



JNTO Newsletter 2: May 2021



Japan, A Culture Expressed Through Art and Nature

Although it is globally renowned for technological innovation, Japan's

history, traditions and cultures have always been intrinsically linked to the

country's rich and varied natural landscapes.

From the best places to observe springtime *Shibazakura* – pink moss – and where to embrace the art of *Shinrin-yoku* – ‘forest bathing’ – to exhibitions and glamping which celebrate the strength, beauty and versatility of natural materials. Japan's wealth of natural treasures – including one of the best stargazing spots in the Northern Hemisphere – is a must-do, must-see on any itinerary.

We invite you to travel outside of the city limits of Tokyo to the glorious regions beyond, all of which have their insider secrets.

Here we have rounded up eight of the exciting cultural and outdoor experiences for you to enjoy.

We promise that our time apart will make travel experiences all the more exciting when cross-border travel is resumed. We are looking forward to seeing you in Japan.



© Hokuryu Town Himawari Tourism Association

Nature

Flower trip across Japan

Sunflowers, wisteria, tulips, hydrangeas, violets, camellias. The nation's famed cherry blossom is not the only flower worth travelling to Japan to see. The nation celebrates a range of scene-stealing flowers in different locations throughout the year.

For a burst of sunshine, head to Hokkaido's Hokuryu Sunflower Village – home to an epic sweep of 2 million sunflowers which burst into bloom beneath blue skies every summer.

Whereas in Tonami Tulip Park in central Japan (Toyama Prefecture), red, white and purple tulips take center stage at



Tradition

Pottery developed by Nature

Japan has long been famed for its ceramic heritage, shaped through the centuries by the nation's deep ties with nature. From organically finished earthenware to the smooth sheen of white porcelain, a spectrum of ceramic styles has been nurtured in Japan. The above photograph shows Arita ceramics crafted by Sakaida Kakiemon, Inoue Manji and Imaizumi Imaemon.

Highlights include the works of Japan's Six Ancient Kilns – including *Bizen-yaki*, from Bizen in Okayama Prefecture, famed for its glaze-free

every spring; while *ajisai* hydrangeas, marking the arrival of the rainy scene early summer, are celebrated at countless nationwide festivals (Bunkyo Ajisai Festival at Tokyo's Hakusan Shrine is a highlight).

sd

Another unmissable bloom is the nation's treasured pink moss, known as *Shibazakura*, which comes alive on mountain slopes during spring as seen in the above photograph taken in front of Mount Fuji, Yamanashi Prefecture.

One event worth timing a visit to Japan for is the Fuji Shibazakura Festival (normally from mid-April to mid-May, Yamanashi Prefecture) with as many as 520,000 pink moss spanning the base of Mount Fuji, whose snow-capped triangular peak looms tall above the blooms.

Shibazakura Takinoue Park in the northernmost Hokkaido region is also worth visiting because the park transforms every spring (from early May to early June) into an otherworldly 100,000 square-meter expanse of gradated shades of pink, accompanied by a string of local festivities and food markets.

Another of Japan's most scenic Shibazakura spots is the Chausuyama Highlands in Aichi Prefecture, a two-hour drive from Nagoya – a popular snow-covered ski destination during the winter months – with ski lifts carrying springtime visitors above hillside fields of 400,000-plus pink moss flowers (from early May to early June).

abstractions, fired at intensely high temperatures.

Among Japan's oldest pottery hubs is Shigaraki in Shiga Prefecture, a one-and-a-half-hour train ride from Kyoto, long esteemed for its quality stoneware, in particular large vessels crafted from strong local clay.

Mashiko in Tochigi Prefecture, reachable from Tokyo by train in as little as two-and-a-half hours, is another mecca for pottery lovers, with more than 250 studios and 50 ceramics shops (it's also home to the serene former home and studio of deeply influential Shoji Hamada, designated as a Living National Treasure and a member of Japan's *mingei* crafts movement).

Arita, Saga Prefecture, is the place to head in southern Japan and it is only a one-and-a-half-hour train or bus ride from Fukuoka, Nagasaki and Saga airports. The word *Arita* means one thing in Japan: white porcelain. The small town in Kyushu is renowned for more than four centuries of exquisite porcelain heritage and admirers of Japanese crafts and ceramics would do well to plan ahead for a visit to Arita Ceramics Fair between the last week of April and the first week of May. One of Japan's largest ceramics markets, a network of around 500 stalls typically stretches from the main station and through the center of the town, showcasing an eclectic range of ceramics from top local kilns.

Innovative contemporary projects have also placed Arita firmly on the global creative map in recent years. The projects that have done this range from the respected series of Arita Collection "1616 / arita japan brand," by designer Teruhiro

Yanagihara (who recently opened a sleekly designed showroom in Arita) to the Creative Residency Arita program which attracts artists and designers from across the globe.



© Kozushima Tourism Association

Nature

Stargazing in Kozushima Island

One good place to take in starry spectacles is in the Northern Hemisphere, in areas with as little light pollution as possible. That could now include Kozushima Island that is a pine-painted volcanic island orbited by white sand beaches in the Izu Islands, a one-hour flight or four-hour jet-ferry ride from Tokyo.

After removing more than 400 streetlights in the summer of 2020, the island was made an official Dark Sky Park by the International Dark Sky Association on December 1, 2020, the second in the country following Iriomote-Ishigaki Island in the southern Okinawa Prefecture.

Kozushima Island's top observation points might include the summit of Mount Tenjo or the gentle sands of Nagahama beach, with its picnic spots, barbecue pits and natural hot springs, but anywhere outside of the main town should do the trick.



Relaxation

Treeful Treehouses Sustainable Resort

Hidden in the wilds of sub-tropical Okinawa, on a bend in the Genka River, is Treeful, a collection of four fantastical treehouses to be opened in June. Comfortably situated in nature, all have floor-to-ceiling windows, air-conditioning and wooden decks with beautiful views across a forest of banyan trees and *figus*. At dusk, sit on your suspended terrace surrounded by rare wildflowers.

The entire Treeful Treehouse Sustainable Resort has been designed to be as sustainable as possible; the team are rebuilding a 19th-century water mill at nearby Shizogumui waterfall and helping to save rare Ryukyu mountain turtles.

Everything is solar-powered and the resort is also wheelchair accessible, including the communal Aerohouse which connects to the rooms via a series of floating walkways.

The main annual event is the Perseid meteor shower in the middle of August each year. This is when planet Earth passes through the sparkly tail of the Swift-Tuttle comet, producing up to 60 shooting stars an hour as small meteors burn up, skimming the upper atmosphere.

Inside the Aerohouse there are relaxation spaces, a kitchen and dining area, as well as toilets and showers (ecologically designed but not in an obvious way). Wake up early and head out onto your balcony to watch the sunrise over the jungle canopy.

Later, you can try yoga, stand-up paddle board at a golden beach or kayak to a nearby island for a piña colada. Nights should be dedicated to stargazing. Look out for Ryukyu flying foxes and puppy-faced fruit bats.

"

The best place to take in starry spectacles is in the Northern Hemisphere, in areas with as little light pollution as possible. That now includes Kozushima Island that is a pine-painted volcanic isle orbited by white sand beaches a one-hour flight from Tokyo."



Relaxation

Hot Spring Bathing



© Narita International Airport Corporation

Art

Culture Gateway to Japan

It's hard to keep your clothes on when travelling around Japan's famed *onsen* hubs – and there are many of them.

One example is Kusatsu Onsen in Gunma Prefecture, where guests can walk along old streets in cotton yukata gowns before soaking in a string of public *onsen* baths – including the famously restorative steaming *Yubatake* hot water fields. Because the water temperature in *Yubatake* is too hot for bathing, staff stir the hot water with a wooden paddle in a traditional cooling practice known as *Yumomi*. You can see a *Yumomi* show or even try it out for yourself at the *Netsunoyu* bathhouse.

Meanwhile, Nozawa Onsen in Nagano Prefecture, a popular ski hub with a bathing heritage dating back more than 1,000 years, offers the best possible après-ski activity – a free soak in 13 public *onsen* facilities scattered across the town.

Beppu in Oita Prefecture is a southern city wrapped in volcanic mountains on one side and a bay on the other, home to a network of more than 2,000 hot spring *onsen* baths of ten-plus various spring qualities – which are all celebrated annually in the springtime Beppu Hatto Onsen Festival.

It's worth noting April as a good time to visit the region, when it will stage the five-day festival which kicks off on *onsen* thanksgiving day.

The decades-old event's dramatic scene stealer is Ogiyama Fire Festival which involves setting fire to a large swathe of Mount Ogi behind Beppu to alert (not very subtly) the *onsen* gods to the end of winter and start of spring.

Hot spring soaking also takes center stage with the Beppu Bath Marathon

A string of bold new artworks will greet future visitors when they arrive at airports across Japan, as part of CULTURE GATE to JAPAN, a cultural program organized by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan.

The works of 29 creatives from across the spectrum – from contemporary installations to *manga* – are exhibited at seven airports and one cruise terminal. Exhibits are called names such as 'Memory', 'Patterns' and 'Motion'. They include a color-drenched exhibit in southern Okinawa, exploring the region's unique heritage; a showcase of eight works by *manga* artists at Kansai International Airport; an exhibit in Fukuoka, tapping into its rich ceramics and textile heritage; and contemporary works at Chubu Centrair International Airport in Aichi Prefecture, inspired by *samurai* and *ninja* warriors.

One standout highlight is Vision Gate, an exhibition of works by eight artists. It is curated by Paola Antonelli, senior curator of architecture and design at The Museum of Modern Art in New York.

"Guests arriving from faraway countries will be welcome into a new way of thinking and making, influenced by ancient wisdom and projected towards the future," explains Antonelli.

Exhibits include an innovative installation transforming vision to sound by artist Yuri Suzuki and Miyu Hosoi at Haneda, comprising a distillation of the hiragana phonetics alphabet.

Other artworks include a series of six video installations, by six different artists, broadcast in synchronized sequence along an arrival gate

encouraging visitors to take a dip in 42 *onsen* baths in the space of five days – while those who manage 88 baths are hailed as “*onsen* masters.” Those who are less ambitious can simply enjoy a soak in the restorative hot waters of their choice at around 100 local *onsen*, which are open for free during the festival.

The main highlight for many, however, is the climax of the event: the iconic Yu-Bukkake Matsuri festival procession, with traditional dancing and portable *mikoshi* shrines paraded down streets before being sprayed with – you’ve guessed it – *onsen* water.



Nature

A land of forests

Inhale – and exhale. Japan’s magical world of forest bathing – known as *shinrin-yoku* – has perhaps never felt more alluring in the current global climate. The therapeutic benefits of full nature immersion – breathing in the scent of trees while placing one foot in front of the other – are well documented, from boosting moods and alleviating stress to improving physical ailments.

Spring, when temperatures rise and early flowers bloom, is one of the most popular times of year to head into the

pathway, including Mariko Mori, Jun Inoue and Sachiko Kodama. Vision Gate can be seen across Tokyo’s two main airports Haneda in Tokyo and Narita in Chiba Prefecture.



© Setouchi chartered uninhabited island KUJIRA-JIMA

Outdoors

Glamping on Whale Island

Keen to get back to nature? Head to Kujira-jima in the Seto Inland Sea, which has been transformed into 21st-century camping nirvana. Kujira means “whale” in Japanese and is so named by locals due to its distinct forested silhouette, which brings to mind the shape of a whale.

Today, the entire, uninhabited island – about 30 minutes by boat from Uno Port in Okayama Prefecture, itself a two-hour train ride from Osaka – is a “camp” with visitors able to choose different sleeping options – ranging from a simple canvas tent on a

forest. Japan has long embraced this concept.

Today Japan is home to 62 official Forest Therapy Bases, selected by the Forest Therapy Society, a certified NPO supported by many local government organizations. Devoted to the art of forest bathing, the network is selected on the basis of scientific research by forest experts and is as expansive as it is geographically diverse.

Forest-bathing hotspots include the magical primal forests, streams and wildlife of Tsubetsu-cho on northernmost island Hokkaido; Ueno Village in Gunma Prefecture, located two to three hours from Tokyo by train or car, with its peaceful Japanese beech and oak forests; and the giant trees and dense valleys of Okutama (the only official forest-bathing spot included in the Tokyo region). Another must-see spot is Oguni town, wedged between mountains in southwestern Yamagata Prefecture. Accessible by a one-hour bus ride from Yamagata Airport.

wooden deck facing the sea, to a stylishly-decked out Glamping tent, complete with indoor plants and design pieces. Another option is bedding down in one of their chic cottages, complete with wood-burning stove.

Activities are as plentiful as the experience is deeply tied to nature. In addition to exploring its empty beaches and forests, guests can take part in a string of activities, such as kayaking, SUP, beach-tent saunas, fishing, night star gazing, sunset cruising and sitting by campfires, among others.

Food is another highlight, with visitors able to relax a notch and buy DIY barbecue beef sets as well as breakfast spreads, while an in-house chef can also rustle up a raft of Japanese-style treats.

If you want to any further information please contact: media_inquiry@jnto.go.jp

Website: <https://www.jnto.go.jp>

For more information for activities and destinations: <https://www.japan.travel/experiences-in-japan/en/>

B to B "Japan Online Media Center": <https://business.jnto.go.jp/>

