour dedicated to responsible tourism

Find rich culture and stunning natural wonders around Mount Aso

Satoyama culture is defined by coexistence with nature and preservation, not exploitation, of your surroundings. People in the area around the active volcano Mount Aso, a UNESCO Global Geopark, have lived this way since ancient times. You can get a glimpse into their lifestyle by going on a personalized private tour here in Kumamoto Prefecture. Defined by the principles of responsible tourism, Satoyama tours use local guides on a wide range of experiences. Discover Japan's largest active volcano, follow rural forestry trails, learn about authentic Satoyama culture, and more. Your tour will let you be active outside in the dynamic landscapes of Aso and indulge in locally sourced traditional regional food. And more than anything else, it will be a chance to delve deep into another way of life and let you connect with people you never would have met otherwise!

SMO MINAMIOGUNI
1789-1 Akababa, Minamioguni-machi, Aso-gun, Kumamoto
<https://satoyama-journey.jp/>



© SMO Minamioguni Co., Ltd.



10

Support the protection of Japan's magnificent black bears

Observe bears in the wild with specialists at Picchio

The Japanese archipelago is highly biodiverse and boasts a huge range of unique flora and fauna. One of the larger animals to inhabit the Japanese wilderness is the Asiatic black bear. The Picchio Wildlife Research Center in the resort town of Karuizawa an hour from Tokyo provides education programs, habitat management projects and more, as part of the efforts to protect the bears living in the hills in this area. The center won the 4th Japan Tourism Award for Responsible Tourism in collaboration with UNWTO awarded by Tourism Expo Japan in 2018. Now, you can support these initiatives and help keep these majestic creatures safe from extinction while learning how to protect human safety on an educational tour of their habitat. Join a highly trained Picchio eco-tour guide searching for these elusive animals on a sustainability-focused adventure. An encounter with a black bear is a humbling and powerful experience that you will never forget.

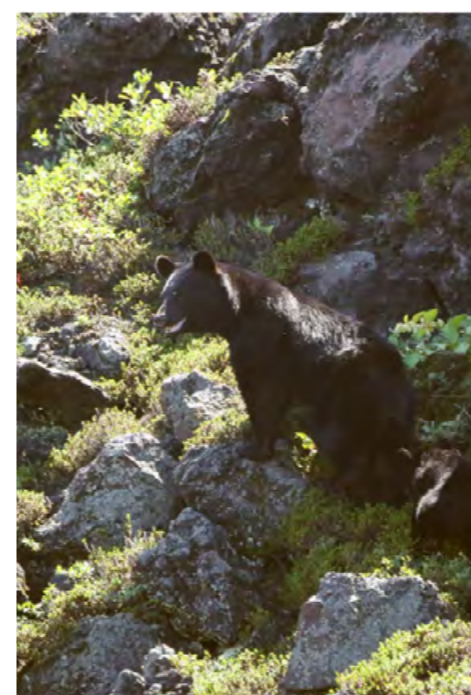
Picchio Wildlife Research Center

2148 Nagakura, Karuizawa-machi, Kitasaku-gun, Nagano

<https://www.wildlife-picchio.com/>

Explore Diverse Ecosystems

Japan was pulled, compressed and contorted in the last ice age, creating a complex patchwork of geographical habitats and diverse ecosystems. Today, travelers will find fascinating animals such as the Japanese macaque, Blakiston's fish owl and Ussuri brown bear, along with beautiful plant species, such as wild camelia and lilies. Japan has a very high number of endemic animals, so you'll be more likely here than in many other countries to spot native species on a trek through wild nature. Surrounded by fertile seas and crisscrossed by snaking rivers, Japan is no stranger to a deluge. Yet this rain keeps the rivers flowing, fills the country's many lakes and soaks its marshes and wetlands. Above the waterline, Japan is famous for its forests, emblematic woodlands that cover much of its dry land. Take an eco-friendly tour and discover Japan's unmatched diversity firsthand.



All photos: © Picchio Wildlife Research Center



11

Explore the breathtaking, ancient beech forest of Shirakami Sanchi



©PIXTA

Experience the majesty of largely untouched natural mountain habitats

The Shirakami Sanchi mountainous region extends across the border between Aomori and Akita prefectures, where you'll discover an ancient beech forest dating back over 8,000 years. This stunning, serene and extraordinary environment is virtually untouched by humans and has remained the same for millennia. This environment is so important that it became the first Japanese World Heritage Site in 1993. Today, the beech forest here is a critical ecosystem home to a number of rare plants and animals like black woodpeckers and golden eagles. In this pristine natural environment, you can enjoy a number of activities including hiking, rafting and canoeing. However, entry to the forest is well regulated and mountain climbers must use designated routes and apply for permission before entering. Upon arrival, stop by the Shirakami-Sanchi Visitor Center to learn about the wildlife and ecosystems, as well as proper hiking etiquette to help maintain the forest in its purest state.

Shirakami-Sanchi Visitor Center

61-1 Aza Kanda, Tashiro, Nishimeya-mura, Aomori

<https://www.experience-shirakami.com/>

13

Promoting conservation since 1964 at Jigokudani Monkey Park



Meet hot-spring loving snow monkeys in mountainous Nagano

Head to Joshin'etsukogen National Park in Nagano Prefecture for an exhilarating look at Japan's famous snow monkeys at Jigokudani Monkey Park. Established over 50 years ago as a conservation area to protect a troop of Japanese macaques under threat from human development, the park has achieved international fame due to the unusual behavior of the monkeys—they're the only troop in the world known to soak in hot springs! The monkeys are wild and move to and from the park as they please. Without any barriers between you and the monkeys, it's a rare chance to observe these curious creatures up close. Local operator Snow Monkey Resorts offers tours throughout the year, combining visits to the monkey park with other popular destinations and activities. Visit Nagano and come away with a newfound respect for all of nature's creatures on an exciting journey into the heart of snow monkey country.

SNOW MONKEY RESORT NAGANO OFFICE

1015-7 Kurita, Nagano-shi, Nagano

<https://www.snowmonkeyresorts.com/smr/snowmonkeypark/>

12

Discover majestic red-crowned cranes in Kushiroshitsugen National Park

Join a guided tour to encounter these iconic animals

Kushiroshitsugen National Park in eastern Hokkaido is the largest marshland in Japan, featuring unparalleled vast and untouched landscapes. With rich natural water sources, the entire park is a flourishing habitat for many flora and fauna. Amongst them, the red-crowned crane is designated a Special Natural Monument of Japan and is particularly representative of the Kushiro marshlands. Once thought to be extinct due to overhunting and environmental changes, the species has recovered through dedicated conservation efforts. Because the cranes nest and breed here, they do not migrate, and can be seen throughout the year. However, for the six months of winter, these stunning birds gather at feeding grounds to perform mesmerizing courtship dances against the pristine, snowy landscape. A series of wooden walkways at the park are the only path through the marsh, allowing visitors to view the cranes and other wildlife without damaging the ecosystem.



Nemuro Nature Center

3-19-8 Tokiwa-cho, Nemuro-shi, Hokkaido

https://h-takarajima.com/detail/index/613&ml_lang=ja

14

Encounter rare birds in Okinawa, a tropical paradise

Experience pure nature and support environmental and conservation activities

Okinawa is a natural paradise that includes several locations renowned for bird watching. The first is the vast Yambaru region, a World Natural Heritage site to the north of Okinawa's main island. The area is 80% covered by forest and home to many rare bird species that can only be seen here. Although this site accounts for less than 0.1% of Japan's total land area, it is home to more than half of Japan's birds and 25% of its frogs. The second location is Kin Town on Okinawa's east coast. This town is surrounded by pristine nature and has been confirmed to be home to over 270 species of birds. Visitors can also take an eco-tour by canoe up the Okukubi River at dawn with a local guide with years of experience studying the local birds. Participate in a riveting nature tour here to help support this sustainable and environmentally friendly initiative.

Okinawa Nature Office

1001-2 Kin, Kin-cho, Kunigami-gun, Okinawa

<https://okinawa-nature.com/en/tour-introduction-en/>



©okinawa nature office



15

Climb to new heights at the Treeful Treehouse Sustainable Resort

Sleep under the stars amongst branches and leaves

Situated in Okinawa's Yambaru National Park, everything about the Treeful Treehouse luxury sustainable resort is designed with the natural environment in mind. And what better way to experience nature than spending the night in a treehouse? Surrounded by the living tendrils of the tree, your eco-friendly accommodation is a bespoke wooden cabin, built high off the ground in order to not disturb the surrounding animals' natural habitat. Carbon-neutral solar arrays, not fossil fuels, generate electricity on-site, and even the grass is tended by goats, removing the requirements for a lawnmower. Wave goodbye to the hustle and bustle of the city and immerse yourself in Okinawa's natural wonders. Wake up to fresh, forest air filtered by the gentle leaves surrounding your woodland home. Spending time here will give you a new understanding for the importance of coexisting with nature. Your stay doesn't put any burden on nature and contributes to its future—and you might not want to leave.

Treeful Treehouse
2578 Genka, Nago-shi, Okinawa
<https://treeful.net/>

Eco-friendly Accommodation

The Japanese word “mottainai” embodies the value of cherishing important things and is deeply rooted in everyday life in the country. This same philosophy drives Japan's eco-friendly accommodation options too. Ranging from affordable to luxurious, a number of ecologically conscious, internationally certified properties provide travelers with comfortable accommodation and an enriching experience. These properties have gone to great lengths to reduce their burden on the global environment and local ecosystems. You'll find initiatives like utilizing hot springs for geothermal heating and spring water for cooling, methods to reduce plastic consumption, local menus serving locally caught and cultivated ingredients, and even hotels with a zero-waste policy. Where will you book your next trip focused on sustainable travel?



All photos: ©@treeful.treehouse





16

Revel in the height of luxury at the Bettei Senjuan Hotel

Truly relax in a private, open-air bath heated by a sustainable hot spring

Tradition and modern aesthetics collide at Bettei Senjuan, recipient of a Green Key certification in Japan, a high standard of global recognition for environmental initiatives. Located at the foothills of Mount Tanigawa, each room in this exquisite hotel, a member of the Relais & Châteaux luxury hotel group, provides a view of the mountain's peak and acres of lush forests. When you arrive at the hotel, you'll be struck by the Zen-inspired design that gives each space a sense of calm and serenity. One of the most notable features are the private open-air baths in each bedroom fed by constantly flowing natural hot spring water. Beyond the rooms and gardens, Bettei Senjuan is famous for its astonishing cuisine. The inspired meals served privately in guest rooms are based on a sustainable philosophy employing seasonal and local ingredients. Come to Bettei Senjuan for unforgettable views and a rejuvenating escape from daily life.

Bettei Senjuan

614 Tanigawa, Minakami-machi, Tone-gun, Gunma

<https://www.relaischateaux.com/us/japan/senjuan-gunma-minakami>



17

Stay in luxury at an eco-friendly inn focused on local production

Escape to the coast and find a sustainable idyl in Esashi town

Located in the southwest of Hokkaido, the beautiful fishing town of Esashi is home to Kuki. This stunning eco-luxury hotel offers much more than just a place to lay your head for the night. As well as exceptional service that includes a butler, Kuki is committed to sustainability in the form of minimizing carbon emissions and limiting waste. Water is heated through a natural hot spring to keep guest rooms warm and melt snow in the parking lot. Most of the organic vegetables, meat and eggs come from local farms within a 25 km radius, one of which is even owned by the company, and kitchen waste is turned into compost for farm use. The cuisine at Kuki follows the same ethical values. Fresh seafood is caught just off the coast, and all the ingredients used in the cooking are seasonal. An ethos of ecological consciousness is embedded in the culture at Kuki.

Esashi ryotei KUKI

1-5 Ubagami-cho, Esashi-cho, Hiyama-gun, Hokkaido

<https://www.esashi-kuki.jp/en-top/>



18

Discover a contemporary take on tradition at Zaborin

Connect with nature and enjoy ethical opulence at a sustainable ryokan

Located in a verdant woodland setting on the northern island of Hokkaido, Niseko Town—voted one of the world's Top 100 Green Destinations in 2020 and 2021 and famous for skiing—is home to Zaborin, a ryokan embodying the area's sustainable values. Dedicated to world-renowned traditional Japanese hospitality, Zaborin incorporates modern, eco-friendly design and building techniques. Outer walls constructed from recycled offcuts treated with natural dyes echo the traditional practice of charring wooden walls to preserve the timber (yakisugi), and an on-site hot spring provides carbon-neutral, underfloor heating in winter, while cold spring water cools the building—and your wine—during the summer months. At Zaborin, guests effectively fund the area's sustainability initiatives while enjoying the luxuries this boutique ryokan provides, including award-winning cuisine, a massage room, library and more. Zaborin takes its name from the Zen philosophy of remaining still and mindful. With each villa at Zaborin boasting an indoor and outdoor onsen, you have the space to do just that.



Zaborin Ryokan

76-4 Hanazono, Kutchan-cho, Abuta-gun, Hokkaido

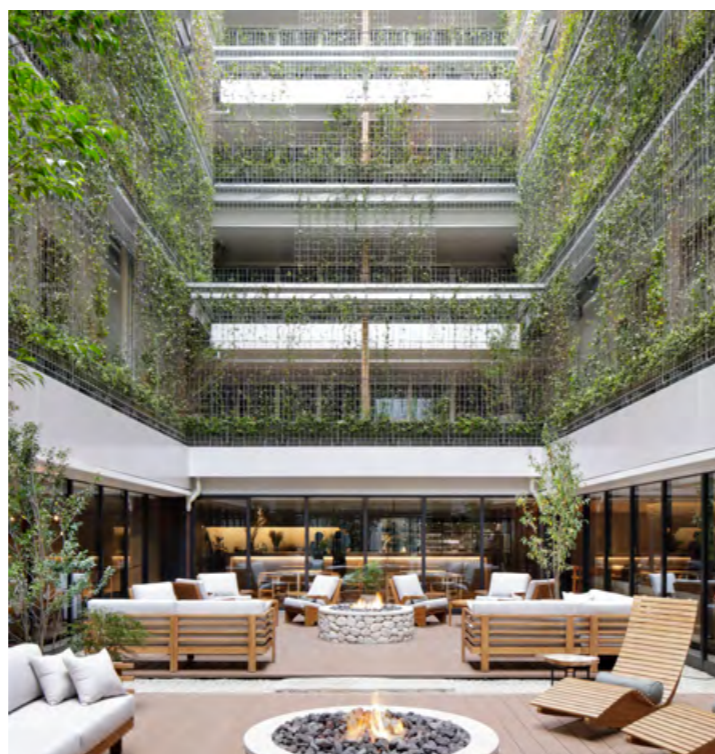
<https://zaborin.com/en/>

19

Benefit both people and nature on a visit to the Good Nature Hotel

An eco-friendly urban oasis in central Kyoto

Best described as a lifestyle hotel, Good Nature Hotel provides guests a place to enjoy both a physical and mental vacation. The hotel offers a range of wellness-related activities paired with eco-friendly accommodation facilities, including yoga, meditation sessions at Ryosoku-in Temple, environmental walks around Kyoto, tea ceremonies and more. These stimulating experiences are kind to the environment, and beneficial to guests as well. The food served at Good Nature Hotel is focused on seasonality, locality and nutrition, and in one of the hotel's restaurants, Erutan, the menu is principally structured around vegetables. The hotel's dedication to well-being doesn't stop with the guests—the hotel is committed to sustainability also, including initiatives to reduce plastic waste and promote food produced and consumed locally. The hotel was awarded a Gold WELL Certification, certifying that the buildings were constructed to be environmentally friendly and beneficial to human health and wellness. It was the first time a hotel had received this certification in history.



GOOD NATURE HOTEL KYOTO

318-6 Inari-cho, Kawaramachidori, Shijosagaru 2-chome, Shimogyo-ku, Kyoto

<https://goodnaturehotel.jp/en>

20

Experience HOTEL WHY, a zero-waste action hotel

Visit Kamikatsu Town, Japan's leading municipality dedicated to zero-waste

Awarded sixth place in Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2022 awards, Shikoku is a small island with a considerable amount to offer visitors. One such offering is a visit to HOTEL WHY. You are invited to stay at this unique hotel, conceived as an interactive experience, and learn how it, and the Kamikatsu municipality, has achieved a zero-waste culture. The experience starts from the moment you check in. You'll learn the history of zero-waste in Kamikatsu before later participating in the recycling effort. Here, local residents bring their waste to the Kamikatsu Zero Waste Center, where waste is separated into 45 different categories and 80% of materials used are recycled. The center is also home to the hotel, curiously built in the shape of a question mark. Inside, you'll find simple, comfortable, modern rooms decked out using local, recycled materials. Come to Kamikatsu to experience a society that focuses on how to treat waste, rather than simply reducing it.

HOTEL WHY

7-2 Shimohiura, Fukuhara, Kamikatsu-cho, Katsuura-gun, Tokushima

<https://why-kamikatsu.jp/en/>



© Transit General Office Inc. SATOSHI MATSUO

Recovery Through Tourism in Tohoku

Filled full of countless treasures for travelers, the Tohoku region promises a spectacular journey all year round. Consisting of six prefectures, you'll find captivating countryside, snow-covered slopes, ancient forests, dramatic coastal scenery, world heritage sites and more.

When the Great East Japan Earthquake hit northeastern Japan in 2011, Tohoku suffered extensively. The tremendous power of nature that has blessed the region with such beauty also had the capacity to ravage it. Following the disaster, the people of Tohoku strengthened their commitment to coexisting with nature.

Right now, there is a spirit of rebirth in Tohoku, and it's an exciting time to visit. The best attractions in the region enable you to experience this energy while discovering Tohoku's natural wonders and cultural heritage.

Island-hopping around Sanriku Fukko (reconstruction) National Park is a must for nature lovers. Explore the coastal areas around the three islands before heading inland to discover unique flora and fauna.

The Michinoku Coastal Trail provides access to some of Tohoku's most spectacular sights while allowing you to lose yourself in the wild, rugged nature that defines the area.

Discover contemporary art, exquisite local dishes, and blissful music at the annual Reborn Art Festival. This important cultural event was launched in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake and embodies the regions commitment to regeneration.

In Kamaishi City, experience the Open Field Museum. A Green Destinations Top 100 for four consecutive years and Silver award winner, the sustainable project invites travelers to experience the city as a living museum.

As a traveler to Tohoku, you'll receive an enthusiastic welcome. Meet passionate residents, learn about their culinary and cultural customs, and contribute to the rejuvenation of this remarkable region.

Sanriku Fukko (reconstruction) National Park

<https://www.japan.travel/national-parks/parks/sanriku-fukko/>

In-outbound Sendai Matsushima Inc.

<https://www.tohoku-local-secret-tours.jp/tourinfo/4945/>

Michinoku Coastal Trail Natori Trail Center

<https://www.mct-natori-tc.jp/en/>

Reborn-Art Festival

<https://www.reborn-art-fes.jp/en/>

KAMAISHI DMC Co., Ltd.

<https://en.kamaishi-kankou.jp/>



©Ministry of the Environment



©Reborn-Art Festival, Kohei Nawa (photo: Takehiro Goto)



21

Step into Japan's green tea epicenter

Discover sustainable farming techniques with a view of Mt. Fuji

Green tea is one of Japan's most celebrated exports, and for a good reason. Well known for its health benefits, it has been grown in the fertile soils of Shizuoka Prefecture for nearly 1,000 years. To witness the traditional, sustainable methods of green tea production is to experience a custom that has remained unchanged across the centuries. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) recognizes green tea production in multiple areas of Shizuoka as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System. Today, on an overnight stay, you can learn the intricacies of Chagusaba farming, a unique, sustainable method of agriculture that protects the tea fields and preserves biodiversity. Depending on when you visit, you can get involved with picking the delicate tea leaves, see an active production facility, or assist in preparing the land for the next crop. Your accommodation is a renovated farmhouse inn where you can enjoy an authentic Japanese tea farm experience in a traditional setting.

Tabinoya

1708 Ono, Kakegawa-shi, Shizuoka

<https://exploreshizuoka.com/shizuoka-post-type/night-at-a-traditional-japanese-farm-house-in-kakegawa/>

Japan's Food Culture

The Japanese archipelago is fertile, rich and diverse, and this precious combination supports many fruits, vegetables, spices and other unique ingredients. Against this outstanding culinary backdrop, many local cuisines using regional ingredients have existed for generations, fostering a food culture that you'll find deeply rooted in the daily lives of Japanese people—wherever you are in the country. Participate in hand-picking tea leaves and enjoy regional plates prepared using fresh, seasonal ingredients like local seafood and vegetables. Of course, you can pair your meal with a glass of sake, Japan's most revered beverage, and also participate in the sake brewing process. Japanese cuisine is a complex patchwork of flavors, cooking methods and cultures. To experience a regional specialty is to truly connect with the people it represents.





22

Witness sustainable seafood made possible by breath-hold diving

Learn ancient fishing techniques still used by Ise-Shima's Ama female free divers

A world away from commercial fishing, female divers, known as Ama, have been sustainably free diving for shellfish in the pristine waters around Ise-Shima for over 3,000 years. Unique, sustainable and unchanged for millennia, the Ama's lives center around the Ama hut, a place to gather, warm up and sample their morning catch. Now, you can help this ancient, sustainable practice endure and support future generations of Ama divers. Experience Ama culture with its unique dress, devotion to ancient ocean deities and unparalleled respect for nature. Taste the spoils of your host's latest dive with a platter of local shellfish freshly prepared over a charcoal grill. Try the freshest giant clams, abalone and sea snails. Afterward, learn some folk dances from Ama women dressed in traditional Ama costume. You'll come away from Ise-Shima with a deep understanding of why these ancient traditions are still alive.



Ama Hut HACHIMAN
819 Osatsucho, Toba-shi, Mie
<https://amakoya.com/english%20page.htm>

23

Contribute to the revitalization of Maebashi at Shiroiya Hotel

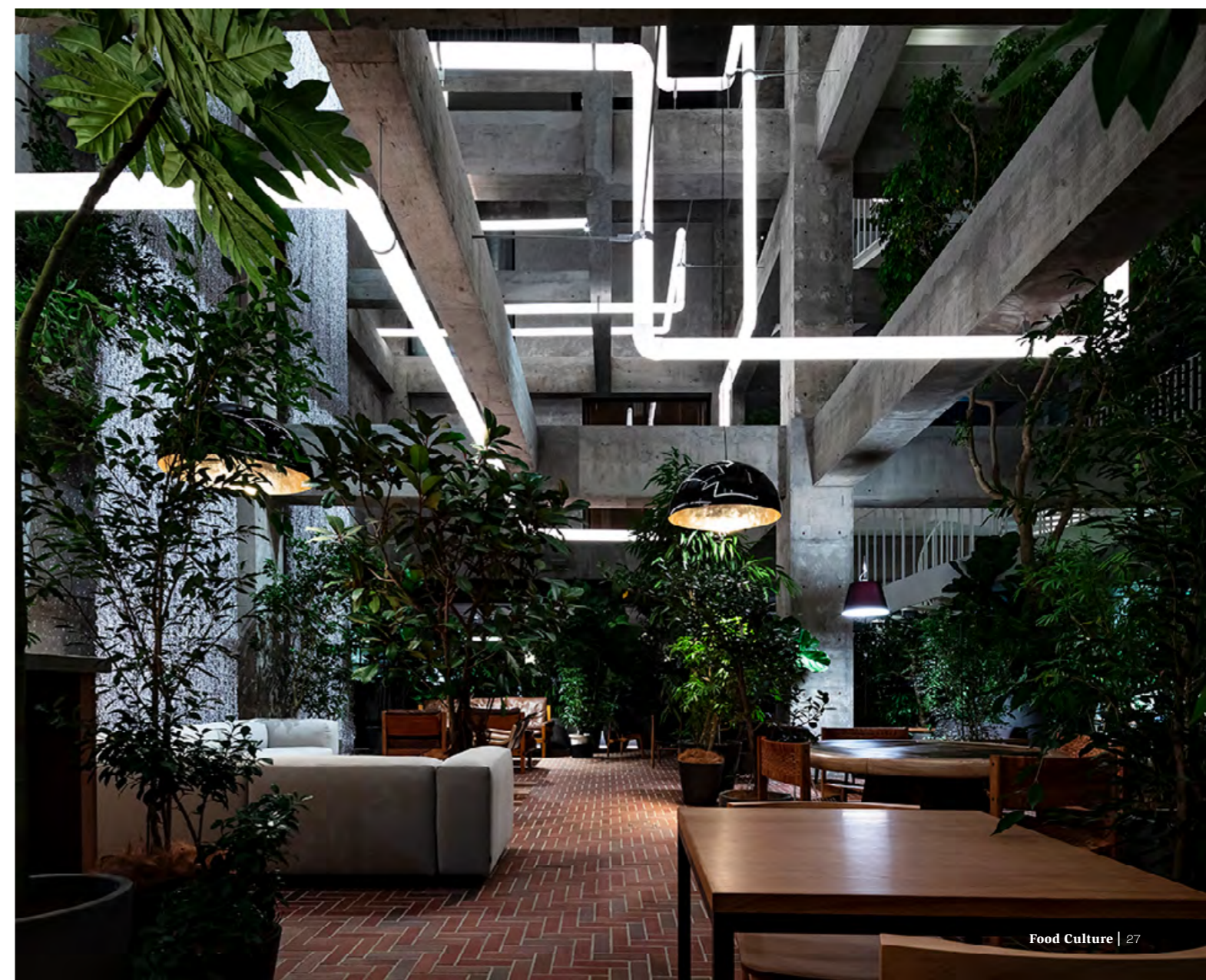
This unique hotel offers new perspectives in art, culture and cuisine

Shiroiya Hotel is located in Maebashi, Gunma Prefecture, an area that contributed greatly to the modernization of Japan during the Edo era thanks to its thriving silk industry. The Shiroiya Ryokan (inn) operated for more than 300 years here, but closed in 2008. As part of efforts to revitalize the area, the existing building has been renovated over the past six and a half years with design by renowned architect Sou Fujimoto. Today, Shiroiya Hotel is a base for local revitalization, providing cutting-edge art, design, food and culture to visitors and guests. The hotel has a private Finnish sauna and offers innovative dishes inspired by Gunma Prefecture's traditional cuisine using local ingredients. The hotel places great emphasis on art, and guests can stay in unique rooms created by famous designers, including Jasper Morrison and Michele De Lucchi. Guests may also participate in activities including hiking, lake canoeing, Japanese tea ceremony, cooking classes and events related to Japanese sake.



Photos: @Shinya Kigure

SHIROIYA HOTEL
2-2-15 Honmachi, Maebashi-shi, Gunma
<https://www.shiroiya.com/en/>





Photos: © KURABITO STAY

24

Discover the secrets of authentic, sustainable sake

Learn unique brewing techniques that have remained unchanged for centuries

Deep in the enchanting countryside two hours northwest from Tokyo, the Saku area in Nagano is a famous production region for Japanese sake. Here, you'll discover Kitsukura Shuzo, a traditional sake brewery that has been producing the iconic drink using the same small-batch, sustainable methods for more than 300 years. On the Kurabito Stay ("kurabito" meaning sake brewer), you can join Kitsukura Shuzo's master brewers and, over three memorable days, don the brewer's outfit and learn how to produce traditional sake. Beyond the brewing lessons, you'll experience authentic regional dishes made with local ingredients at your lodgings, Sakagura Hotel, a former on-site building where the brewers once lived. Away from the brewery complex, you'll have the chance to explore the area, home to a total of 13 sake breweries, and enjoy meals at local restaurants.



KURABITO STAY

623-2 Usuda, Saku-shi, Nagano

<https://kurabitostay.com/en/>

25

Immerse yourself in nature in a unique, floating hotel

The SUIDEN TERRASSE hotel hovers above acres of rice paddies

Even before stepping inside the SUIDEN TERRASSE hotel, the first thing you'll notice is the ocean of rice paddies surrounding the establishment. (SUIDEN in fact, means "paddy fields.") The famous architect Shigeru Ban built the hotel with this landscape in mind, celebrating the long tradition of rice cultivation in the Shonai area of Yamagata Prefecture. Constructed from wood, the hotel's natural materials combine perfectly with the views of agricultural land and the distant mountains beyond. The hotel also features a natural free-flowing hot spring pumped from 1,200 meters underground. The cuisine at SUIDEN TERRASSE complements the clean, minimalist guest rooms, including menus developed with a focus on light dishes using fresh vegetables from Yamagata Prefecture and the hotel's farms, alongside local sake to accompany your meals. The Shonai area has a rich tradition of local cooperation and reuse of resources for organic production. On your visit, experience and touch the soil, breathe the fresh air and immerse yourself in the landscape.



SHONAI HOTEL SUIDEN TERRASSE

23-1 Shimotori-no-su, Kita-kyoden, Tsuruoka-shi, Yamagata

<https://www.suiden-terrasse.yamagata-design.com/>

26

Visit a remarkable sake brewery housed in a historical monument

Taste locally brewed sake direct from the source



The Hachinohe Shuzo sake brewery in Aomori Prefecture is a true marvel. Dating back to 1775, today six buildings of this traditional brewery constructed between 1912 and 1926 have been designated as Registered Tangible Cultural Properties, while the surrounding area flourished as a trade center and displays a mix of Japanese and Western architecture that defines the modern industry of the time. Visit Hachinohe Shuzo and see how the master brewers create sake that enthusiasts worldwide enjoy. Using local rice and yeast, alongside water from the Hachinohe and Kanisawa areas, famed for its purity, the brewers at Hachinohe Shuzo think outside the box to create new styles of local sake in Aomori prefecture. You can find out more about their background on your tour and, of course, sample the result. The Hachinohe Shuzo Company is committed to the region's cultural heritage, hosting exhibitions and concerts in other buildings not used for sake production. The performances help preserve unique traditions that have defined Aomori Prefecture's cultural heritage for generations.

Hachinohe Shuzo

9 Hon-cho, Minato-machi, Hachinohe-shi, Aomori

<https://mutsu8000.com/en/kura/#Kengaku>



Healing Powers of Hot Springs

There are 1,552 known volcanoes worldwide, and 111 of them are in Japan. It's these mighty, primeval vents, rising from the two volcanic belts that run northeast and southwest across Honshu, Japan's main island, that heat the thousands of onsen (hot springs) located in Japan that are considered a blessing from nature. Japanese people have bathed in these waters to seek purification and relaxation since time immemorial, and there are many different types. Yet a visit to an onsen is much more than an opportunity to bathe. Hot spring towns are renowned throughout Japan for their lively yet relaxing atmosphere and stunning natural scenery. Many onsen also provide superb accommodation facilities. Onsen have been an essential part of Japanese life since ancient times because of the abundance of resources they offer and are still a major draw for travelers today.

27

Luxuriate and relax at Dogo Onsen, one of Japan's oldest hot springs

This heralded cultural property remains a popular public bath house

Constructed in 1894, Dogo Onsen Honkan (the main building out of many) has been designated an Important Cultural Property and acquired many other accolades, including three stars in the Michelin Green Guide Japan. The building is stunning—you'll be blown away by the attention to detail on both its facade and interior. The decor is almost unchanged from when it was constructed: traditional paper and wood panels separate the spaces, blue and white tile motifs adorn the walls and winding staircases transport you to another time altogether. The hot spring remains a regularly operating public bath house loved by the local community. In total, 18 springs of different temperatures provide the water to Dogo Onsen Honkan, generating a mix that is kind to sensitive skin and packed with nutrients. Soak in the luxurious spring water and take in the building's historical architecture for an inspired bath house cultural experience.

Dogo Onsen Honkan

5-6 Dogoyunomachi, Matsuyama-shi, Ehime

<https://dogo.jp/en/>



28

Find luxurious, traditional decadence

Escape to Hoshino Resorts' KAI Tamatsukuri, a modern ryokan with private hot springs

Located near the Daisen-Oki National Park and Oki Islands UNESCO Global Geopark, KAI Tamatsukuri is a stunning resort within Tamatsukuri Onsen—an ancient town famed for its hot spring that has been alluring visitors for over 1,300 years. The hot spring takes center stage at the resort too, with each room housing an open-air bath fueled by the waters. A luxuriating soak here provides a true restorative experience thanks to the characteristics and effects of this incredible natural spring water. KAI Tamatsukuri is contemporary, luxurious and elegant, but much thought has gone into preserving the resort's traditional character, inspired by the quintessential Japanese inn, or ryokan. Expect unrivaled hospitality, enjoy local cultural performances in the evenings and dine on exquisite dishes prepared using local seafood specialties, such as snow crab. KAI Tamatsukuri also promotes sustainability efforts including recycling toothbrushes used by guests, disposing of plastic bottles and working towards minimizing environmental impact.



©Hoshino Resorts

Hoshino Resorts KAI Tamatsukuri (Formerly KAI Izumo)

1237 Tamatsukuri, Tamayu-cho, Matsue-shi, Shimane

<https://hoshinoresorts.com/en/hotels/kaitamatsukuri/>



29

Experience the life of Buddhist monks at Koyasan first-hand

Embrace spiritual fulfillment on a withdrawn, deep-mountain retreat

The legendary Japanese monk named Kukai (774–835 AD) founded the Shingon Buddhism sect and a monastery complex in Wakayama Prefecture known as Koyasan. Since then, for more than 1,200 years the monks at Koyasan have lived a simple, sustainable life in the verdant Kii Mountains. This active monastic center is one of Japan's most sacred sites, but it is open to visitors. In fact, of the 117 temples located here, 51 are open for visitors to stay alongside the monks at the temple's shukubo, a traditional pilgrim lodge. Here, you'll learn about the monks' daily lives and actively participate in early morning prayer and meditation sessions during your stay. The monks will also prepare your food, a Buddhist cuisine made entirely of vegetables, edible wild plants, grains and soybeans known as shojin ryori. Staying at Koyasan is a mindful, positive experience that will leave you feeling fulfilled, at peace and content for the days and weeks that follow your visit.

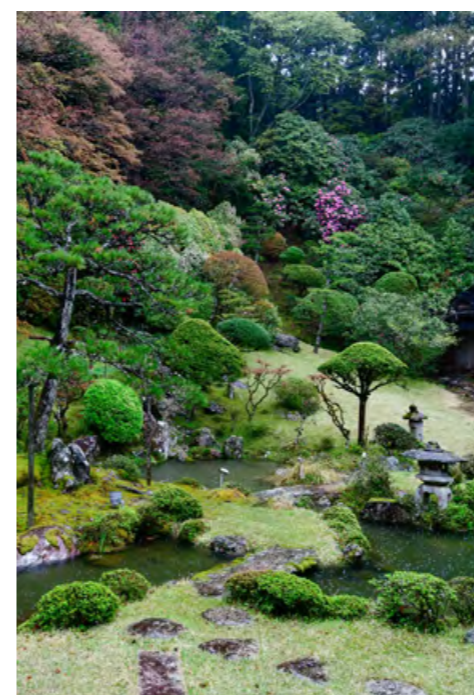
Koyasan Shukubo Temple Lodging Association

600 Koyasan, Koya-cho, Ito-gun, Wakayama

<https://eng-shukubo.net/>

Gain Insight into Japanese Beliefs

The geography and location of the Japanese archipelago afford a mild climate, while towering mountain slopes, fertile seas and verdant fields provide a diverse and compelling natural landscape. However, Japan is also prone to disasters, from typhoons and floods to heavy snowfalls and icy storms. In response to these conflicting elements, Japanese people have developed a sense of mindfulness with profound gratitude and awe toward nature. This reverence has formed a culture of respect for nature and the environment in Japan, and the idea that gods dwell in Japan's mountains, seas, plants, trees and more defines the country's ancient religions and practices. There are many ways to experience Japan's unique spiritual culture. Join a pilgrimage route, stay in an ancient temple, try Zen meditation or simply marvel at the beautiful natural landmarks that have inspired deep-rooted beliefs.





30

Follow the ancient Henro pilgrimage route on foot

Explore Shikoku, voted sixth best region in Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2022

In recognition of the island's excellent cultural and environmental offerings, in 2022, Shikoku was recognized as one of the world's best regions by Lonely Planet. At the top of the attraction list is the Henro trail, a 1,400-kilometer pilgrimage route that has been preserved thanks to the many faithful following its trail for over 1,200 years. The full pilgrimage includes 88 temples and the journey can take a month or two on foot. However, there are no strict rules on which temples to visit or how many in total. Modern pilgrims have the option of cycling or using public transportation, giving you the chance to explore hidden corners of the island in peace and at your own pace. Along the way will be memorable encounters with Shikoku's unique, undiscovered culture and natural beauty, far from the bustle of city life.



Shikoku 88 Sacred Sites (Inc.)
1065-1 Zentsuji-cho, Zentsuji-shi, Kagawa
<https://88shikokuhenro.jp/en/>

31

Stay near the grounds of an ancient Zen Buddhist temple complex

Find inner peace at a unique Japanese inn and discover Zen philosophies

Located deep in the mountains three hours north of Kyoto in Fukui Prefecture, Eihei-ji Temple is the main temple of the Soto school of Zen Buddhism, the largest religious denomination in Japan. In English, Eihei-ji means The Temple of Eternal Peace, and that's exactly what you'll find when you stay at the Hakujukan hotel. Situated in front of the gates to the Eihei-ji Temple, Zen philosophies take center stage at this exquisite hotel. The hotel's concierges are themselves trained at the Eihei-ji Temple and are on hand to guide you through some of the practices you can get involved with during your stay. These experiences include attending morning services and learning the art of Zazen, the Zen Buddhist practice of meditation. And the Zen influence doesn't stop there. Even the dishes prepared for guests are created using local and seasonal ingredients in the traditional Buddhist way known as shojin ryori.

Stay at Hakujukan Zen Hotel
Shihi 6-1, Eihei-ji-cho, Yoshida-gun, Fukui
<https://www.hakujukan-eiheiji.jp/en/index/>



©hakujukan

32

Become one with nature under the guidance of Dewa Sanzan

Yamabushi mountain priests guide you to spiritual and environmental discovery

Towering above the tree line of the Bandai-Asahi National Park are the three mountains of Dewa. Here, generations of mountain priests known as Yamabushi have walked the peaks for over 1,500 years. Following the ancient belief of Shugendō, a unique Japanese mountain faith that is a fusion of Shinto, Buddhism, and native Japanese animism, the Yamabushi are dedicated to connecting with nature through mind, body and spirit. Now, for the first time ever, you can join the Yamabushi and learn their ancient sustainable ways. Join Master Hoshino on a journey of self-discovery as you follow sacred trails and stay in a traditional Yamabushi-run pilgrim lodge. You'll also learn long-practiced meditation and other techniques to reconnect with yourself and live more harmoniously with nature. In addition, your visit to Dewa Sanzan, and financial contributions to sustainable experiences like those offered by organizations including Megurun Inc., will give you the opportunity to directly support Yamabushi culture and the environmental stability of the region.

Megurun
120-2 Konko-ji, Yabase, Tsuruoka-shi, Yamagata
<https://www.yamabushido.jp>



©Yamabushido



33

Discover a centuries-old post town brimming with history

Explore Ouchi-juku, a celebrated Fukushima attraction

Delve into the past on a trip to Ouchi-juku, a historic post town built around 1640 in the Edo era. It once linked the castle town of Tsurugajo Castle and Shimotsuke Province, known today as Nikko. However, as the years have slowly ebbed by, the stunning architectural beauty of the town has made it a must-see attraction in the Fukushima region. Registered collectively as an Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings, over 30 thatched houses that populate Ouchi-juku have been preserved since the Edo era and are a true marvel. Today, some of them are even open as lodgings. Gather around a traditional “irori” (open fireplace) hearth in one of these houses to enjoy soba and other dishes representative of the area. In the local community, specialized artisans using time-honored techniques collaborate with villagers to continue preserving these houses. Your visit here will contribute to this tradition that has spanned generations and infiltrated all aspects of life in Ouchi-juku.

Ouchi-juku

Ouchi, Shimogo-cho, Minamiaizu-gun, Fukushima

<https://ouchi-juku.com/>

Traditional Towns and Heritage Stays

In certain parts of Japan, there are beautifully preserved towns and villages engraved with the country’s history. Here, visitors can experience the beauty of ancient Japanese architecture and communities still following time-honored traditions handed down over generations. On a stay in dwellings such as thatched houses, you can witness firsthand the ancestral wisdom that led to their construction using local, renewable materials. You’ll learn further about these communities through local dishes created with locally sourced ingredients. By experiencing these towns and buildings preserved from another era, you’re also helping local communities maintain their beloved towns and unique ways of life well into the future.



All Photos: © PIXTA





© Shirakawa Village Office

34

Experience the original Japan at Shirakawa-go and Gokayama

Living history inspires at these UNESCO World Heritage Sites

The remote villages of Shirakawa-go in Gifu Prefecture, selected as a Green Destinations Top 100 location in 2020, and Gokayama in Toyama Prefecture are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. In both locations, you'll find an enchanted village of gassho-zukuri-style thatched farmhouses, traditional structures built sustainably using local materials. Villagers preserve and protect this beautiful landscape together, following the ancient concept of Yui. In practice, this means the people of the village work cooperatively to maintain their own homes and those of their neighbors. Many of these unique houses are also open to guests, giving visitors the chance to experience life as it was before Japan modernized, while supporting the preservation of this unique way of life. At Shirakawa-go, traffic regulations limiting car access help to reduce environmental burden, and sustainable management at both sites ensures your visit helps to preserve the integrity of the local traditions and landscape.



Shirakawa-go

1086 Ogimachi, Shirakawa-mura, Ono-gun, Gifu

<https://shirakawa-go.gr.jp/en/>

Gokayama

754 Kaminashi, Nanto-shi, Toyama

<https://gokayama-info.jp/en/>

35

A sustainable stay at a Kyoto-style thatched cottage, in the mountain retreat of Miyama

Experience life in the slow lane surrounded by beautiful mountains and rice fields

Two hours from Kyoto City, deep in the countryside you'll find Miyama Town, voted "Best Tourism Villages by UNWTO" in 2021. The collection of thatched cottages here could well grace the pages of an ancient Japanese saga. Kayabuki no Sato is Miyama's main village, made up of 39 thatched cottages, the largest concentration of thatched roof houses in Japan. Sustainability is woven into the fabric of the village, a traditional satoyama community that works alongside, not against nature. For a unique and authentic experience, you can spend a night at Miyama FUTON&Breakfast. In fact, the main house is a Registered Tangible Cultural Property. Despite representing daily life as it once was, the accommodation has everything you could ask for from a modern getaway, including well-equipped bathrooms and bedrooms. Enjoy fresh eggs from the on-site chicken coop and dishes prepared using local ingredients. Get involved with ecologically conscious activities during your stay including bamboo crafting using naturally sourced timber, thatching workshops and organic farming.

Miyama FUTON&Breakfast

29 Hanabusa, Shima, Miyama-cho, Nantan-shi, Kyoto

<http://miyamafandb.jp/>



© Miyama FUTON&Breakfast

36

Retreat to the mountains and stay in a historic farmhouse

Enjoy the stillness of the wilderness on a rural retreat



© SHUHEI TONAMI

A collection of farmhouses more than a hundred years old, the four properties at Yamaura Stay exude rural charm. These traditional structures have been carefully renovated and restored without compromising their integrity, and the result is a picturesque scene of a simpler time. Beyond the walls of the farmhouse, you'll discover a rural idyll punctuated by rice paddies, exquisite mountain ranges and a local culture that respects sustainability and conservation above all else. During your visit, you can learn how to make miso or traditional dishes from locals, take a tour of the area, or even visit a sake brewery. Maintaining the farmhouses in the Yamaura, an area in the shadow of the Yatsugatake Mountains, contributes to the ongoing preservation of rural life in the area—that's why your stay matters.

Yamaura Stay

3506 Chino, Chino-shi, Nagano

<https://yamaurastay.jp/en/>



37

Enjoy a regal stay in Japan's first guest-ready wooden castle

Experience living history in breathtaking Ozu Castle

Ozu Castle, a designated Important Cultural Property, is Japan's first restored wooden castle that welcomes you to experience a night sleeping within the same walls as ancient rulers once did. As the castle only hosts one group a day, you'll have the place to yourself. During your stay, learn the history of the castle in exhilarating fashion when the 1617 Sadayasu Kato takeover, a formative moment in history, is replayed exclusively for you by local performers with special attention to authentic details, including a real gun salute. You will also be invited to tour the local area and discover hidden gems like Garyu Sanso, an architectural masterpiece and designated Important Cultural Property that also can be reserved for a luxurious breakfast. The entire experience connects guests with local traditions and cultures in an effort to support their endurance, including traditional performing arts, local food and sake industry, and Tobe-yaki tableware, an Intangible Cultural Property designated by Ehime Prefecture.



Ozu Castle Stay

903 Ozu, Ozu-shi, Ehime

<https://castlestay.ozucastle.com/en/home>

38

Stay in traditional Japanese houses renovated into a boutique hotel

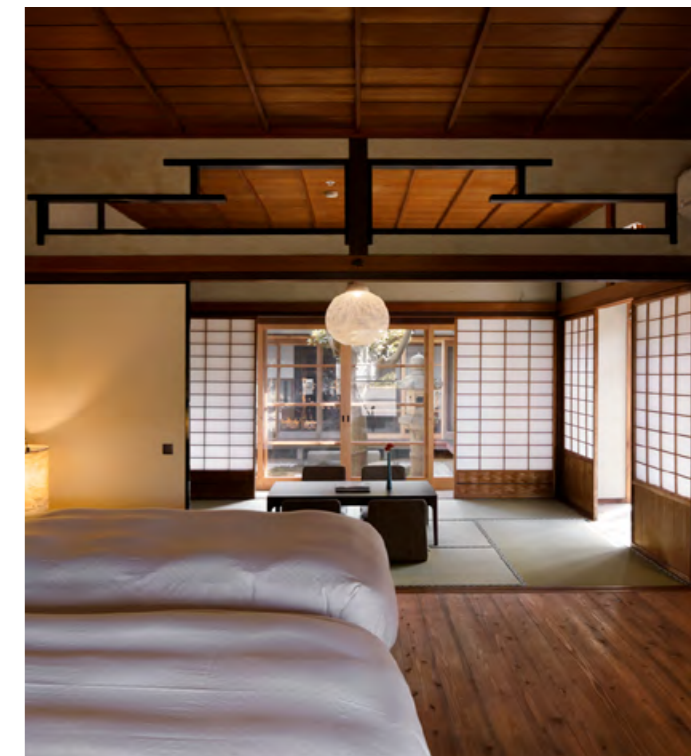
Discover old-world traditions at this stunning hotel with over a century of history

The ancient castle town of Sasayama near Kyoto is recognized as one of Japan's top 100 beautiful historical towns. Here the buildings are so wonderfully preserved they have received certification as an Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings. NIPPONIA Sasayama Castle Town Hotel allows you to experience this living history through accommodation facilities scattered across a number of historic houses throughout the town. Each building has a unique history, including ONAE, a former bank magnate's residence that houses NIPPONIA's front desk and restaurant, alongside several guest rooms. Guests enjoy artful French cuisine using locally sourced, seasonal ingredients from the Tamba-Sasayama area, and pottery workshops in the Tamba style at one of Japan's six ancient kilns provide a compelling hands-on experience. The entire town benefits from the hotel's presence, with its efforts made to create an authentic, living experience for guests while preserving the integrity of the structures and ultimately benefiting the community as a whole.

NIPPONIA Sasayama Castle Town Hotel

25 Nishimachi, Tanbasasayama-shi, Hyogo

<https://www.sasayamastay.jp/en/>



39

Relax in minimalist luxury surrounded by exquisite scenery

Discover a former traditional inn reimagined with deep community ties

Deep in rural Shimane is Yunotsu Onsen. This idyllic village, buffeted by ocean spray with a backdrop of forested mountains, is the epitome of tranquility. Here, you'll find HĪSOM, a Nordic lifestyle-inspired minimalist hotel housed on the site of a former traditional Japanese home. The developers of HĪSOM are dedicated to sustainability, and many materials from the original inn were upcycled and used in the new build, and HĪSOM maintains many original features, including the iconic tatami floor. A haven for nature lovers or families in search of a calm, rejuvenating stay, the culture at HĪSOM is all about simple pleasures, from enjoying fresh local food to immersive experiences in nature. You can prepare food alongside family or friends in the comfortable open kitchen and barbeque patio, or enjoy catered lunch or dinner (advance reservations required). During your stay, luxuriate on the gorgeous beach nearby, go for a refreshing swim or catch local fish to make the most of time well spent at HĪSOM.



HĪSOM

588-1 Yunotsu, Yunotsu-cho, Oda-shi, Shimane

<https://hisom.jp/>



40

Help preserve cultural properties during a stay at Shunyoso

Discover exquisitely preserved, 1940s Japanese architecture on Awaji Island

Shunyoso is a National Historic Landmark on the Island of Awaji. Officially an ongoing National Registered Tangible Cultural Property Revitalization Project, Shunyoso is an important monument built in 1941 and restored using sustainable methods. A former residence of the Iwaki shipbuilding family, Shunyoso comprises eight separate buildings, including a guest house, meditation area and guest hall. Shunyoso's owners have embarked on an ambitious preservation drive to prevent the buildings from falling into disrepair by encouraging tourists to visit the properties and help support their conservation efforts. These include natural and reusable energy sources, well water and rainwater usage, reducing waste and supporting initiatives to create and consume locally. During a stay at Shunyoso, take time to explore the buildings that make up the estate and learn about how Awaji Island once looked and operated. Experience traditional shows, and enjoy a photo session wearing a kimono or yukata.

Shunyoso

2-5-4 Uyama, Sumoto-shi, Hyogo

<https://shunyoso.jp/en/>

41

Experience history in a 200-year-old renovated traditional inn

Stay and immerse yourself in the local community, an extension of the hotel

Iizuka-tei is an exceptionally beautiful, 200-year-old property constructed in the Meiji era. You'll find simple, modern design features that accentuate the character of the existing building alongside contemporary luxuries. Located in the town of Nakagawa-machi at the foot of the Yamizo mountains and near the Naka River, Iizuka-tei is also a Registered Tangible Cultural Property. The town's tight-knit community supports the functions of the hotel. You'll find simple, modern design features that accentuate the character of the existing building alongside contemporary luxuries. Nearby restaurants offer exquisite meals using local ingredients, with vegan options and catering services also available. In addition, unique activities are provided through local operators, including traditional dinners with community farmers, cycling tours through terraced fields and more. Rediscover rustic simplicity and support sustainability in rural Japan at Iizuka-tei.

Iizuka-tei

360 Bato, Nakagawa-machi, Nasu-gun, Tochigi

<https://iizukatei.ohawaragt.co.jp/en/>



Japan's AINU Indigenous People

Since time immemorial, the indigenous AINU people have inhabited the northern region of the Japanese archipelago, particularly Hokkaido. Their ancient culture includes a unique language, religious beliefs centered on deep respect for nature, traditional dances, and spell-binding rituals. The AINU are also skilled craftspeople, with exceptional skills in wood carving and embroidery.

Akanko AINU Kotan, an inhabited settlement located in Akan-Mashu National Park, is one of the most authentic places in Japan to experience AINU culture. In this lakeside village you'll discover traditional AINU theater, music, cuisine, oral history and more.

To learn about the history and wide-ranging cultural practices of the AINU, there's no better place to visit than Upopoy (National AINU Museum and Park). The facility includes hands-on workshops, performance spaces, interactive exhibitions and much more.

The Arashiyama Hiking and AINU Culture Tour offers you a chance to discover the natural wonders that have influenced AINU culture for millennia. Scour the slopes of Mount Arashiyama, and afterwards learn more about the AINU's story at the local museum.

The AINU have always lived harmoniously with the natural world. Today, we could learn a great deal from their culture about how to live sustainably, alongside and not against nature.

Upopoy (National AINU Museum and Park)

2-3 Wakakusa-cho, Shiraoi-machi, Shiraoi-gun, Hokkaido

<https://ainu-upopoy.jp/en/>

Akanko AINU Kotan

4-7-19 Akankoonsen, Akan-cho, Kushiro-shi, Hokkaido

<https://www.akanainu.jp/en/>

Adventure Hokkaido

West 4, North 46, Higashikawa, Hokkaido

<https://www.adventure-hokkaido.com/tours/asahikawa-ainu-1-day-hiking-culture-tour/>



© The Foundation for AINU Culture



© The Foundation for AINU Culture



AINU Culture | 3



42

Experience the ancient Shinto ritual of Takachiho Kagura

This fascinating dance performance will transport you to another realm

In Takachiho, a town in northern Miyazaki Prefecture, masked and costumed performers at the Takachiho Shrine offer a performance of re-enacted scenes from Japanese mythology through Takachiho-no-Yokagura, an ancient Shinto ritual dedicated to the local god of each village. The ritual has been passed down for over 800 years, and is still performed between November and February to offer thanks for the autumn harvest and ask for blessings in the next year. There are 33 episodes of the ritual, and four of them are displayed every night for visitors to enjoy. These performances will whisk you away to a land of myths and legends, conveying messages of rich harvests, happy marriages and new life. The Takachiho Shrine is registered as a National Tangible Cultural Property, while Yokagura is registered as an Intangible Folk Cultural Property. Support ancient tradition in Japan's southern Miyazaki prefecture for a lasting memory that helps preserve local culture for generations to come.

Takachiho-no-Kagura Performance

1037 Mitai, Oaza Takachiho-cho, Nishiusuki-gun, Miyazaki

https://takachiho-kanko.info/en/boat_kagura/

Traditional Arts Rooted in Community

Since ancient times, Japanese communities have dedicated their meals, dances, songs and music to the gods. These traditions contributed to the origin of performing arts in Japan, and even today, many performances retain these traditional influences. Communities have developed unique, traditional arts cultures such as Kurokawa Noh, Kanazawa Geigi and Takachiho Kagura. Thanks to training regimens, relentless practice and dedicated education programs, Japanese performing arts and techniques have been handed down through the generations. What binds them all is a deep respect for the past, commitment to maintaining these traditions well into the future and strong connections to the beauty that inspired them. You'll find countless opportunities to enjoy traditional performing arts firsthand and help them thrive for generations to come.





44

Visit Kanazawa's most famous chaya (teahouse), accompanied by traditional geisha

Experience refined Japanese hospitality in a 200-year-old setting

Geisha, also known as “geigi” in Kanazawa, Ishikawa Prefecture, are perhaps one of Japan’s most recognizable cultural symbols. For centuries, geisha all across Japan have followed a strict set of rules regarding their approach to hospitality and entertainment. Now, you can experience this culture first-hand with a visit to Kaikaro in Higashi Chaya District, nationally designated as an Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings. Leave the modern world behind and immerse yourself in geisha culture. See them perform traditional dances, listen to their centuries-old songs and learn about geisha culture from the teahouse proprietress in English. Beyond the entertainment, you can enjoy regional dishes prepared with local ingredients and of course, plenty of fresh Japanese tea. Since 1820, this traditional teahouse has welcomed guests from all over Japan. Now you can join their ranks.



Photos: @artex inc.

Geisha Evenings in Kanazawa
1-14-8 Higashiyama, Kanazawa-shi, Ishikawa
<https://www.geishaevenings.jp/>

43

Delve into ancient theatrical arts in Kurokawa

Learn all about centuries-old Noh performance tradition

Kurokawa Noh is a traditional art form involving masked performers that began with rituals to the local god at Kasuga Shrine in Kurokawa, Yamagata Prefecture over 500 years ago. This rural village community continued the rare and much-celebrated tradition for centuries, allowing it to retain a unique style different from mainstream Noh. It became an official Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property in 1976. On a visit to Kurokawa, you’ll discover why this art form is so celebrated by the whole community, see some of the traditional costumes and masks, and learn about individual performances under the guidance of a Noh master. Lunch is traditional tofu-based cuisine commonly served during the Ogi Festival. Your visit will help preserve artistic history and sustain ancient performing arts traditions in pastoral Kurokawa Village.



Megurun
120-2 Konko-ji, Yabase, Tsuruoka-shi, Yamagata
https://megurun.com/megurun_experiences/kurokawa-noh-village/





© PIXTA

Experience Japanese Festivals with History

The Japanese word “matsuri” means festival and is derived from “to enshrine.” The focus was usually to offer something to the gods, and these gods are deeply entwined with the origins of Japanese festivals. Although Japanese festivals vary from region to region, every matsuri is a community-wide event and an opportunity to proudly display and preserve local traditions. In the past, the celebrations served as either thanksgiving to the gods for prosperity, or a request to them for a bountiful harvest or to ward away natural disasters. Today, Japan’s festivals enable visitors to witness ancient rituals, performances and lively participation by local residents.

45

Celebrate summer in Kyoto at the Gion Matsuri

Since 869, this annual festival has been held by Yasaka-jinja Shrine

Visit Kyoto City in July, and you can’t miss the festivities of Gion Matsuri. This popular annual festival, held by the city’s Yasaka-jinja Shrine in the neighborhood of Gion, was first celebrated over 1,000 years ago to appease the gods and drive away plagues from the city. Today, Gion Matsuri centers around the exhilarating procession of massive yamaboko floats—the combined name of the Yama and Hoko floats that are pulled through the city streets. As high as 25 meters and weighing up to 12 tons, these ornate floats, adorned with exquisite craftwork including woven fabric, textiles and sculptures, are recognized as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Although an ancient festival, the team behind it are committed to modern sustainability practices, operating a zero-waste campaign since 2014. This means all the night shops and street stalls that operate, serving close to 210,000 meals over the festival, are committed to transitioning from disposable to reusable tableware.

Gion Matsuri

Kyoto-shi, Kyoto

<http://www.gionmatsuri.or.jp/foreign/en/>



© PIXTA

46

Observe and enjoy cultural diversity at the Kunchi Festival

The annual autumn festival recognizes Nagasaki’s trading heritage



© NPTA

For centuries, Nagasaki has been an important Japanese hub for traders and explorers alike. In fact, during the foreign isolation period in Japan between the 17th and 19th centuries, Nagasaki stayed open for business, particularly through trade with China and the Netherlands. Since this era, the annual Kunchi Festival has symbolized the city’s international history. During the festival, one of the biggest in Japan held from October 7–9, people flock to Nagasaki’s Suwa Shrine to pay homage to its guardian god and offer thanks for the city’s success. A different district is in charge of the proceedings each year, which includes dances that take place at designated “dance districts” throughout the city. These dances and rituals reflect the city’s Japanese, Chinese, Dutch and Portuguese heritage, making for a truly special festival experience. Due to its unique mix of cultural traditions handed down over generations, the Kunchi Festival was listed as an Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property in Japan. Step into a unforgettable festival experience that is both a treasure of the Nagasaki people and a cultural window to the world.

Nagasaki’s Kunchi

Nagasaki-shi, Nagasaki

<https://travel.at-nagasaki.jp/en/what-to-see/64/>



47

Experience traditional aizome indigo dyeing in a castle town

Explore a family-owned dyehouse dating back over 400 years

Japanese indigo is an instantly recognizable color. The Nagara River Basin in Gifu Prefecture was selected as a Green Destinations Top 100 location in 2021, and this rich source of water has allowed indigo dyeing to flourish here. At a traditional dyehouse here along the river in the historic castle town of Gujo Hachiman, artisans have been expertly dyeing garments with indigo pigment for centuries. Learn from 15th-generation masters at the Watanabe Somemono Dyehouse how natural aizome indigo dye, which has natural insect-repelling and fabric-strengthening properties, is produced through a fermentation process. You'll see first-hand how these expert dyers follow an ancient method of soaking, washing and drying pieces until only the most vivid indigo remains. Create your own indigo-dyed t-shirt to take home as a souvenir while experiencing traditional techniques that have been handed down through generations of master artisans.

Watanabe Somemono Dyehouse

737 Hachiman-cho, Shimadani, Gujo-shi, Gifu

<https://experiences.travel.rakuten.com/experiences/22184>

Discover Japanese Craftsmanship

Japanese aesthetic expression is best conveyed through the handiwork of its craftspeople. Traditional skills in kimono making, lacquerware, porcelain, blacksmithing and more have been handed down for generations based on the natural resources available in specific regions. Today, these inherited traditions are a base for the innovative crafts developed by Japan's cutting-edge artisans. Across Japan, there are many opportunities to get involved with hands-on workshops and try some of these unique crafts for yourself. By traveling and experiencing the skills of artisans firsthand and directly purchasing traditional crafts, you can touch the spirit of these cherished forms of Japanese craftsmanship that have been cultivated over a long history.





48

Tour the Gyokusendo copperware studio to learn ancient techniques

Absorb time-honored traditions that define Tsuiki metalworking

Two hundred years ago at their studio in Niigata Prefecture, the Tamagawa family began crafting copperware using the ancient technique of Tsuiki metalworking (a term derived from the words “hammer” and “raise,” indicating the repetition inherent to the process). Today, this tradition continues, and you are invited to see this unique practice first-hand. In the Tsubame-Sanjo area, a Japanese region famous for metalworking, join a tour of the Gyokusendo copperware studio and explore this beautiful building certified as a Tangible Cultural Property. Observe master metalworkers as they meticulously create works of art using the Tsuiki method: aside from intense repetition, this method creates final pieces from a single sheet of copper. The process is governed by strict rules that have remained unchanged for centuries, and the metalworkers must complete the whole process by hand, using hammers, anvils and other instruments. Carefully crafted by these skilled artisans, every beautiful tsuiki copperware piece is unique, and becomes even more characteristic over time.



Gyokusendo
2-2-21 Chuo-Dori, Tsubame-shi, Niigata
<https://www.gyokusendo.com/en/openfactory>

49

Learn centuries-old pottery techniques from a certified master



Create your own Japanese tea bowl by hand at this Kyoto pottery workshop

Since the 16th century, raku ware pottery has been highly prized by renowned tea masters including Sen no Rikyu, who perfected the Japanese tradition of wabi-cha tea ceremony. A unique and celebrated Japanese tradition, raku ware is formed entirely by hand without using a potter’s wheel. The potters at Shoraku Kiln in Kameoka, Kyoto are dedicated to preserving traditional techniques by introducing new methodologies that help to refine them. Now, you can join an immersive pottery workshop and experience this highly skilled, traditional practice firsthand. Master potters at the Shoraku Kiln host a 3.5-hour masterclass to guide you in molding your very own chawan (tea ceremony bowl) with these very techniques. The raku style celebrates imperfection and asymmetry, applauding the unique creation developed by each individual artist. Discover the rikyu-wabicha tradition of artistic properties and the connection it has to the Buddhist principles of Zen on your visit.

SHORAKU
2-4 Dougatani, Kamihara, Higashibetsuin-cho, Kameoka-shi, Kyoto
<https://shorakugama.com/en/>

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Try your hand at Kintsugi, mending broken pottery with precious metals

Discover how this age-old, sustainable art form collides with wabi-sabi philosophy

Kintsugi is a centuries-old technique for fixing broken pottery with precious metals. Kintsugi translates to “golden joinery,” mending damaged pottery by joining the pieces with natural resin (urushi) and sprinkling the joints with gold powder (maki-e) before polishing them. This revered maki-e technique is a closely kept secret amongst Kintsugi artisans and follows Japanese concepts including the aesthetic of wabi-sabi, a tradition of accepting and finding beauty in transience and imperfection. Beyond this, the art of Kintsugi is recognized as a sustainable practice, where old, discarded objects are given a new lease of life. Learn from Kintsugi master Showzi Tsukamoto during this gold joinery workshop as your broken pottery is reborn into a beautiful piece of art. Following the workshop, your host will perform a samurai-style tea ceremony service and explain the philosophy and history behind Kintsugi. You’ll leave the workshop with a sense of accomplishment and a treasured memento of your experience.

Kintsugi Souke
La Casa Minaminagasaki #401, 5-1-10 Minaminagasaki, Toshima-ku, Tokyo
<https://kintsugitsukamoto.wixsite.com/kintsugi>



© Kintsugi Souke

Leading Sustainable Destinations in Japan

Green Destinations “Top 100 Destination Sustainability Stories”

Green Destinations, the world’s leading destinations’ network for responsible tourism, selects regions that meet its core criteria and have advanced sustainability stories through a panel of experts each year. These are published as the “Top 100 Destination Sustainability Stories” to be shared as inspiring examples to tourism professionals and travelers.

Six regions from Japan were selected in 2020 and 12 regions in 2021, the largest number of regions by country in 2021. 10 regions from Japan were selected in 2022.

<https://www.greendestinations.org/top-100-destinations/>



2020

- Kamaishi
- Kyoto City
- Miura Peninsula
- Niseko Town
- Okinawa Prefecture
- Shirakawa Village

2021

- Amami-Oshima Island
- Aso City
- Kamaishi
- Kyoto City
- Nagara River Basin
- Nanao City and Nakanoto Town
- Nasushiobara City
- Niseko Town
- Sado City
- Shodoshima Town
- Toyooka City
- Yoron Island

2022

- Shodoshima Town
- Ozu City
- Oguni Town
- Nasushiobara City
- Minamichita Town
- Kamaishi
- Higashimatsushima City
- Hakone Town
- Gero-spa Town
- Aso City

“Best Tourism Villages by UNWTO”

In 2021, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) launched “Best Tourism Villages by UNWTO,” a global initiative to highlight the villages that are working to make tourism a driver of rural development and wellbeing and to advance the role of tourism in valuing and safeguarding rural villages along with their associated landscapes, knowledge systems, biological and cultural diversity, local values and activities. For the 2021

pilot initiative, 44 villages from 32 countries were recognized as Best Tourism Villages by UNWTO from among the 174 villages in 75 UNWTO Member States that applied, and the following 2 villages were selected from Japan.

<https://www.unwto.org/tourism-villages/en/>



2021

- Miyama Town
- Niseko Town



Miyama's thatched village, Kyoto

Japan Tourism Agency "JSTS-D (Japan Sustainable Tourism Standard for Destinations)"

The “JSTS-D” provides sustainable tourism indicators for municipalities and DMOs so that they understand the current situation from various angles and manage tourism sustainably.

The indicators are based on international standards outlined in the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations (GSTC-D). Each element of the various JSTS-D tourism indicators is

organized in consideration of Japan and its unique characteristics and challenges. The following destinations have committed to working under the JSTS-D.

<https://www.gstcouncil.org/japan-sustainable-tourism-standard-for-destinations-gstc-recognized-standard/>



As of February 16, 2023

Otaru City

Yatsugatake Area

(Hokuto City, Fujimi Town, Hara Village)

Miura Peninsula

(Kamakura City, Zushi City, Yokosuka City, Miura City, Hayama Town)

Kyoto City

Kamaishi City

Shikoku

(Ehime Prefecture, Kagawa Prefecture, Kochi Prefecture, Tokushima Prefecture)

Higashimatsushima City

Aso City

Akita Prefecture

(Odate City, Kitaakita City, Kosaka Town, Kamikoani Village)

Hata Area

(Sukumo City, Tosashimizu City, Shimanto City, Otsuki Town, Mihara Village, Kuroshio Town)

Hatsukaichi City

Amami-Oshima Island

Ozu City

Tonosho Town

Atami City

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