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JAPAN TRAVEL UPDATES JNTO



May 2026

News From JNTO



In 2026, the United States celebrates its 250th anniversary of independence and hosts globally significant events such as the FIFA World Cup. Seizing the momentum of this special year, the public and private sectors of both countries will work together to launch the "Japan-USA Tourism Campaign 2026" to further expand two-way tourism between Japan and the United States.

[Learn More](#)



GREENxEXPO 2027 comes to Yokohama from March 19th to September 26th, 2027, bringing together Japan's garden culture, seasonal scenery, and food traditions. There is also growing international excitement, with the United States officially confirming participation and helping make this a global event worth planning ahead for.

[Learn More](#)

Educational Tools & Resources



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News From Japan

Fukui Prefecture – Local Cuisine Lunch and Sagicho Experience at Kagetsuro



Experience the essence of Japanese tradition with a unique cultural plan in Katsuyama City, Fukui Prefecture. Enjoy a seasonal local cuisine lunch at Kagetsuro, a 120-year-old nationally registered cultural property, followed by a hands-on encounter with the 300-year-old Katsuyama Sagicho Festival. Try on traditional costumes, play festive drums and kimono. This exclusive program offers an unforgettable journey through history, food, and local spirit.

[Learn More](#) or [Contact](#)

Hyogo Tourism Bureau – Awaji Island Yura Fishing Port Private Traditional Fish Auction Tour & Special Lunch

Yura Fishing Port, historically known for supplying premium seafood to the Imperial Court, offers a rare glimpse into Japan's rich maritime heritage. Join a private tour led by a professional wholesaler who supplies Michelin-starred restaurants and local luxury ryokan hotels, and experience the relaxing atmosphere of this bustling port. Observe the unique traditional auction, where freshly caught seafood is brought to bid, and even take part yourself by securing the finest local catch. Your journey culminates in an exclusive "Sea to Table" dining experience, where a skilled chef prepares your selection just for you at a



special seaside onsen ryokan overlooking the local waters. [Learn More](#)

Visit Kinokuni – Takeno Luxurious Fresh Japanese Seafood Course



Takeno, a local fisherman's town just one train stop away from Japan's tattoo-friendly hot spring town Kinokuni Onsen, brims with the natural bounty of delectable Japanese seafood caught fresh daily. Under the expertise of the owners of Yashio, a reservation-only restaurant in Takeno, savor the clean, natural flavors of locally sourced seafood and vegetables.

[Learn More](#) or [Contact](#)

Kochi Prefecture – Discover Immersive Tea Tourism

Discover immersive tea tourism in Kochi's famed Niyodo Blue region, where pristine rivers and misty mountain slopes produce Tosa tea—an artisanal Japanese green tea known for its clean aroma, gentle sweetness, and smooth finish. Niyodo Blue Tourism Council offers curated, hands-on experiences—from tea picking and hand-rolling to blending, roasting, and private tastings with certified instructors. Visitors can also enjoy scenic afternoon tea overlooking Japan's clearest river. These programs connect travelers with local producers, culture, and landscape, creating high-value, story-driven experiences ideal for FITs and small groups seeking authentic, off-the-beaten-path Japan. [Learn More](#) or [Contact](#)



Kyoto – Kyoto Beyond the Crowds



Kyoto shows a more intimate side in the early morning and after sunset, when the city quiets down, the light softens over temples and streets, and everyday life feels closer and more visible. These off-peak hours offer a different way to experience the city beyond the daytime flow—slower, calmer, and more atmospheric. As a general guide, morning sightseeing is before 9:00 AM and night sightseeing is after 6:00 PM (with seasonal variation such as summer sunrise around 5:00 AM and sunset around 7:00 PM, and winter sunrise around 7:00 AM and sunset around 5:00 PM), making these the best times to explore Kyoto's more peaceful rhythm. [Learn More](#)

Nagano – Refined Culinary Experiences in Nagano

Refined culinary experiences in Nagano Prefecture reflect a distinctive harmony between alpine environment, seasonal ingredients and understated culinary sophistication. Surrounded by the Japanese Alps, the region draws on pure water sources, heirloom vegetables and foraged ingredients to create cuisine that emphasizes simplicity and natural flavor. Traditional techniques such as fermentation and preservation remain central, while contemporary approaches subtly refine these practices into elegant, modern expressions. Often set in serene countryside inns or minimalist dining spaces with views of peaks



and forests, these experiences reflect a strong sense of place, where climate, altitude and seasonality converge. [Learn More](#)

Explore Shizuoka – Elevated Dining Experiences in Shizuoka



Elevated dining experiences in Shizuoka Prefecture showcase a refined blend of hyper-local sourcing, culinary artistry and immersive cultural settings. With exceptional seafood from Suruga Bay, diverse mountain produce and the iconic presence of Mount Fuji shaping both landscape and culinary identity, the region emphasizes seasonality and terroir-driven cuisine. Dining often unfolds in intimate, meticulously designed spaces or historic settings tied to the legacy of the Tokugawa shogunate, balancing deep-rooted tradition with subtle innovation. [Learn more](#)

Hotel Updates



[MIMARU Osaka Shinsaibashi Central](#)

Opening Fall 2026: Best Accommodation for Family Stay at MIMARU Osaka Shinsaibashi Central



[The Osaka Station Hotel](#)

THE OSAKA STATION HOTEL, Autograph Collection Joins Luxury Travel Consortium - Takumians



[The Tokyo Station Hotel](#)

Artful Kaiseki-Inspired French Dining at Tokyo Station

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JTB USA, Inc.

[World Heritage & Culinary Harmony: Fuji, Hakone and Izu](#)

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Mountain Hiking Holidays

[Hiking the Japan Alps in July 2027](#)

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News From Japan

Fukui Prefecture – Private Echizen Knife Factory Tour

This tour will take you to two workshops: Yamaken Woodworks, which specializes in making handles with designs on them that are rare even in Japan, and Ryusen Hamono, which creates beautiful knives with unique patterns on the blades. The way you see kitchen knives will surely change when you witness the views of the craftsmen and the pride they have for their work.

[Learn More](#) or [Contact](#)



Visit Kinosaki – Halal Friendly / Vegetarian / Vegan Dinner and Stay at Waraku in the Kannabe Highlands



Waraku is a restaurant known for using local ingredients home to the Kannabe Highlands, a mountain town near Kinosaki Onsen. Enjoy a halal-friendly, vegetarian or vegan dinner using seasonal products grown in the area and ingredients from the Kannabe Highlands. Experience a private rural homestay at this charming, intimate inn that hosts only one group daily. Guests immerse themselves in the Japanese countryside in a private room with a traditional bath and serene garden view!

[Learn More](#) or [Contact](#)

Kochi Prefecture – Experience an Authentic Countryside Stay in Rural Kochi

Experience authentic Countryside Stay in Japan at Nook's Kitchen & Lodge in rural Kochi. Nestled in a quiet mountain hamlet, this private retreat lets you exclusively rent both a 100-year-old traditional house (kominka) and a modern cabin. Savor exquisite seasonal Japanese game-meat cuisine crafted by a professional female chef using local ingredients. Menu consultations are available for guests staying multiple nights or with dietary restrictions. Spend your days exploring forests and rivers, and your nights under star-filled skies, enjoying a slow, lived-in rural lifestyle far from tourist crowds. [Learn More](#) or [Contact](#)



Kyoto – Countryside stays in Kyoto City: Keihoku



Discover a quieter side of Kyoto at Tokuheian, a 200-year-old family-run thatched-roof home passed down through seven generations. Located in Kyoto's countryside, this historic farmhouse invites guests to experience authentic rural life, from seasonal landscapes and traditional architecture to Japanese food & culture shaped by the land. It's a place to slow down, connect with nature, and experience traditions that have been part of daily life here for centuries. [Learn More](#)

Explore Shizuoka – Countryside Escape with Tea Picking

Shizuoka Prefecture offers a compelling [countryside escape](#) that blends culture, nature and refined rural hospitality. Guests can enjoy immersive stays in traditional ryokan and countryside inns surrounded by rolling tea fields and mountain landscapes. During green [tea picking season](#), typically from late April through early summer, travelers can participate in hands-on harvesting experiences and learn about one of Japan's most iconic exports. Clear days reveal breathtaking views of Mt. Fuji rising above the fields, creating unforgettable photo opportunities. With hot springs, local cuisine and easy access from Tokyo, Shizuoka is ideal for clients seeking an authentic and tranquil Japan experience. [Contact for more information](#)



Yokohama City Visitors Bureau – Shiitake & Kikurage Farm Visit



Nagashima Farm has a history of more than 500 years of farming in Yokohama. Over the centuries, the farm has raised pigs and chickens, cultivated rice, vegetables, and flowers, and more recently expanded into mushroom cultivation. The mission of Nagashima Farm is to produce high-quality agricultural products while promoting sustainable farming practices. The farm operates its own solar power system and collaborates with researchers to explore new possibilities in agriculture. Visitors can learn about Shiitake and Kikurage cultivation in a sustainable setting, tour the farm and mushroom house, and enjoy dishes featuring fresh Shiitake mushrooms. [Learn More](#) or [Contact](#)

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[Hotel Chinzanso Tokyo](#)
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News From Japan

Fukui Prefecture – Heisenji Hakusan Shrine Walking Tour



Heisenji Hakusan Shrine, boasting 1,300 years of historical significance, presents vistas of cedar-lined avenues, meticulously laid stone pathways, and resplendent moss carpets, which are at their most vibrant during the months of June and July. Designated as a National Heritage Site in 2020, the site provides guided tours that are particularly favored by senior demographics and individuals with an interest in temple history, due to their comprehensive exploration of the site's rich historical context.

[Learn More](#) or [Contact](#)

Hiroshima CVB – Walking the Pilgrims' Path on Mt. Misen

Discover the sacred beauty of Mount Misen in Hiroshima, rising above the tranquil waters of the Seto Inland Sea. On Miyajima, where maritime culture and timeless nature meet, guests can follow ancient pilgrimage trails through lush forests dotted with stone statues and small shrines. Guided by a certified Shinrin-yoku (forest bathing) facilitator, travelers experience nature with five senses, embracing the gentle climate and serene island atmosphere unique to the Setouchi region. Rather than simply admiring the view, this mindful hike offers a deeper connection to Hiroshima's spiritual heritage, coastal beauty, and restorative calm. [Learn More](#) or [Contact](#)



Visit Kinosaki – Buddhist Reading, Sutra Copying, and Waterfall Meditation Experience at Hokkeji Temple



Travel to Tanto Farming Village south of Kinosaki Onsen and learn the ways of Buddhist meditation and spirituality with the help of a local English-speaking monk who resides at Hokkeji Temple. Learn about the religious traditions of "dokyo" (Buddhist chanting), "shakyo" (Buddhist sutra copying), and "takigyo" (waterfall meditation) while also trying all three for yourself! Complimentary pick up and drop off in front of JR Kinosaki Onsen Station! [Learn More](#) or [Contact](#)

Kochi Prefecture – Great news for cruise passengers visiting Kochi!

Now that one of the busiest seasons for cruise travel has arrived, a new page by the Niyodo Blue Tourism Council introduces convenient taxi plans departing directly from Kochi Port. If you've already visited Kochi Castle or Hirome Market, or are looking for something different, why not take a short trip to experience the crystal-clear waters of Niyodo Blue? These fixed or customized sightseeing taxi plans make it easy to explore Kochi's stunning natural beauty within your limited port time. Discover a deeper side of Kochi and make your cruise stop truly unforgettable. [Learn More](#) or [Contact](#)



Hyogo Tourism Bureau – Origin of Japan, Awaji Island Nature Guide Tour



Awaji Island, located in the eastern Seto Inland Sea, is known as the mythical birthplace of Japan and is blessed with rich natural beauty sustained by its unique system of ponds and natural springs. On the island's stunning west coast, famous for breathtaking sunsets, the world's first and only nature adventure experience awaits. The exclusive "Sea Firefly Show" course offers a powerful, one-of-a-kind experience while providing insight into marine ecosystem conservation. *Available in summer only. Please inquire for reservation periods. [Learn More](#)

Explore Shizuoka – Miho no Matsubara

In Shizuoka Prefecture, where the majestic silhouette of Mount Fuji rises beyond the sea, Miho no Matsubara offers a restorative journey through one of Japan's most poetic coastal forests. Part of the UNESCO-listed Fujisan World Heritage Site, this seven-kilometer grove of ancient black pines has inspired artists, pilgrims and poets for centuries, including in the classic tale of the Hagoromo legend. Walking beneath wind-shaped branches with the hush of Suruga Bay beside you, the scent of salt and pine mingling in the air feels both grounding and transcendent. Here, forest bathing meets ocean breeze—an experience that restores not only the body but the spirit in the timeless shadow of Fuji. [Learn more](#)



Yokohama City Visitors Bureau – Iconic Stage: Yokohama Private Cafe



Discover a dining destination where flavor, beauty, and sustainability come together. The ICONIC STAGE lineup of dishes and desserts delights both palate and eye, showcasing responsibly grown ingredients. Inside the Yokohama headquarters, SustainuS Farm on the third floor cultivates edible flowers, herbs, and leafy greens hydroponically under LED lights, without pesticides. These vibrant harvests shine in the second-floor ICONIC STAGE kitchen and first-floor private café. Guests of the first-floor private café can tour the farm, watch culinary artistry unfold, and enjoy a café space featuring a piano—ideal for performances, gatherings, and even dog-friendly celebrations. [Learn More](#) or [Contact](#)

Hotel Updates



[Cerulean Tower Tokyu Hotel](#)

Newly Opened “Comfort Floor”
 Guest Room Level Launched October 2025



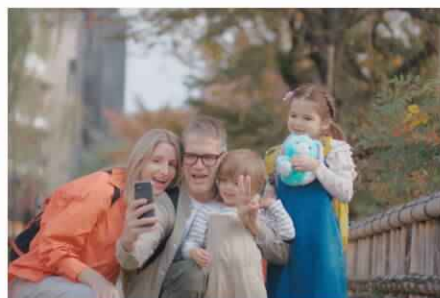
[Imperial Hotel, Kyoto](#)

A New Chapter Begins in Kyoto's Historic
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PRESS RELEASE

NAGASAKI AND OKINAWA SELECTED FOR THE 2026 *NEW YORK TIMES* 52 PLACES TO GO



Yanbaru, Okinawa Prefecture © JNTO

New York – January 8, 2026: The Japanese destinations of Nagasaki and Okinawa have been chosen as two of the ["52 Places to Go"](#) in 2026 by the *New York Times*, continuing Japan's status as one of the world's top trending destinations.

[Nagasaki](#), located in western Kyushu, is a lively port city with a storied past: the nearby fan-shaped island Dejima used to be the only place in all of Japan where the West could conduct trade. The open-air museum [Glover Garden](#) represents that influence with its European-inspired residences and buildings. Nagasaki is also home to many sites associated with Christianity. In early October, the famous [Nagasaki Kunchi](#) is held: a 400-year-old festival held at the iconic Suwa Shrine, which is known for its long staircase. The festival features dragon dances and such local foods as *hashimaki*, a savory pancake made with cabbage, rolled around chopsticks and finished with a variety of toppings, including a fried egg.



Glover Garden © Nagasaki Prefecture Tourism Association



Dragon dancing at Nagasaki Kunchi
© Nagasaki Prefecture Tourism Association

[Okinawa](#) is Japan's southernmost prefecture, a chain of islands that has a distinct tropical culture and climate. The city of [Naha](#) is typically a visitor's gateway to Okinawa, with bustling shops, street performers and nightlife on the [Kokusai-dori Street](#). Also located in the city is [Shuri Castle](#), one of the many striking UNESCO World Heritage sites on the main island; the structure had its north and south halls devastated by a fire in 2019, and plans to reopen this fall after reconstruction that emphasized traditional methods. Diving is very popular in Okinawa, with professionals and novices swimming out to see the [Blue Cave's](#) iconic glowing limestone. Okinawa has also drawn growing interest from U.S. travelers as one of the world's well-known "Blue Zones," regions associated with longevity, wellness and healthy lifestyles.



Shureimon Gate at Shuri Castle
© Okinawa Convention and Visitors Bureau



Blue Cave © Okinawa Convention and Visitors Bureau

"With the number of visitors from the United States exceeding three million in 2025 -the highest level on record- Japan continues to grow as a top travel destination for American travelers" said Susumu Matsumoto, Executive Director of the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) New York Office. "As more U.S. travelers seek new, distinctive, and authentic destinations across Japan, The New York Times' selection of Nagasaki and Okinawa as two of the '52 Places to Go in 2026' highlights the strong appeal of Japan's regions. Both destinations offer meaningful experiences beyond Japan's major cities."

The JNTO New York Office will participate in the New York Travel & Adventure Show at the Javits Convention Center on January 24–25, featuring destinations including Nagasaki and Okinawa.

For more information about travel to Japan, visit <https://www.japan.travel/en/us>.

ABOUT JAPAN NATIONAL TOURISM ORGANIZATION (JNTO)

As the official tourism board, JNTO seeks to inspire international travelers to visit Japan. Focusing on sustainability, diversity and preservation of its history and culture, JNTO encourages travelers to explore the country while supporting local businesses, learning about indigenous cultures, and helping conserve its natural sites.

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Japan Travel Newsletter

April Issue 2026

Before You Fly Check the New Power Bank Rules



Planning to fly within Japan? New guidance from April 24, 2026 asks travelers to keep power banks close at hand during the flight. They may not be packed in checked baggage, placed in overhead compartments, or used to charge devices on board. Review the details before you travel for a smoother trip.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Discover GREEN×EXPO 2027



GREEN×EXPO 2027 comes to Yokohama from March 19 to September 26, 2027, bringing together Japan's garden culture, seasonal scenery, and food traditions. There is also growing international excitement, with the United States officially confirming participation and helping make this a global event worth planning ahead for.

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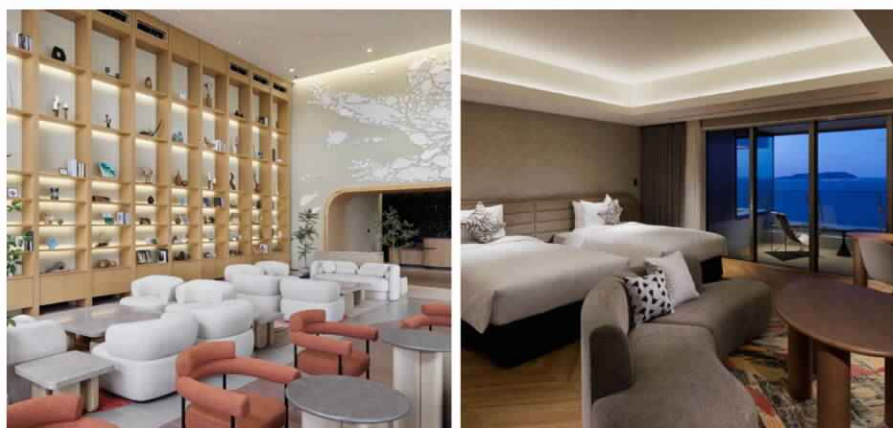
JNTO will host a Japan travel booth at the Japan Parade



JNTO will host a Japan travel booth at the Japan Parade & Street Fair on May 9, from 11:00 AM, near Central Park at West 72nd Street. Get Japan-wide travel tips at the JNTO booth, and also visit booths for Nagasaki and Okinawa—named in the New York Times' 52 Places to Go.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Fukuoka Prince Hotel Momochihama



Prince Hotel Fukuoka Momochihama opened on March 17, 2026, as Fukuoka's only seaside Prince Hotel overlooking Hakata Bay. All guest rooms face the ocean, offering bright, open interiors with uninterrupted views. The hotel features dining that highlights fresh, locally sourced seafood, as well as a relaxed café loved by both locals and travelers. Cultural elements, including artwork by Hakata doll artist Hiromine Nakamura, enrich the guest experience. A top-floor Club Lounge offers panoramic sunset views, blending coastal tranquility with urban convenience.

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Japan Travel Newsletter

March Issue 2026

Breathe in Japan with Marie Kondo in Mie



Marie Kondo heads to Mie in the Breathe in Japan film series and invites you to slow down and reset. With sacred history, forested mountains, and bountiful seas as the backdrop, discover a side of Japan shaped by tradition, craftsmanship, and local flavors and take fresh inspiration for your next trip.

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A Mindful Escape to Izumo with Marie Kondo



Follow Marie Kondo to Izumo in Shimane, a place woven into Japan's creation myths and known for its serene sacred sites and coastal sunsets. This Breathe in Japan film is a gentle invitation to slow down, breathe deep, and discover how history and nature can bring a sense of balance to your next trip.

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Discover Yokohama at OMO7 by Hoshino Resorts



Opening April 21, 2026, OMO7 Yokohama by Hoshino Resorts will transform the former Yokohama City Hall into a “legacy hotel” just steps from JR Kannai Station. Built around the concept Groove to Yokohama ism, it blends postwar architecture with new city discoveries, from gourmet streets and live entertainment to breezy nights by the port.

[LEARN MORE](#)

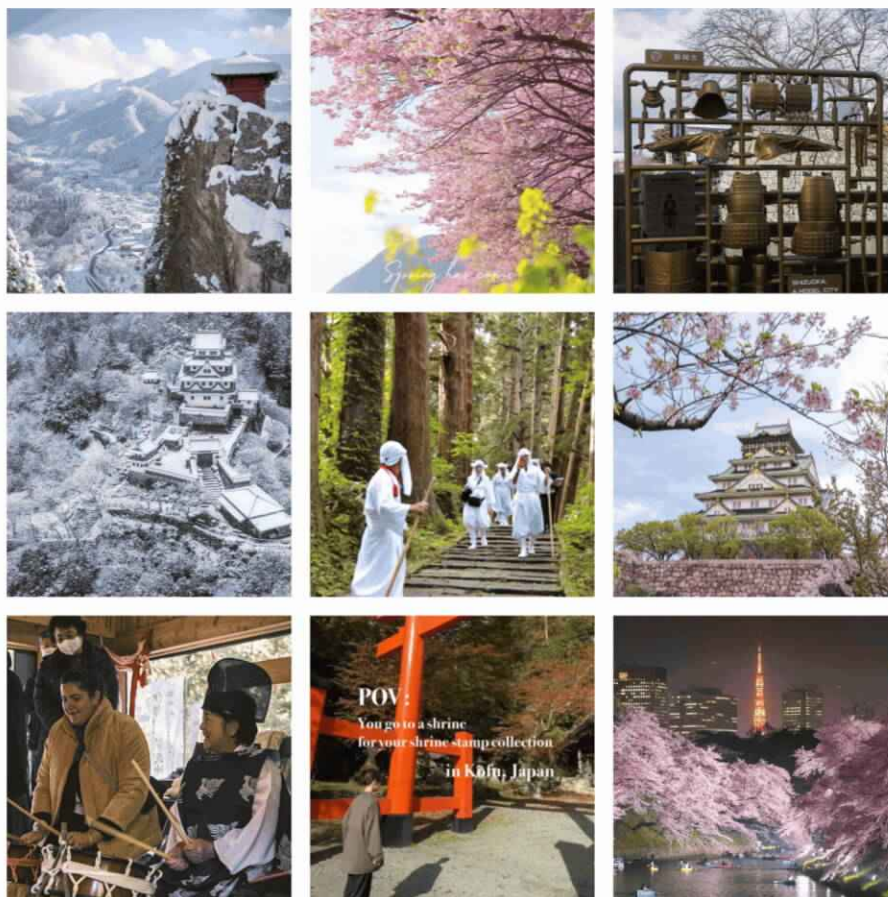
A New Urban Resort Arrives in Okinawa Chatan



Opening April 2026, RIHGA Royal Resort Okinawa Chatan brings an urban resort feel to American Village, about 35 minutes from Naha Airport. Look forward to bright, spacious rooms with kitchens and laundry, plus top floor highlights like an infinity pool, premium lounge, and a communal bath and sauna with sweeping coastal views.

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PRESS RELEASE

JAPAN'S CHERRY BLOSSOM SEASON MOVES NORTH AS SPRING UNFOLDS



Hirosaki Cherry Blossom Festival © JNTO

New York – March 10, 2026: As spring unfolds across Japan, the nation's most beloved seasonal spectacle—cherry blossoms (*Sakura*)—progresses northward from the southern islands toward the country's cooler regions. While the earliest petals have already appeared in parts of Kyushu and Shikoku, the peak of blooming is advancing steadily through central and northern Japan, with many regions just entering their most anticipated viewing period.

Cherry blossoms bloom for only seven to ten days, making their beauty fleeting and deeply cherished. Rather than a single moment, the season unfolds as a moving celebration from mid-March through early May, offering travelers the opportunity to follow the blossoms as they advance throughout Japan's chain of islands.

Where and When to Experience the Cherry Blossoms

As the cherry blossom front moves north, several regions are approaching or entering peak bloom:

Hokuriku Shinetsu Region (Late March to Mid-April):

· Niigata: [Takada Castle Park](#) Cherry Blossom Festival is one of Joetsu City's historic signature events, and this year marks its 101st anniversary. Held annually from late April to early May, the celebration transforms the park into a sea of pale pink, beautifully illuminated by more than 3,000 paper lanterns. Their light shimmers across the castle moat, creating one of Japan's most unforgettable nighttime scenes.

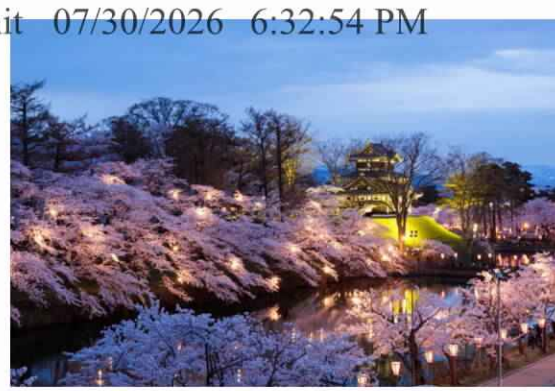
· Nagano: [Shinshu Zenkoji Temple](#) stores one of the first Buddhist statues ever brought into Japan when Buddhism was first introduced in the 6th century. This historic temple is surrounded by a mix of beautiful cherry and weeping cherry trees, making it especially stunning in the springtime.



Hirosaki Castle © Tohoku Tourism Promotion Organization

Hokkaido (Late April to Early May):

· Hakodate: [Goryokaku Tower](#) is one of Hakodate's signature attractions, offering panoramic views of the star-shaped Goryokaku Park below. In spring, more than 1,600 cherry trees line the moat around the fort, turning the entire citadel a soft pink. As petals drift across the water, the scene becomes especially beautiful—best admired from above.



Takada Castle Park © JNTO

Tohoku Region (Mid- to Late April):

· Akita: [Kakunodate](#), the samurai town known as the "Little Kyoto of Michinoku," hosts its Cherry Blossom Festival from April 15 to May 5, 2026. Samurai Residence Street becomes especially enchanting beneath cascading blossoms, taking you back to the Edo era. After sunset, soft lights and drifting petals create a dreamy, unforgettable scene for visitors while they sample the area's street food and drinks.

· Aomori: [Hirosaki Castle Park](#) is home to the oldest Somei-Yoshino tree and more than 2,500 cherry trees surrounding the castle. With blossom tunnels, petal-filled moats, picnic spots, rowing boats and evening illuminations, it feels like several great cherry blossom spots combined into one.



Goryokaku Tower © 2025 Hokkaido Tourism Organization



Sakura Mochi © JNTO

Sakura season is not only seen but to be savored. The blossoms' subtle salty-sour flavor—derived from flowers preserved in salt or plum vinegar—appears in seasonal specialties. Among them are the Sakura Mochi, a pink rice confection wrapped in a salted cherry leaf first popularized in Edo (modern-day Tokyo); Sakurayu (cherry blossom tea), traditionally served at celebratory occasions; and Sakura Ebi, the pink shrimp harvested in Shizuoka's Suruga Bay, whose delicate hue mirrors the blossoms themselves.

From Seasonal Beauty to Sustainable Futures

Japan's appreciation of the four seasons is deeply woven into its cultural identity, and *Sakura* has long symbolized renewal, transience and harmony with nature. This connection between people and the natural world continues to shape the country's outlook. In 2027, Yokohama will host [Green x Expo 2027](#) (International Horticultural Expo 2027), a global gathering focused on sustainability, innovation and coexistence with nature, taking place from March 19 to September 27, 2027. As Japan celebrates the annual return of cherry blossoms, it also looks ahead to conversations about how societies can live more thoughtfully within the natural cycles that define them.

For more information about travel to Japan, visit <https://www.japan.travel/en/us>.

ABOUT JAPAN NATIONAL TOURISM ORGANIZATION (JNTO)

As the official tourism board, JNTO seeks to inspire international travelers to visit Japan. Focusing on sustainability, diversity and preservation of its history and culture, JNTO encourages travelers to explore the country while supporting local businesses, learning about indigenous cultures, and helping conserve its natural sites.

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PRESS RELEASE

MARIE KONDO UNCOVERS TWO HIDDEN REGIONS OF JAPAN AS WELLNESS DESTINATIONS, JNTO UNVEILS NEW FILMS "BREATHE IN JAPAN"



BREATHE IN JAPAN © JNTO

New York – March 3, 2026: The [Japan National Tourism Organization \(JNTO\)](#) New York Office hosted a wellness-themed media event, "BREATHE IN JAPAN," at [Bon Studio](#) in Brooklyn on February 26, 2026, marking the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States. Approximately 40 leading U.S. media representatives and content creators attended the event.

The event positioned Japan as a destination where travelers can restore balance and reconnect with nature, culture and tradition. Newly produced tourism films featuring [Mie Prefecture](#) and [Izumo](#) in [Shimane Prefecture](#) were officially introduced.

Opening remarks were delivered by Executive Director Susumu Matsumoto of the JNTO New York Office, who introduced the event's theme, "Breathe in Japan," and spoke about Japan's growing popularity as a travel destination, as well as increasing interest in "hidden gems" across the country. He said, "Japan

The event featured a talk by renowned Japanese organizing consultant, author, and TV presenter, Marie Kondo, along with the screening of newly produced highlights films set in Mie Prefecture and Izumo.

The films highlight two regions that embody the essence of restorative travel, portraying scenes of harmony between nature and history — including the sacred grounds of Izumo Taisha and the traditional ama diving culture of Mie. Through deeply rooted cultural traditions and living heritage, the films express the concept of a journey that restores balance.



Izumo Taisha, Shimane Prefecture @ JNTO

The project was produced in close collaboration with local governments, tourism associations and community partners in Mie and Shimane, carefully and authentically capturing each region's distinctive identity and multifaceted appeal.

During the event, Marie Kondo — who appeared in the films — spoke directly about the charm of both destinations.

Regarding filming in Izumo, she shared, "We're all busy and constantly thinking in our heads but being there allows you to experience a sense of quiet and truly feel, 'I'm here.' Simply by being present and connecting with the land, it's something you can feel on a deeper level within yourself."

Regarding filming in Mie Prefecture, she noted, "When I went to the ama hut, I met a 94-year-old diver who started when she was around five and kept diving until she was 80. She is known as a legendary diver, and that was certainly a legendary accomplishment. She is now at the hut greeting guests and is still very active."



Ama (woman diver) hut "Hachiman-kamado", Mie Prefecture @ JNTO

In conjunction with the event, the long-form film "[Breathe in JAPAN | Marie Kondo Visits MIE/Izumo](#)" was released on YouTube, inviting global audiences to experience Japan's wellness offerings firsthand.



BREATHE IN JAPAN © JNTO

Representatives from Mie Prefecture and Shimane Prefecture also attended the event. With the support of local partners OKUME, Kettl Tea and ITO EN North America, guests were introduced to Izumo soba, dashi and Japanese tea culture, along with curated giveaways, highlighting the multifaceted appeal of Japan's regional culture, cuisine and traditions.

As interest in experiential, nature-based and wellness travel continues to grow in the U.S. market, JNTO remains committed to promoting sustainable tourism and encouraging visitation to diverse regions across Japan.

Izumo: https://youtu.be/kn7M8v4w_rE?si=oHPrvjNaXnuFpZR0

Mie: https://youtu.be/_pnwlcPlidE?si=vKIAXTy_61UeJvr



BREATHE IN JAPAN © JNTO

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PRESS RELEASE

MINAKO AOSHIMA APPOINTED EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF JNTO LOS ANGELES OFFICE



New York – May 19, 2026: Minako Aoshima has assumed her post as Executive Director of the Los Angeles office of the [Japan National Tourism Organization \(JNTO\)](#), effective April 24, 2026.

Ms. Aoshima was born in Shizuoka Prefecture and joined JNTO in 2005. From 2009 to 2012, she served as Director at the JNTO Los Angeles office, where she worked closely with a wide range of partners and organizations in the United States. She returned to Japan in 2012 and served at JNTO headquarters in Tokyo until her current appointment.

During her time in Tokyo, Ms. Aoshima gained extensive experience in organizational management and administration, while also deepening partnerships with regional communities and tourism stakeholders across Japan. Her work has focused on reinforcing collaboration with local governments and tourism-related businesses nationwide.

In 2026, a landmark year marking the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States, Japan and the United States are jointly promoting a U.S.-Japan Tourism Year, with a focus on enhancing bilateral exchange and fortifying U.S.-Japan relations. Ms. Aoshima's appointment to Los Angeles comes at this significant moment, underscoring JNTO's commitment to further strengthening cooperation and people-to-people exchange between the two countries.

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