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Japan, Where Life is an Arts

Japan excels at presenting its traditions and art heritage in a good light. Boasting attractions such as the exquisite exhibitions in the open air museums and the new modern arts hubs that are emerging, Japan is a cultural haven.

Why not visit the contemporary art biennale where you can literally stay overnight in an artwork, which is just

as worth visiting as anything UNESCO listed. In this case, even the presentation of beautiful cuisine is considered an art and an Intangible Heritage. Everyone can experience exquisite perfection.

We encourage you to discover Japan both on and off the beaten track. Here we have rounded up eight of the best 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.



© Nakatani Michiko "Voices from Afar" at Echigo Tsumori Art Field

Art

Echigo Tsumari Art Triennale

In places as varied as rice fields, forests, and empty schools, art crops up unexpectedly across the natural landscape at Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, one of the world's biggest outdoor art festivals.

The event's objective is simple: it aims to tap into the power of contemporary art to help revitalize declining and depopulated countryside communities scattered across scenic Niigata, a region of remote mountain villages and rice fields. Since launching in 2000, the event has presented the work of an impressive roll call of international contemporary artists, from Marina Abramovic and Antony Gormley to James Turrell (visitors can even sleep overnight in Turrell's beautifully illuminated House of Light) plus countless domestic talents.

Originally scheduled from 25 July to 12 September 2021 but postponed to a later date, this year's triennale event



Cities

Northern Aomori: Major Arts Hub

It's a far-flung northern region of Japan long famed for its apples, fresh seafood, wild mountains, plus its high-quality, architect-designed art museums.

Aomori – a prefecture that caps the northern tip of Japan's main Honshu island – has emerged as an unexpected modern arts hub in recent years, with the emergence of a string of progressive museums.

There is Towada Art Center – a minimal mesh of white cubes and flowing glass walkways with natural light, designed by architect Nishizawa Ryue – which houses a compact but impressive permanent collection of 38 artworks, by artists ranging from Ono Yoko to Ron Mueck.

The outdoor installations are another highlight – including a popular Kusama Yayoi playground-style space, a vast mural of Yoroshiku Girl by (Aomori-born) Nara Yoshitomo and

will debut 100 new artworks scattered across the provincial region, bringing the total number of installations on display to around 300 (bus tours are available but car hire is recommended if possible: the event spans 760 square kilometers over six areas). Ahead of the main event, new artworks will be introduced in late July. In addition, you can visit about 200 artworks displayed throughout the year.

New highlights to keep an eye out for this year include *Voices from Afar* by Nakatani Michiko; *16 Ropes* by Ilya and Emilia Kabakov; and a new *Tunnel of Light* by Ma Yansong of MAD Architects.



© Nakanoshima Museum of Art, exterior perspective drawing

Art

Nakanoshima Museum of Art

Osaka Prefecture might be best known for its sensational street food, raucous comedy clubs and electrifying nightlife, but for a more cerebral take on the city head to Nakanoshima, located a 20-minute walk from JR Osaka Station, and the museum island.

a rainbow-bright *Flower Horse* by Choi Jeong Hwa.

Aomori Museum of Art, a monolith of white minimalism by Aoki Jun, its form inspired by nearby archaeological sites, is another major attraction, with both temporary and permanent exhibits (don't miss Nara's super-sized Aomori-Ken dog statue, flanked by concrete walls).

Another modern design mecca is the Hirosaki Museum of Contemporary Art, which opened last year, with the brick warehouses of a former apple cider factory renovated by architect Tane Tsuyoshi.



Outdoor & Art

Open-air museums across Japan

Be it by the sea, in a forest or on a mountainside – there are few more powerful settings for art than in the heart of nature.

Japan has long excelled at smoothly mixing all things art and nature, with countless open-air art facilities across the archipelago, showcasing a

Spliced between the Dojima River and Tosabori River, the island is shaping up to be one of the most exciting districts in Japan. Joining two existing museums (the Osaka Science Museum and the National Museum of Art, Osaka), the Nakanoshima Museum of Art will be the latest addition to the area.

Designed by Katsuhiko Endo Architect and Associates, the exterior features a striking black block facade, while inside it contains nearly 6,000 works of contemporary Asian and international art.

René Magritte's surrealist painting *Le Boutique Tout Fait* and Alberto Giacometti's sculpture *Le Nez* are part of the permanent collection, as well as important Japanese Impressionist paintings by Yoshihara Jiro and Fujishima Takeji. Elsewhere, there are industrial design archives, an auditorium and a room dedicated to the Kansai-based *Gutai* avant-garde art movement of the 1950s.

Looking for somewhere equally stylish to stay? Check into the sleek new Zentis Osaka, the first property of the new Zentis hotel brand, from the group behind the acclaimed Palace Hotel Tokyo.

cornucopia of sculptures and installations under the skies.

Among them is Sapporo Art Park – known as Sapporo *Geijutsu no Mori* – a 40-hectare expanse of green forest in northernmost Hokkaido with an array of creative facilities.

It's home to a sculpture park and art galleries, alongside craft studios – glassmaking, ceramics, textiles, woodmaking – staging workshops, classes and events through the seasons. Another Sapporo outdoor arts mecca is Moerenuma Park, a municipal facility (and part of the city's Circular Greenbelt Concept) with a landscape dreamed up by artist Noguchi Isamu.

Inspired by the idea of “the whole being a single sculpture”, the park is a magical creative playground (for children and adults alike), with the geometric lines of its Sea Fountain, Glass Pyramid and Play Mountain.

Another place to savor art in nature is the Hakone Open-Air Museum in mountains west of Tokyo. Spanning a green mountainside, it opened in 1969 as the nation's first open-air museum and today remains as timeless as it is popular.

Around 120 sculptures and installations are scattered throughout the grounds, by artists ranging from Henry Moore to Okamoto Taro, alongside a pavilion dedicated to Picasso and a hot spring footbath.

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©Earth Celebration Committee



© Tofuku-ji Temple Honbo garden

Cuisine & Outdoor

The Charm of Japanese Tea

Sushi, soba, ramen – and green tea. Japan has long enjoyed not only a rich culinary landscape, but also a centuries-old tea culture.

Springtime doesn't only mark a new financial and academic year in Japan, it also kicks off tea-picking season.

The Ajimano teahouse in Echizen, a city in Fukui Prefecture, a two-hour drive from Nagoya Prefecture, opens its doors for an annual event every spring. In this city with a deep relationship to Japan's oldest poetry

Cuisine

UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Foods

Traditional Japanese cuisine, or *washoku*, is as much about the preparation and presentation as it is about the ingredients and the recipes – and it's so important to Japan's identity that it has a place on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Deeply connected to nature, *washoku* celebrates the country's rich bounty, from seasonal vegetables and prized fruits, to foraged wild

collection, the *Manyo-shu*, visitors are able to experience all the stages of making Ajimano tea – from picking the leaves (a process known as *chatsumi*) before drying and massaging them. And finally? Tea is brewed and served.

Ureshino, located in a mountainous valley in Saga Prefecture, an hour's drive from Nagasaki Prefecture, is also famed for its unique ancient tea culture. Here, visitors can enjoy a raft of unusual tea experiences – such as enjoying a cup of tea specially brewed in the middle of mountain-top tea field on the region's so-called *Tenchadai*.

Another place to head is the Shizuoka Prefecture, which produces nearly half the nation's green tea. In particular? Nihondaira – a 307 meter-high hilltop area with a legendary reputation in Japan for its epic views of a floating snow-capped Mount Fuji.

At its apex is Nihondaira Ocha Kaikan, a tea store where, between April and October, visitors can head into the fields with farmers and try their hand at harvesting tea leaves.

It all starts in the vivid green tea fields, with visitors wandering between neat rows of waist-high tea bushes – majestic Mount Fuji views looming large, clouds permitting – learning about how to pick the leaves.

Once bags are full of leaves, visitors can try tea-processing techniques such as tea rolling. And then finally? It's teatime: the experience normally finishes with visitors enjoying a cup of freshly-brewed green tea plus – something of a culinary novelty for many – delicious new tea leaf tempura, before taking their own picked tea home with them.

herbs and edible plants, to rice and freshly caught seafood.

Typically seen at family gatherings and New Year celebrations each dish is always beautifully presented on special tableware to be shared with friends, family and among the community. The vast new Toyosu Fish Market in Tokyo (which replaced Tsukiji market in 2018) is the place where Japan's most delicious delicacies are auctioned and sold, not just fish – as the name suggests – but fruits and vegetables too.

But wherever you visit and whichever time of year, you can always find a taste of *washoku* as one food or another coming into season, whether its springtime melons from Hokkaido, apples from Aomori Prefecture in late summer, dark purple Kyoho grapes from Yamanashi Prefecture, which arrive in autumn, or *mikan* (mandarin oranges) from Wakayama Prefecture in early winter.



© shikata kizou urushiten

Art

Techniques in the SDGs era

It's an ancient art form dating back four centuries, yet it is rooted in a very timely modern-day concept: sustainability.

Kintsugi – the art of fixing broken pottery, by tracing visible lines of gold or silver across the cracks – has become globally renowned in recent years.

Its popularity has been fueled not only by its appreciation of beauty in imperfection, or the intricate craftsmanship involved – but also due to its recycling element.

There are several hypotheses on the origin of *kintsugi*. According to one of them, the art form dates back more than four centuries. Ashikaga Masayoshi, *shogun* in the 15th-century reportedly broke his favorite tea bowl and sent it to China to be repaired. When it returned with the pieces stapled together, local artisans decided to create a more aesthetically-pleasing version by filling the cracks with golden lacquerware – *kintsugi* was born. In pragmatic terms, *kintsugi* taps into the traditional Japanese concept of *mottainai* – the desire not to waste. It is rooted in a respect for objects, a word that has, in recent years, gone hand in hand with sustainability.

The beauty of *kintsugi* – its delicate network of lines revitalizing broken



© Ninagawa Mika "Concept Room 152" Hotel Anteroom Kyoto

Relaxation

Art Hotels

If visiting Japan's museums and galleries is high on your list of things to do, here's a way to squeeze in an extra art fix: book a night or two at a hotel with its own art collection.

A 15-minute walk south of Kyoto Station, the Hotel Anteroom Kyoto houses more than 200 works of art and has eight concept rooms designed by some of Japan's top artists – the most psychedelic of which is Room 152, a cherry blossom fantasia created by Ninagawa Mika.

Also in Kyoto, the BnA Alter Museum multitasks as a 10-story contemporary art gallery and a hotel. Each of its 31 rooms sport a different design.

In Tokyo, the Grand Hyatt had the Murakami Takashi Flower Art Gallery suite, featuring 14 original artworks and sculptures depicting his signature 12-petal flower motif.

Nagoya (two hours west of the capital by bullet train *shinkansen*) has The Tower Hotel, with 15 pared-back rooms decorated with local art, fabrics and furnishings, hidden inside a 1950s former television broadcasting tower.

ceramics – has been interpreted as a timely metaphor for embracing the flaws and imperfections of life, rather than trying to hide them.

The process of *kintsugi* is as simple in concept as it's visually striking: the broken pieces are stuck together and the cracks are painted with lacquer dusted with powdered metals – gold, silver, platinum.

While in Fukushima you can bed down at the 16th century Itamuro Onsen Daikokuya inn, which permanently showcases over 300 works by contemporary artist Suga Kishio.

If you would like further information, please contact: media_inquiry@jnto.go.jp

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