



JNTO Newsletter 6: June 2021



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## *Japan, Don't Miss Out*

There are so many things to see and do in Japan that this final newsletter focuses on those “*must-not miss things*”.

Whether you want to visit an ancient Temple or the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, or simply go autumnal leaf-viewing while paddling on a lake, there is a wealth of places to see and things to do that are both on and off the

beaten track that any local will tell you should top your itinerary list.

And of course with the Olympics nearly upon us, there are special things to do and see that represent and reflect the history of Japan such as the nation's great bullet train *Shinkansen*, which began operations prior to the last Olympics in Tokyo and connected the capital with Nagoya and Osaka.

Wherever you visit in Japan, you will want to come back for more.

Therefore, we have rounded up seven exciting experiences for you to enjoy.



© Courtesy of Central Japan Railway Company

### Cities

## Shinkansen Deeply Connected with the Tokyo Olympics

When the previous Tokyo Olympic Summer Games kicked off in 1964 to a sea of flag-waving crowds, it was a historic moment for Japan.

Not only was it the first Olympics to be held in Asia, but also the first time the games were telecast internationally via satellite. Taking place less than two decades after the end of World War II, it also marked Japan's reentry into the global community and showcased its rapid post-war economic recovery.

One important symbol of Japan's modernization and an enduring legacy of the games was the launch of the world's first high-speed bullet trains known as *Shinkansen*.

Today, the nation's *Shinkansen* trains remain one of the ultimate symbols of high-tech Japan. The bullet train network now spans the nation, from Kyushu in the south to Hokkaido in the north, with its famously fast, clean and punctual trains hitting a top speed of 320 kilometers per hour. However,



### Cities

## Aomori Nebuta Festival

The phrase "*Rassera! Rassera!*" resounds vibrantly when the Nebuta Festival is held in Aomori Prefecture every summer. This traditional festival attracts millions of visitors every year in August, with its bright parades, vivid floats, rhythmic music and lively dancing.

As part of the festival, around two dozen large illuminated floats, known as *Nebuta* (handcrafted from wire, wood and paper) and depicting ancient tales of vivid mythical gods, heroes, warriors and demons, form a procession through Aomori City.

Meanwhile, hundreds of dancers – called *haneto* in Aomori dialect – move alongside the floats to the musical accompaniment of taiko drummers, and flute and cymbal players.

The event climaxes after dark on August 7th, when the *Nebuta* floats are placed in boats and transported around Aomori Bay beneath a kaleidoscopic fireworks.

Central Japan Railway is currently constructing a high-speed maglev train line that will connect Tokyo, Nagoya and Osaka and is expected to achieve a top speed of 500 kilometers per hour.

And there are few more iconic Japan experiences than watching the cleaning staff, often wearing flowers clipped to their hats, undertaking the so-called “Seven Minute Miracle” – cleaning an entire train between services in just seven minutes in a mesmerising high-speed routine, before enjoying a bento box meal while traveling at high speed across Japan. This is also a perfect way to sample Japan’s famous hospitality, practicality and efficiency.



Courtesy of Chusonji

### *Tradition*

## **UNESCO World Heritage Sites: "Traditional Architectural Techniques"**

As a force protecting and appreciating oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, social practices, hereditary knowledge and time-honored arts and crafts from around the world, the Unesco Intangible Cultural Heritage division has added the conservation of Japan's wooden architecture to its list in 2020.

While there are few experiences to rival witnessing the festival in person, visitors to Aomori at other times of the year can also enjoy a taste of the famed event at the facility called Nebuta Museum WARRASSE. The building, with its striking red steel latticed façade, showcases the heritage and craftsmanship of the festival. Four paper *Nebuta* floats are on display, alongside experiences such as *haneto* dancing and opportunities to make paper segments used in the famed floats.

Aomori Prefecture is located about 4 hours by train or 1.5 hours by plane from Tokyo.



### *Tradition*

## **Magic of Mount Koya**

The sacred religious site of Mount Koya is the 9th-century birthplace of Japan’s Shingon sect of Buddhism and home to numerous Buddhist temples.

Mount Koya offers highly unique overnight stays at temples – known as *Shukubo* – where guests can follow in

Some of the skills it aims to safeguard include the harvesting of Japanese cypress bark, lacquer painting, *tatami* woven straw mat making, producing and maintaining straw thatched roofs, decorative carving, and traditional *Sakan* wall plastering that has allowed many of Japan's wooden structures to survive a millennium of earthquakes, typhoons and lightning strikes despite their seemingly fragile timber frames.

Some specific examples of sites selected to become UNESCO World Heritage Sites include the gold-adorned Konjikido Golden Hall (Constructed in 12th-century) of Chūson-ji Temple in Iwate Prefecture, the elegant Himeji Castle (Also known in English as “White Heron Castle”) in Hyogo Prefecture, and Aizu's 1,000-year old Shingu Kumano Shrine Nagatoko (Renowned for its large open stage with a thatched roof supported by 44 earth quake-absorbing pillars) in Fukushima Prefecture.

One of the most striking examples of the architectural techniques used can be found at *Hōryūji* Temple in Nara Prefecture. *Hōryūji* Temple, about 10km south west of Nara in Ikaruga and a 40 minute travel from JR Nara station, is not just the oldest wooden building in Japan, but it is also the oldest wooden building in the world. Originally constructed in 607 AD, the Buddhist temple today is alluring for both its historic relevance and its 150 Japanese National Treasures, its five-story pagoda and other multiple beautifully constructed wooden buildings, which are the world's oldest surviving wooden structures, existing within the vast temple complex. *Hōryūji* is home to a time capsule of rare early Buddhist art, from frescoes to statues.

Prince Shōtoku, who was also an avid student of Buddhism, is said to be the

the footsteps of centuries old tradition of monks and pilgrims by checking into around 50 different temples for the *Shukubo* experience. These overnight stays are among Japan's most esoteric and stoic experiences, offering a rare insight into the daily lives of Buddhist clergy, including their vegetarian meals and close-up views of cultural treasures used in their religious practices. Visitors brave enough to take up this temple experience are greeted with sliding screen doors, *tatami* straw mat rooms, futons unrolled nightly as bedding, temple vegetarian cuisine and a heady mix of incense, ornate interiors, various religious sculptures and chanting during early morning prayers. And while this experience might be a bit too stoic for some tourists, the purpose of *Shukubo* is to also provide guests with opportunities to sample the teachings of the Buddha and prayer.

But even if you do not take this path, Mount Koya (Called Koya-San by Japanese) is still a magical place to visit with its remote 900-meter high location surrounded by deep forests and by eight mountain peaks of Wakayama Prefecture. Koyasan is 100 minutes from Namba Station in Osaka by train.

Once home to thousands of temples, today Koya-san, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is an enclave of more than 100 intricately-crafted temple buildings scattered within this mountain setting and exquisite forests of ancient trees.

Food is a highlight during any temple stay: prepare to be served vegetarian Buddhist cuisine known as *shojin ryori* – an exquisite medley of seasonal vegetables, showcasing a careful balance of five colors and five flavors.

Mornings start early in temples, with many visitors joining monks at early

founder of *Hōryūji* Temple. He is also one of Japan's most legendary figures because of his other achievements which included the penning one of the earliest constitutions in the world, creating a foundation for the future Japanese culture.

morning prayers in the innermost sanctums, havens of ornate gold décor, Buddhist statues, incense and chanting. Other activities often range from meditation to calligraphy.

And to commemorate the 1,400th anniversary of Prince Shōtoku's death this year, his deeply influential legacy is celebrated in a landmark exhibition entitled "*Hōryūji: Prince Shōtoku and Treasures of Early Buddhist Faith in Japan.*" Held at both Tokyo National Museum and Nara National Museum, this exhibition takes guests through a journey of the world of Prince Shōtoku, with a cornucopia of exhibits from portraits and relics, to ancient temple treasures.

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*Hōryūji Temple is the oldest wooden building in the world. Originally constructed in 607 AD, the Buddhist temple has a five-story pagoda. Today the temple houses 150 of Japan's National Treasures. It remains as alluring as it is historic.*

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## Cities

### Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park

Once, it was Hiroshima's bustling commercial district. Today, it is a peaceful sanctuary dedicated to the memory of the victims of the world's first atomic bomb.

Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, designed by the architect Tange Kenzo, was created in 1955, just ten years after the nuclear attack that obliterated the city near the end of World War II.

Spanning an open field created by the force of the explosion, today it's home to memorials, museums and monuments alongside quiet pathways and cherry blossom trees. The Park attracts more than one million visitors every year.

The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Ceremony takes place here every year on August 6th, with a one minute silence observed at 8:15 a.m. – the time of the attack – in memory of its estimated 140,000 victims.

The park is also home to the structure closest to the blast that survived, now known as the Atomic Bomb Dome, its scarred and skeletal form was once home to the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall. Next to the



## Outdoor

### SUP-ing on Chuzenji Lake

Led by a group of young Japanese go-getters, the enthusiastically titled Sup! Sup! has brought a new outdoor pastime to Nikko – stand-up paddle boarding on the glassy green waters of Chuzenji Lake. A one-hour bus ride from Nikko station, it's an experience that can be enjoyed anytime of year.

Take to the water in spring and you can glide alongside violets, wisteria, azaleas, hydrangeas, and of course cherry blossoms as they come into bloom. In summer, the lake's cool water provides the perfect foil to the region's 27-degree centigrade sunny weather. Autumn is leaf-viewing season, or *momiji-gari* in Japanese, as the mountains surrounding Chuzenji Lake transform into a tapestry of red and yellow maples, bright golden ginkgos, orange osmanthus and scarlet spider lilies.

In winter, you can slip into a cold-weather wetsuit and slide into the furthest corners of the lake in search of weird and wonderful ice formations, a hobby known as *shibuki-gouri*.

Other top SUP spots include Lake Biwa in Shiga Prefecture northeast of Kyoto, and Miyajima in Hiroshima Prefecture where you can glide

Atomic Bomb Dome, there is Hiroshima Orizuru Tower, which opened in 2016. The tower has an observation deck on the top floor and offers a view of the surroundings including views of the Atomic Bomb Dome from above.

The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum also offers a reflective insight into the atomic bomb attack and its legacy, through numerous exhibits.

Other features include the large curved concrete Memorial Cenotaph, listing the names of bombing victims, and the Children's Peace Monument, including a statue of a schoolgirl dedicated to the bombing's youngest victims.

And while there are numerous important tourist spots in various countries around the world, the Hiroshima Memorial Peace Park is unique for its historical relevance and importance as a spot where visitors can ponder the meaning of war and pray for peace.

through the grand *torii* gate of Itsukushima Shrine.



© TOTTORI SAND BOARD SCHOOL

## *Outdoor*

### **Tottori Sand Dunes**

A desert-like sweep of sand dunes, complete with camel rides and

At the sand dunes, visitors are spoiled for choices in terms of activities.

sandboarding, is perhaps not a typical landscape for Japan. Welcome to Tottori Prefecture, a coastal region, in Western Japan, which is famously home to the biggest sand dunes in the country. Tottori Prefecture is located approximately a 2.5-hour ride by bullet train Shinkansen from Osaka Prefecture. In Tottori Prefecture there are hidden attractions which are not widely known as those in Kyoto or Osaka

The epic (and ever-shifting) expanse of sand dunes, with smoothly curved lines shaped by winds and tides, stretches across a region measuring 16 by 2.4 kilometers.

And visiting Tottori's sand dunes, which are located inside the San'in Kaigan Geopark alongside the Sea of Japan, feels a bit like entering another world, as famously captured in the surreally beautiful images by legendary photographer Ueda Shoji.

Among the most famous are camel rides on the sand dunes (a rarity in Japan). Other popular activities include fatbiking, paragliding, sandboarding and yoga, or simply taking a stroll to admire the ripple-like patterns on the sand's surface.

The sand dunes are a year-round destination, with a backdrop that changes dramatically with the seasons – from snowfall during winter to bursts of bright flowers during spring.

There are many hot spring *onsen* in Tottori Prefecture you can get freshened up even if you get covered by sand!

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.

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If you would like further information, please contact: [media\\_inquiry@jnto.go.jp](mailto:media_inquiry@jnto.go.jp)

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