

RISE

MONTHLY JOURNAL FROM JAPAN



my JAPAN

EXCLUSIVE EDITION
PART 01

Dear Reader,

Ohayo Gozaimasu!!

Wishing readers a Very Happy New Year!!

2021 was the year that brought in great hope and many achievers to the Land of Rising Sun. At Tokyo 2020, it was a spectacular display of resilience and great sportsmanship that lived up to the slogan "world we share. The world leadership applauded Tokyo's efforts in executing a successful sporting event, amidst a pandemic. In Tokyo 2020, the flower of the season, the sunflower was an integral part of podium ceremony.

With restrictions and no foreign visitors, cultural festivals honouring the spirits of one's ancestors were held throughout the summer season in various prefectures. Highlight of these festivals are night illumination in the form of bright floats, fireworks and lanterns.

The month of October saw some respite in quarantine norms, as they were reduced to three days from ten days. The last quarter of the year also witnessed some of the most amazing hotel openings. Hilton LXR hotels & resorts opened their doors in Gion, Kyoto; OMO5 by Hoshino resorts and ACE Hotel Kyoto were amongst the few that are set to welcome guests.

Japan has worked hard over years to delight each visitor by providing safe and clean environment for travel, and has stayed on top in visitor satisfaction and this reflected in the Conde-Nast Readers' Awards 2021. In the big cities category, Japan swept the top slot, with Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto being ranked in the top three. Japan's Seven Star Luxury Train in Kyushu was ranked No. 1. Also, the top luxury hotel spot in Asia was taken by Japanese luxury brands like Suiran, Okura Tokyo, Hoshinoya and Iraph Sui, Miyako Okinawa.

For automotive enthusiasts, Porsche opened its Tokyo experience centre near the capital, in Kisarazu City (under Chiba Prefecture). This is going to be the first of its kind to offer wholesome experience.

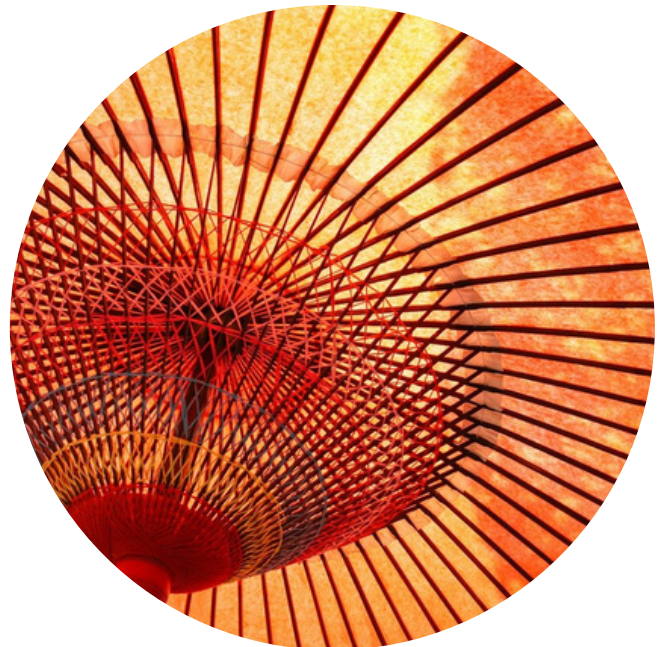
With the arrival of Christmas, it marks the start of festivities in Japan. Special markets are setup for Christmas, streets are illuminated and special menus are on offer at restaurants. It is the New Year that is a big festival in Japan and also marks a holiday season. To celebrate New Year, locals take short breaks to different Ryokans or resorts.

With the announcement of the new variant of COVID-19, foreign visitors' arrival is restricted for the time being in Japan, and the country has witnessed a steady decline in COVID-19 cases after the peak in August. Stricter measures taken now shall result in better and safer travel in the future.

At RISE, we strive to bring you, incredible travel and leisure stories from Japan, and we hope this special edition, "My Japan," shall delight you with amazing 22 stories, narrated by people who adore Japan and want you to be part of a journey of endless discovery called Japan.

Stay safe and healthy.

Arigato Gozaimasu.





OSAKA—TALE OF UNFORGETTABLE MEMORIES

BY KELVIN KWAN - SINGAPORE AIRLINES

Osaka has been at the heart of Japan's cultural and economic development for hundreds of years. In my opinion, Osaka is a must visit for any trip to Japan to experience the perfect blend of tradition, a modern city and most importantly food! A city where you will be provided with unforgettable memories.

Hi, my name is Kelvin Kwan and I had the privilege of spending 5 years working for Singapore Airlines in Japan, 3 years of which were spent in Osaka. Now that I am based in India, I would like to share with you my love for Japan and provide my personal 'local' guide to this wonderful city, to show you what Osaka has to offer.

For anyone planning to travel to Japan, please be assured that people are friendly and honestly 'Google Translate' can be your best friend. So, get a little adventurous because Osaka has lots to offer!

WHERE TO EAT

For centuries, Osaka has been known as the "nation's kitchen" and till today is the city where you can literally "eat until you drop". So, first up, here are some of my recommendations for places to eat.

Fukutaro - One should never miss the chance to try the Osaka soul food 'Okonomiyaki'. Whilst there are several

larger chains, such as 'Fugetsu' or 'Chibo', I recommend 'Fukutaro', located in Namba and Umeda which is popular among locals. 'Okonomiyaki' is a pan-fried Japanese savoury dish made with flour batter that usually consists of shredded cabbage and a variety of ingredients and toppings such as meat or seafood. It is fun to watch the restaurant staff make your 'Okonomiyaki' right in front of you on the table top grill.

Shabu-Tei - is a well-established 'shabu-shabu' restaurant located in Umeda and Shinsaibashi. They are a local favourite and known for their freshly made 'goma-dare' (sesame dipping sauce), which goes well with thinly sliced beef or pork.

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Endo-Sushi - located in the Osaka central fish market, 15 minutes' walk from the nearest subway station, offers very fresh sushi. This main branch opens from 5AM to 2PM from Monday-Saturday. There is usually a queue, but it is worth a visit. Their popular menu is 'Maze' which consists of 5 different pieces of sushi (there are some varieties of combinations). It would be nice to have breakfast there before sightseeing.

Daruma - If you like deep fried meat and vegetables skewers, this is the place for you! Invented as cheap fast food in the early 20th century, Kushikatsu is now a very popular cuisine and Daruma one of the most famous chains with branches across the city. A delightful and fun experience, but just remember the basic rule that one should never double dip your skewer in their tasty black sauce.

Makino - This chain which has several branches in Osaka (larger branches in Umeda, Nanba and Tenjinbashi) is one of my personal favourites. Makino specialises in tempura and your orders

are made to order and served one by one. Their batter is light and crispy and delicious. Don't forget to order the 'egg' tempura. You can either order skewer per piece or try the various combos they have including a vegetarian set.

WHAT TO DO

Next up, places to visit and recommended things to do in and around Osaka city. Be it shopping, sightseeing or attractions, Osaka has it all.

Dotonbori - It is widely regarded as 'heaven' for eating, shopping, and taking photos. If you had only once place to visit in Osaka, this is it. There are many stalls selling local street foods (e.g. Takoyaki), local cafes, ramen shops, and a wide variety of restaurants including local popular chains. There are also numerous shops selling shoes, bags, clothes, accessories, items from chemists, cosmetics, souvenirs, etc. You will enjoy the famous photo spot in front of the iconic Glico-man sign at the Ebisu bridge with other large sign boards around the area too.

Harukas 300 Observation Deck - It is the observatory located on the 58th - 60th floors on Japan's highest building "Abeno Harukas". You will enjoy unobstructed 360-degree views from the height of 300 meters above the ground. Enjoy the sunset and night view from the observatory with a cold drink in hand.

Universal Studios Japan - 'USJ' is the first Universal Studios that was built outside of the United States. It will definitely be a fun filled day for children and adults alike, for what will require the whole day to experience as much of what USJ has to offer. The most popular attractions include - Wizarding World of Harry Potter, Minion Park and the recently opened Super Nintendo World.

The basement floor of larger department stores (not unique to Osaka, but it a must visit in Japan) 'Depachika' ('Depa' for department store and 'Chika' for basement in Japanese) is a gourmet heaven for home-made styled Japanese dishes, bentos (meals in a box), delicatessen foods,



fine-quality foods, fruits, beautifully decorated cakes or other sweets, variety of Japanese confectionery, delicious breads and pastries, etc. It is also a perfect place to look for souvenirs. Recommend to visit 'Depachika' at the larger department stores. In Osaka, these would be 'Hankyu Department Store' in Umeda or 'Takashimaya' in Namba.

Doguyasuji - This is a shopping arcade, known as 'Kitchenware street' located in Namba, lined with shops selling kitchen utensils, cooking equipment and accessories, kitchen knives, a variety of tableware including chopsticks, restaurants supply, replica foods, etc. A lot of fun to stroll the street.

Cup Noodles Museum - The birthplace and all things instant noodles. Visitors are educated on the importance of inventiveness and discovery by introducing the history of instant noodles. You can also create your own original cup noodles package. Located 30mins north of Osaka city by train.

Suntory Yamazaki Distillery - Visit the birthplace of Japanese whisky and enjoy "Yamazaki Distillery Tour" including a guided tour of the distillery with viewing of the production process, as well as tasting of Yamazaki component whiskies. About 1hr from Osaka by train. Reservations are strongly recommended.

THINGS TO NOTE

Moving around the city - The most convenient way to explore Osaka city is by taking the Metro or train. In Osaka, there are a variety of railway lines, belonging both to JR and other private railways so planning ahead and knowing which train goes where will help with your city traveling and sightseeing.

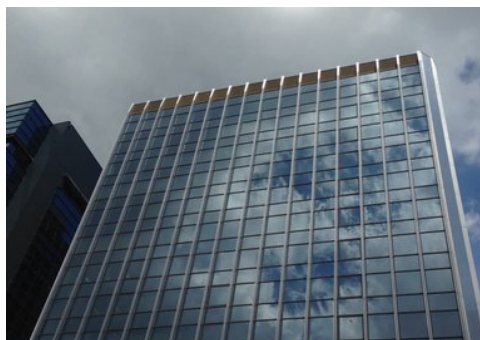
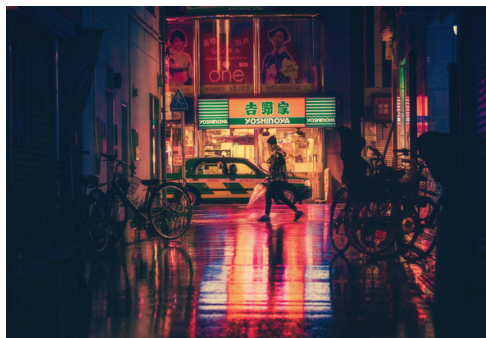
Restaurants - Due to steep competition amongst all numerous eateries, many restaurants offer reasonable 'lunch menus', so don't forget to look out for them! Also, if there is a long queue at a restaurant, please make sure to

check if there are any waiting lists (inside or outside of the restaurants) and place your name on it.

What I have shared is literally the tip of the iceberg as there are just too places to eat, shop and unique places to visit in Osaka. Listed are just some of my personal recommendation to friends and family and I hope you will have an absolute blast in Osaka. If you are looking for the great outdoors such as mountains to trek or gardens or historical places such as temples and shrines to visit, whilst I have not covered much here, there is indeed a lot to explore too. Lastly, if you have more time on your hands, don't not forget that Kyoto, Kobe and Nara are nearby and can be visited as day trips out of Osaka too.

No matter which season you choose to visit Osaka, I am sure it will be a memorable one.

Singapore Airlines flies to Osaka daily. To book a flight, visit singaporeair.com



JAPAN: A PHOTOGRAPHERS' PARADISE

BY SONIA SINGH - NIPPON TAIYO HOSPITALITY

When we wish to capture a moment, we think of memoirs created through photography; it means telling stories of dozens of places we have visited. Japan as a destination is endless and a photographer's paradise. With stunning landscapes enriched with nature, be it mountains, lakes, valleys, or even beaches, stretching from north to south or from east to west, each place in Japan definitely leaves a mark on a traveller's mind with its beauty. And a traveller would be happy to capture nature through photography.

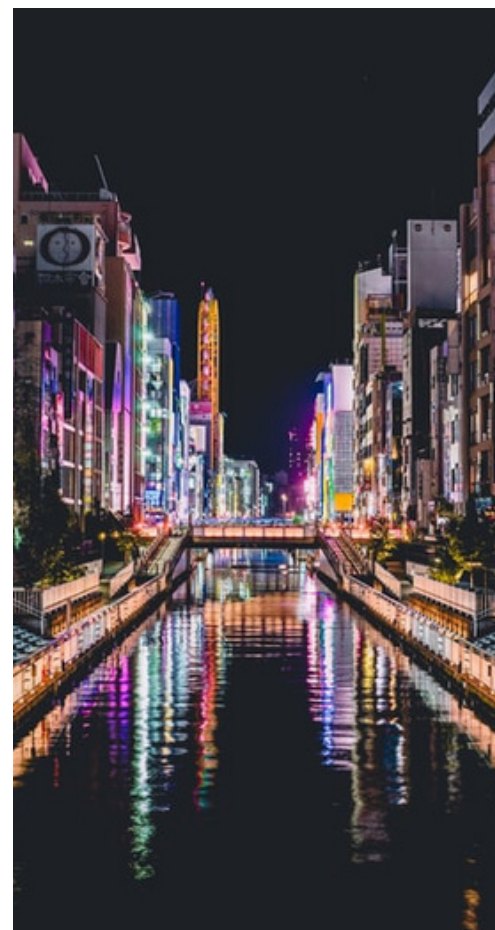
Using reflections in photography creates amazing images. One can use water, mirrors, or even windows on a building or skyscraper. Any sort of reflective surface

can change an image into a work of art. Reflection photography is the ability to look at an image in a unique or distinctive way. One needs to have perfect weather, lighting, and location to capture mirror images. Many of us would find the reflection in the water attractive.

In the past few years, I have been able to view and capture beautiful landscapes, especially through reflection photography or landscape photography. Some of the places that I found attractive are my personal favourites, and I would recommend travellers visit them during their Japan tour, especially if you love nature photography.

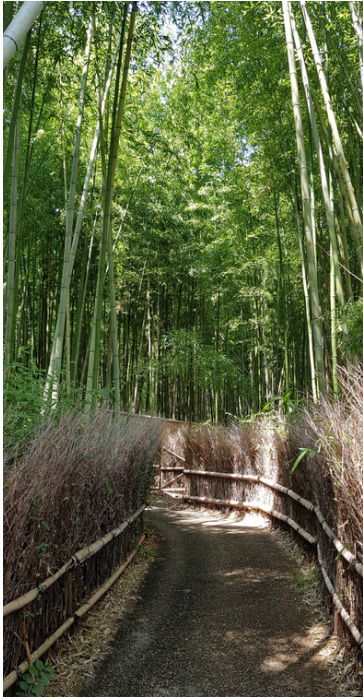
- Kinkakuji Temple is a gold-covered Zen Buddhist temple that is a gleaming sight in the heart of Kyoto and a must-see for any traveler. As you walk towards the path of the temple, you can clearly see the reflection of the temple in the water surrounding it.
- Kyoto is a treasure chest of picturesque places. Every temple and shrine, has a different landscape, be it during cherry blossoms or autumn or winter season, when there is illumination with light and sound show. Byoda-in Temple, Toji Temple, Daigoji Temple, Daikaku-ji Temple, and Rurikoin Temple are some of the places to capture the peaceful atmosphere.

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- Mount Fuji: The stunning photos of the iconic mountain are always at the top of Japan's searches and looks captivating in all four seasons. Mt. Fuji is surrounded by five lakes, one of which is Lake Kawaguchi, a popular sightseeing spot where one can see Mt. Fuji reflecting in its surrounding lakes. Sakasa Fuji, or Inverse Fuji, is a sight where Mt. Fuji is sharply reflected upside down, reflected on the surface like a mirror at Yamanakako Lake. A "Double Diamond" view of Mt. Fuji can be witnessed outside Yamanashi prefecture. Especially famous are Tanuki Lake (Shizuoka Prefecture) and Ashinoko Lake (Kanagawa Prefecture) at the time of sunrise.
- Gardens and parks like Shinjuku Gyoen National Park in Tokyo, Kenrokuen Garden in Kanazawa, Rikugen in Tokyo, or Ashikaga Flower Park or Shirotori Garden in Nagoya, and many more, have picturesque natural scenes at any time of year with great views.
- Castles in Japan are also impressive. At Matsumoto Castle, Osaka Castle, Nagoya Castle, and Takada Castle in Niigata Prefecture, one will not get bored of taking photographs throughout the day.
- Ponds like Blue Pond in Hokkaido, Yumi Ike Pond in Gunma, Siberian Iris at Hira Pond in Shiga, and Sarusawa Pond in Nara are not to be missed.
- Japan's Uyuni Salt Lake! Seto Inland Sea's "Mirror of the Sky," where both you and the sky will be reflected.
- Niigata's Tunnel of Light in Kiyotsu Gorge: This 750m-long tunnel provides access to one of Japan's three great valleys, the Kiyotsu Gorge. Within the tunnel, Kiyotsu Gorge can be seen from 3 different viewing stations. Also, in the panoramic station at the end of the tunnel, you can enjoy the spectacular scenery.
- Festivals like Saga International Balloon Fiesta, Lantern Festivals and New Year Celebrations are also a great way to capture reflections of scenery.
- Amusement parks like Universal Studios, Tokyo Disney Sea and Huis Ten Bosch are fun too.
- Even puddle reflections in Japan after rain are also a great way to capture the hustle and bustle of the cities.

Japan bids an unparalleled chance for incredible photography, as it offers rich landscape from urban to rural, high rise buildings to shrines, modern to traditional, stunning manmade to natural sites waiting for to be captured through the individuals creativity. Once in Japan, you are never short of photographic opportunity.



KYOTO – DAY TRIP FROM OSAKA

BY SHARAD SHARMA – NIPPON TAIYO HOSPITALITY

Kyoto the erstwhile capital of Japan and in 1868 the capital shifted to present day Tokyo. While you visit Kyoto, it is evident that there is a constant tussle to balance the old-world charm with the ultra-modern city of high-rise buildings and extraordinary services. Kyoto has now become a case study, as to how heritage can coexist with ultra-development.

While on my solo trip to Japan, Osaka was the gateway city and I had planned the tour in such a way that Osaka became my base for few days and I took day trips to nearby destinations, and Kyoto was one of them and it was pure love.

From Osaka-Umeda station, take the

Hankyu train to Arashiyama station and change train at Katsura station for Arashiyama Station. It was a thirty-minute train ride and then fifteen to twenty minutes of walk time to the famous Arashiyama Bamboo Forest. As it is one of the most popular attraction, and you will find a lot of people walking the forest pathway and looking for that perfect Instagram photograph. It is better to plan a visit to Bamboo forest in early hours of the day and during the weekday, as there shall be chances of encountering less crowd. Nonomiya Shrine is a Shinto shrine and is located in the middle of forest. The Arashiyama Bamboo forest is open round the clock and there is no entry fee.

Take a little stroll to the nearby stations operated by JR that are Saga-Arashiyama or Uzumasa and take train to main Kyoto station, it is second largest train station after Nagoya and is one of the largest building in Japan, including a hotel, movie theatre, shopping mall, departmental store and many government offices. Making it a destination in itself. Upon arrival take a bus to Higashiyama District. It is one of the city's best-preserved historic district and must visit for that Kyoto experience.

This district is between Kiyomizudera and Yasaka Shrine, is approximately a two-kilometre area and can be covered in two hours or even half a day is less for it.

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Some of the temples in this district are Kiyomizudera Temple, Kodaiji Temple, Yasaka Pagoda, Yasaka Shrine and Marayuma Park. Apart from these temples and parks, it has one of the best collections of wooden buildings and traditional merchant shops, which invoke a feeling of the old capital city. The Yasaka Pagoda is visible from a distance and is a photographer's delight.

While most of the temple and pagoda in this locality attract entry of approx. six hundred Yen, and one of my personal temple to spend time is Yasaka Koshin-Do Temple, the entry to the temple is free, and it is open from 0900 to 1700 Hrs, its colourful ambience is photographers delight. Temple is devoted to blue deity, having its origin linked to an old religion Koshin, also the birth place for see/hear/speak no evil. Represented by three monkeys.

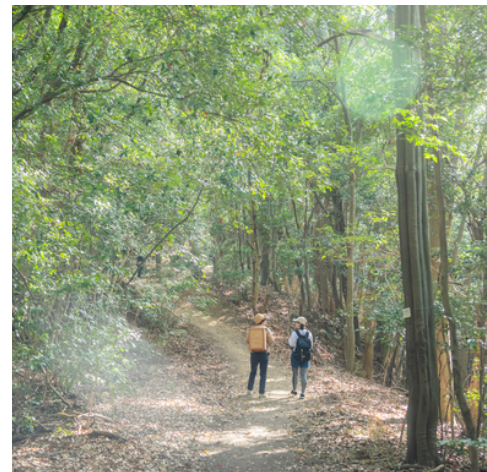
While strolling in this old town, which has been beautifully restored, do not miss visiting Starbucks, located in a traditional machiya (wooden house) with a Japanese garden. It is the perfect place to stop and enjoy special flavours designed for specific seasons in Kyoto.

Apart from this amazing coffee shop, you may also stop for Kiyomizu-yaki pottery, sweets, pickles, crafts, and other souvenirs being sold in these traditional shops. For Indian food, head to Maharaja restaurant, serving delicious North Indian cuisine.

The famous Gion Matsuri festival starts from Yasaka Shrine and is the most important festival from Kyoto. The float festival happens in July, and in evening the streets are closed for traffic and it becomes hub for great food, drinks and performances.

After the visiting Higashiyama district, take a walk to Kamo river, that runs through Kyoto City and provides ideal place to relax during afternoon or after a long walk. In summer, restaurants open balconies looking out to the river. There are pathways running alongside the river on which one can walk along the river, and some stepping stones that cross the river. Sometimes you can even spot a maiko or geisha, traditional Japanese entertainers, along the river banks.

Later in the evening, take a walk to Kyoto-Kawaramachi Station for a train to Osaka-Umeda station. Return to base with memories to cherish forever. It is recommended to stay in Kyoto for at least two days to explore and experience the different sites of Kyoto, what has been said in article is just a bit of Kyoto, and rest is still to be visited.



ASAGESHIKI, HIROSHIMA JAPAN

BY KANA KAWASAKI - HIROSHIMA CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

Asageshiki, an original combined word with two Japanese words- Asage means breakfast and Asa + Keshiki means view in the morning is a morning hiking tour in Hiroshima, Japan.

A hiking tour through the crisp early morning air of Futaba Mountain, a forest of sacred trees rich in nature. Enjoying Nodate, traditional outdoor tea ceremony with a guide on the mountaintops overlooking Hiroshima City and the Seto Inland Sea.

Through the tranquil forests of the Mt. Futaba, admire the majestic and elegant architecture of Hiroshima Toshogu Shrine, and learn about the history of Hiroshima as

the castle town from the Shinto priests. Hiroshima Toshogu Shrine was built at the foot of Mt. Futaba, which is in the direction of the demon gate (northeast) of Hiroshima Castle in 1648.

At the Kinko Inari Shrine, lined with more than 120 bright red torii gates, was also built as a god of fulfilling various wishes such as business prosperity and family safety over 250 years ago. We will trek through its seven different gods. The panoramic view from the top of the mountain, the Peace Pagoda offers a spectacular view of Hiroshima City, the Seto Inland Sea, and also Miyajima.

After enjoying the beautiful view, we go

down to Okumiya where is used to be a stage long time ago. At this place, we have special breakfast and also experience Nodate performed by tour guide. Okumiya is wonderful place to see panoramic view of Hiroshima as well as the Peace Pagoda. Asageshiki original breakfast is filled with local products and the bento box is reusable.

Since Asageshiki has a concept of "regenerative tourism", as a local-based tourism group clean the route regularly with volunteers.

Why don't you visit Hiroshima to experience something new and deeper with us?



HOKKAIDO—A LUXURIOUS SOJOURN

BY HIRO MIYATAKE - BEAR LUXE JAPAN

If you've been looking for a perfect post-lock down getaway, Hokkaido is just the place to be for a holistic holiday experience. Explore Japan's northernmost island and discover a realm of spectacular scenery, unique culinary experiences, storied heritage and endless adventures. Covering nearly a quarter of the country, it's Japan's largest and most fascinating prefecture.

In 2020, Japan was the most sought-after destination especially with the Tokyo 2020 Summer Games capturing the world's attention for weeks. The cool environs of Hokkaido were the host prefecture for the Olympic marathons and race-walking events. The world witnessed Japan's

legendary 'Omotenashi', the time-honoured spirit of selfless hospitality that goes above and beyond.

Fall in love with Hokkaido's pristine panoramas renowned for its untouched beauty and natural produce. Immerse in slow-paced travel experiences with guided visits to organic farms to experience traditional farming and vegetable harvesting first-hand. A visit to Hokkaido's vineyards is a must to savour handpicked fine wines with a side of gorgeous natural vistas. Wineries in Yoichi have harnessed Japanese terroirs and curated a unique expression, distinct from European versions. What's more, Three Michelin-starred Copenhagen restaurant Noma,

offers Yoichi's premium wines for connoisseurs to savour.

While here, don't miss out on sampling Japan's celebrity Michelin-starred chef Tomoyuki Takao's ingenious Italian culinary masterpieces crafted with the region's freshest seasonal produce. He's a passionate culinarian who hikes the mountains cape and forages the adjoining port to handpick traditional Ainu ingredients and fresh seafood for his gourmet specials. He's known for curating neo-Hokkaido cuisine by adopting the cooking methods of the Ainu - the indigenous people of Hokkaido.

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If you're an outdoorsy kind of person say yes to adrenaline-fueled adventures at Hokkaido's stunning ski destinations for skiing and snowboarding in winters and unrushed tee-offs at the lush golf courses in summers. Step into a ginormous frozen sea and experience Ryuhyo's awe-inspiring drift ice that stretches from Hokkaido's northern coast all the way to Siberia. Set off on ice-walking tours trekking through the ice-covered wonderland and enjoy this unique seasonal phenomenon.

Fuel your wanderlust with a staggering range of sightseeing opportunities amid nature's exquisite artistry poised in Hokkaido. The best time to enjoy Sakura season here is in April when cherry blossoms frame the cityscape in vivid hues. From massive mountains, active volcanoes,

meandering rivers, lush meadowlands and the wide ocean – Hokkaido is a haven for nature enthusiasts and adventure junkies.

Discover a plethora of luxe hotels offering world-class hospitality and captivating cityscape views you can't get bored of. An ever-growing collection of design-led hotels continue to push the envelope and redefine luxurious getaways here.

From the ultra-luxurious 'Haku Villas' with an infinity onsen hot-spring to 'Park Hyatt Niseko Hanazono' offering minimalist aesthetic and stunning views of the Annapuri mountain ranges to 'Higashiyama Niseko Village', a Ritz-Carlton Reserve in Hokkaido's snowy wilderness. You'll be left spoilt for choice with a wide assortment from world-class ski resorts to the serene

seclusion of ryokans.

Slated to open their doors to discerning travellers soon are Rosewood Niseko, Aman Niseko and Six Senses Niseko reinforcing Hokkaido as the destination of choice for luxurious holidays and inspiring escapades.

Begin planning your next holiday as this serene paradise is all set to welcome global travellers. Check Hokkaido off your travel bucket list with personalized travel plans crafted by Bear Luxe Japan. With an array of seasonal attractions and natural marvels, any time you pick is absolutely the right time to experience the captivating charms of Hokkaido.



SAPPORO SNOW FESTIVAL

BY NIBEDITA ROY - JNTO INDIA OFFICE

It all started when a group of students used their imagination and the best quality snow of the world to carve out some popular sculptures in the Odori Park in 1950. With time it has matured to a neon-lit, week long, international crowd puller festival of the Hokkaido, located in the northern most part of Japan.

It takes place in the early February in 3 sites in Sapporo namely Odori Park, Tsudome Site and Susukino Site. The 72nd Festival will take place in Hybrid mode from 5th February, 22 to 28th February, 22. This year, snow sculptures that main attraction of this festival in Odori Park will appear from 5th February, 22 to 12th February, 22. People also can enjoy this event online by learning how to make small snow structures or by participating in photo contest.

Sapporo can be reached from New Chitose Airport by JR train in 37 minutes. Shuttle bus service is available between the Snow Festival sites during this season.

In the Odori Park people can enjoy the essence of Ainu tradition along with cutting edge technology, anime, different sports like skii jump. Also, international diplomatic relations are celebrated here in form of the Snow Festival. Depending on the theme different snow sculptures and activities are arranged every year.

In the Tsudome site, the fun activities like Family Tube slide, Snowball Challenger, Snow Kickboard, Ice Glass making, Indoor kids park make it the main attraction for people traveling with their families.

In the Susukino Site on a theme of "Finding Delight in Ice" 60 snow sculptures are carved which can be touched and climbed. A walk along the Illumination Road will take into the Ice bar where hot beverages can be relished. Photo opt with the "Ice Queen" will bring you numerous hearts on the Instagram.

Waiting till the evening to experience the magic of lit up snow sculptures is worthwhile. You can take back the sweet memories of the festival in terms of the taste of local food, wine, beer or souvenirs available there.

*The schedule of the festival may change or cancel depending on the Corona Virus situation.



JAPAN-LEADING GOLFING DESTINATION

BY BENNETT J. GALLOWAY - THE GALLOWAY GOLF GROUP K.K.

The Japanese are well known for taking a good idea and making it better and golf is no exception. Courses in Japan tend to be far above international standards and nowhere else in the world can you find such lavish facilities in such staggering numbers. Virtually every famous course designer has played a part in creating a variety of great courses while the attention to detail and strict management ensures they are immaculately groomed and maintained.

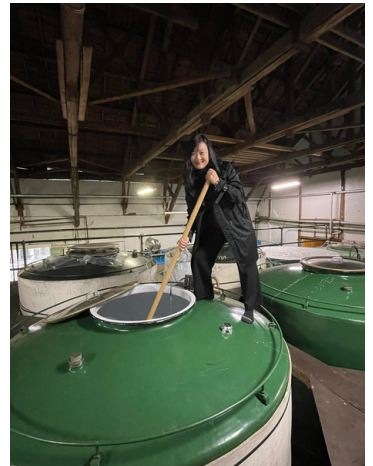
The Gotemba valley in Shizuoka Prefecture is home to the southern half of Mt. Fuji and easily accessible from Tokyo by car or train. This fertile area has undoubtedly the best views of the famous mountain you'll find

anywhere in Japan. With all the land gently sloping away from Mt. Fuji, the area beckoned for golf course construction. Luckily the citizens of this golf crazed nation were only happy enough to oblige and with the help of some world famous and domestic course designers, have created some of the best courses surrounded by the most spectator and memorable scenery you'll find anywhere in the world! Couple this with the unique culture and fine local cuisine and you've got a must experience new golf destination.

Japan has been crazy about golf since it was introduced more than century ago and it has long been an intricate part of its business culture ever since. Today there

are more than 2,300 courses in Japan outnumbering Scotland. Nothing is more memorable than hitting a perfect tee shot straight down the fairway with Mt. Fuji so close it literally towers over you! So should you find yourself in Tokyo with time on your hands, don't hesitate to take a day out of your life for an unforgettable golf get-away.

Courses once were open to members only but now welcome the public too, often at very reasonable prices. Golfers looking to try something different will love golf in Japan. It's a slight twist from the grand old game you might be used to, but just replace your scotch whiskey with Sake and you've got a golf experience you'll never forget.



SAKE – JAPANESE RICE WINE

BY KYOKO NAGANO – SAKE LOVERS INC.

Do you know sake? It is Japan's national alcohol drink which has a history of over 2500 years. It is deeply rooted in Japanese culture and tradition and sake making is an intangible cultural asset of Japan. If you like Japanese animation, you might have seen the movie "Your Name" where the main character priestess chewed the rice and spit it in a container - eventually it became holy sake (primitive form of sake) called kuchikamizake, which was used for ceremonial purposes.

The current sake making style was established in the Edo period (400 years ago) and sake is brewed alcohol, not distilled. If you visit Meiji Jingu shrine or

some famous shrines, you will see sake barrels offered there.

Our main business is exporting sake (not yet to India) and we handle over 100 craft sake breweries products nationwide but we also conduct sake brewery tours and tasting events so the tourists can get to know more about sake and the brewery's history and their story. Sadly, the sake industry in Japan is diminishing but gaining popularity overseas.

Let me introduce Toshimaya Sake Brewery in Tokyo. The history of Toshimaya goes back to 1596 when they started off as a sake retailer, the longest history among the sake breweries located in Tokyo. Sake making

usually starts from October and ends around March. If you come to the brewery during the sake brewing season, it might be interesting to visit the brewery in full action. Not just you get to see inside the brewery, you will get to taste different kinds of sake. If you have more than 10 people in the group, we can also set up a sake and food pairing event inside the brewery. When you visit the brewery, you can taste the fresh and delicious sake which is only available at the brewery. There are unpasteurized fresh sake which you can't get in India too. India imports only 0.2% of what the United States has imported and sake is not yet known so be sure to try some while you are there!



THE DRAGON ROUTE

BY ADRIAN NAVARRO - MOTO TOURS JAPAN INC.

The Dragon Route cuts through Aichi, Gifu, Toyama, and Ishikawa prefectures, from south to north across the Chubu region and next to the Japanese Alps, in the central part of Japan. It is gaining popularity as one of the hidden gem destinations among motorcycle enthusiasts all over the world. It was given this name because the shape of the area looks like a mystical rising dragon with the Noto Peninsula as the head.

The countless attractive features of this area include a wide range of traditional and historical culture landmarks like Nagoya castle, the World Heritage site of Shirakawago with their famous traditional gassho-zukuri farm houses, the swordsmith town of Seki with their Katanas

craftmanship and Keta Shinto shrine, a holy spot dating back over 2,000 years. It enshrines the deity Okuninushi, who is a god people pray to find true love.

In addition, the route also takes you through fun sweeping mountain roads and beautiful natural landscapes that change from season to season like Kenrokuen garden, designated as one of the three most beautiful landscape gardens in Japan. You will also have the chance to ride on Chirihama with the motorcycle, the only beach driveway in the country. The sand is so compact that you can drive right next to the water.

And we can't forget the abundance of

delicacies from land and sea that they serve at the traditional Ryokans! (Japanese style hotels). Did you know Japanese cuisine has been officially recognized as a UNESCO Intangible World Heritage? The route also gives you the chance to stroll around Himi with its charming small town's fish market. The northernmost part of the route ends up at a luxury hot spring resort by the sea at the Noto peninsula. Nothing like a hot bath at the hot springs after a day of riding to relax the body and have a wonderful sleep.

Can you imagine? Riding through Japan on a rising dragon shaped route, exploring all these fascinating places in the country on your favorite motorcycle. Is like a dream come true!



BARAZUSHI – A FOOD CULTURE

BY JESSE EFRON – KYOTO BY THE SEA DMO

The Tango region of Kyoto by the Sea is just 2-hours from Kyoto City by limited express train, and has a food culture that dates back to Japan's first ancient kingdom. For generations, people in this region have been making a unique sushi-dish called barazushi, and it is so popular in Japan that people want to try it at least once during their life.

What is barazushi?

It looks a little like lasagna, and while there are different varieties, it is often made in a wooden box called a matsubuta, and has a layer of sushi rice, crumbled grilled mackerel, another layer of sushi rice, and a variety of toppings like shredded egg, red

pickled-ginger, kamaboko (fish cake), and shiitake mushrooms. The pieces are cut and served so that you can see the layers while eating it. People also add seasonal ingredients to create barazushi that matches each season (like burdock root, bamboo shoots, and kampyo).

Why barazushi?

Making barazushi means so much to people here. Mothers and grandmothers make barazushi for festivals, a tradition passed down through generations. It's a confirmation of social and familial bonds, and a way of communication, connecting families, relatives, neighbors, and the community. Even though it was

originally made for festivals, the tradition soon spread to the Obon holiday, birthdays, and occasions where relatives and friends gather. Now there are restaurants and hotels in the region that specialize in making this dish as well. And there are some splendid variations that can accommodate different diets as well. For example, Centrale Hotel Kyotango makes a vegan version that tastes just like the original recipe! You can find sushi anywhere in Japan, but you'll only find barazushi in Kyoto by the Sea!