

RISE

MONTHLY JOURNAL FROM JAPAN



LETTER FROM EDITORS DESK

Dear Reader,

Ohayo Gozaimasu!!

We wish our readers a very Happy New Year !!

The year 2023, the Year of the Rabbit, brings new hope for tourism in Japan. Over the past two years, Japan has imposed a lot of restrictions in order to protect itself from pandemics.

Christmas in 2022 seemed to have been blessed. Tourists have been flocking to Japan over the last month to celebrate Christmas and the New Year. There has been huge demand, and it resulted in many places being sold out.

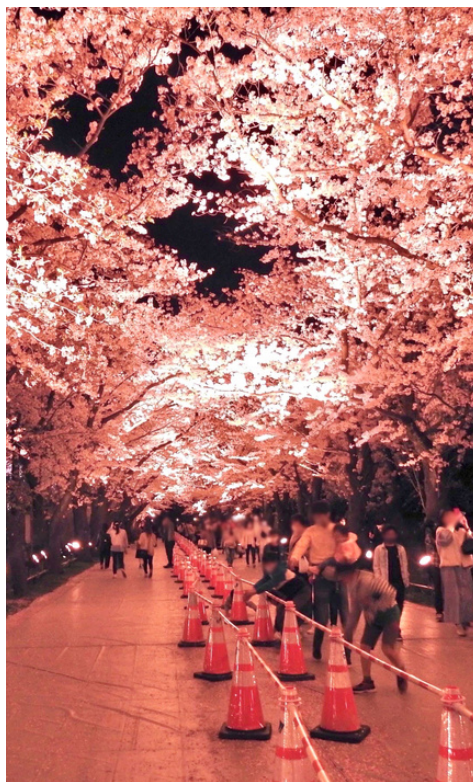
For the cherry blossom season this year, there will be many

tourists expected. Even with high demand, the challenges remain for the ground handlers.

This year, some of the major international events, like the G7 Hiroshima Summit 2023, the Adventure Travel World Summit in Hokkaido, and many more, are scheduled.

We hope that our readers will go beyond the cherry blossom season this year and explore Japan's less travelled roads.

Arigato Gozaimasu!



ONE OF JAPAN'S TOP 3 NIGHT CHERRY BLOSSOM VIEWS: TAKADA PARK, NIIGATA

BY SONIA SINGH

There are always some sights that remain remarkable even when the season changes. In Niigata, there are many such spots like this that can catch a traveler's eye. One such sightseeing spot in Joetsu City, known as Takada Castle and its park, cannot be missed. Takada Park was built on the site of what was once Takada Castle, the castle built as a residence for Tadateru Matsudaira, the sixth son of Ieyasu Tokugawa, in 1614. The entire park has been designated an official historic site by the Niigata Prefectural Government.

Takada Castle is a castle on the plains and differs from other castles in Japan. It does not have stone walls but instead uses the surrounding river and earthen walls as a defense. It does not even have

a castle tower; instead, a triple tower was used as a castle tower. It is also said that

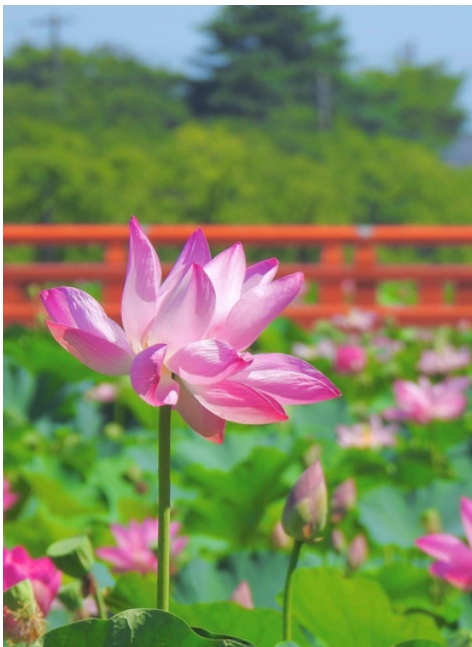
during the time of construction, the architects did not have much time to gather stone for this structure, and the castle was built in a span of four months.

The Takada castle triple tower had become a symbol of the castle to replace the castle tower, but after the castle was abandoned, it was demolished around 1886. The Triple Tower was fully rebuilt in 1993 based on the findings of materials research and excavations. It has three layers and three floors; the base is about 9.1 m east-west and about 10.9 m north-south; the height is about 15 m; and the appearance is based on a

palace-style building. The first and second floors are the exhibition rooms, and the third floor is the observation room. A fence of about 50 meters, together with the east side of the tower, was also rebuilt at the same time. It is also said that to celebrate the 20th year since Joetsu's founding in Niigata, the Triple Tower was rebuilt as a symbol of Takada Castle.

The park has cultural facilities such as the restored Takada castle triple turret and museum, the Kokei Kobayashi Memorial Museum of Art, the Takada Library, and the Ogawa Mimei Literature Museum (in the Takada Library), sports facilities such as an athletics field and a baseball field, the bronze statue promenade, the bronze corner of Yuzo Iwano, and the outer moat

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round promenade.

In Japan, there are many castles that look beautiful during cherry blossom season. Takada Park is known as one of the "Three Greatest Night-time Cherry Blossom Viewing Spots in Japan" and is extremely popular. Cherry blossoms in Takada Park began when 2200 cherry trees were planted in 1909 by the Legion to commemorate the march of the old army's thirteenth Division. Around 4000 Yoshino cherry trees now surround the castle and its park.

During cherry blossom season, which normally peaks in this area from the end of March to early April, there is a festival called the "Takada Castle Public Cherry Blossom Viewing Party," where 3,000 lanterns light up the park at night during cherry blossom season. There are 300

yatai (shop) stands, which serve everything from local cuisine to staple festival foods, lined up on the roads of the park. One can grab a quick bite or sit inside the park while enjoying the beautiful hanami. It can easily take up to two hours to cover the entire park. The entrance to the park is free.

The view of the triple tower and cherry blossoms shines in the light of lanterns; sights reflecting on the water surface of the moat are beautiful, and it becomes even more brilliant. Because of this magnificent view, CNN once named Takada Park in Joetsu City as one of the world's five best blooming great flower festivals.

In summer, the lotus flowers that are planted in the park's moat bloom. The Lotus Festival, which is held from late

July to mid-August, is highly recommended.

For reaching Takada Castle Park, one can reach it by train by taking the Hokuriku Shinkansen to Joetsu Myoko Station, and from there it's 10 minutes by taxi or rental car. If you are using local buses, then take the Kubikino bus to Takada Koen Iriguchi; it's one minute on foot. If you plan to bring your own vehicle or rent one, then take the Joshin-etsu Expressway to Joetsu-Takada IC, and from there it's 10 minutes. Or, take the Hokuriku Expressway to Joetsu IC, and from there, it's 10 minutes.

Are you planning to reroute your itinerary along the Golden Route and take a quick tour to Niigata this Cherry Blossom season?



BUNRAKU – JAPAN'S PUPPET THEATRE

BY EMI ITO

Bunraku, pronounced "boon-rakao," is Japan's professional puppet theater. Developed between the 17th and 18th centuries, bunraku is one of the four forms of Japanese classical theatre, the others being kabuki, noh, and kyogen. Bunraku is also called "ningyo joruri." Japan's professional puppet theatre developed between the 17th and 18th centuries; bunraku is one of the four forms of Japanese classical theater, the others being kabuki, noh, and kyogen.

Bunraku is also called "ningyo joruri," a name that defines its origin and essence. Ningyo means doll or puppet, and joruri is doing narration of the ballads or chanting accompanied by the three-stringed shamisen to create drama. The narration with music playing in the background is used to express the feelings of the puppets, who do not speak.

"Tayu," the narrator, chants or sings the story and also voices the puppet characters, changing his speech and intonation to express different genders, ages, and social rankings. The stories are either romantic or historical plays.

The most iconic bunraku play is Chikamatsu Monzaemon's Love Suicides at Sonezaki, which was first performed in 1703 and was based on the real-life case of two lovers who committed suicide together in the Sonezaki forest in Osaka during the same year. This play has been compared to Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet.

In 1955, the Japanese government recognised the importance of bunraku by designating it as an important intangible cultural property. It was only in 2003 that it was recognised and named an "intangible cultural heritage of humanity" by UNESCO.

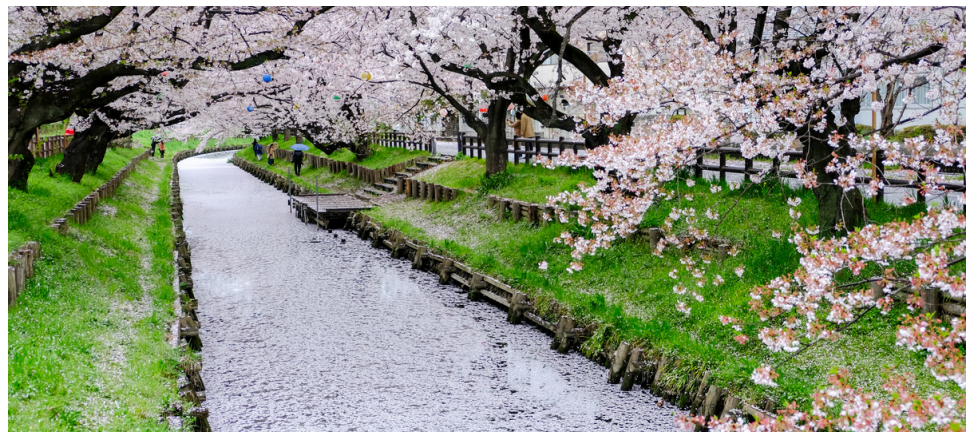
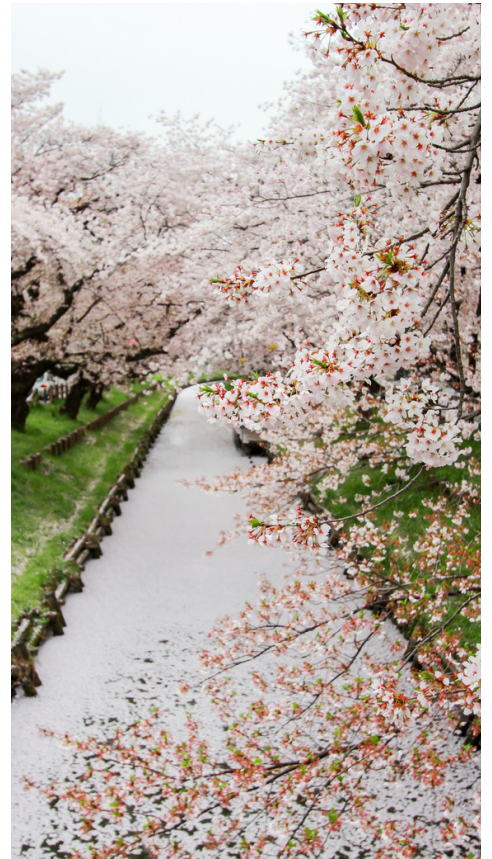
Today, one of the best places to see it is at the National Bunraku Theater in Osaka's Nippombashi district. The National Bunraku Theatre was established in 1984 as the home of Bunraku in the Kansai region. The National Bunraku Theater is a 5-minute walk from Nippombashi Subway Station and Kintetsu Nippombashi Station.

The theatre has a main hall with mainly 753 seats used for Bunraku performances and a smaller hall with 159 seats used for rakugo storytelling and musical performances. Special sessions for "Bunraku for Beginners" as well. This building also has a restaurant serving refreshments and meals. The building also holds an exhibition room, which has displays of puppets, costumes, photographs, and video performances with explanations written in English and Japanese.

*Come see the
Cherry Blossoms
in Japan.*



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INFORMATION BUREAU

SAKURA IN KAWAGOE CITY, SAITAMA

BY YOKO ITO

Known as Little Edo, Kawagoe City is about 30 minutes away from Ikebukuro in Tokyo. Kawagoe City has also gained popularity for its clay warehouses, unique historical area, traditional treats, and kimono-wearing culture.

This city is also a quick getaway from the hustle and bustle of Tokyo. Kawagoe City is also famous for the cherry blossoms, or sakura, at the back of Kawagoe Hikawa Shrine along the line of the Shingashi River.

It is said that the owner of the confectionary shop Kameya Eisen, which was founded in 1783 and is still in operation, planted 300 seeds of sakura in commemoration of the war dead, including his two sons who never

returned from World War II in 1957. The plant was planted intentionally near the Kawagoe Hikawa Shrine, as this shrine is known as the guardian shrine of Kawagoe. These cherry blossoms were named "Homarezakura." In Japanese, homare means honourable, so calling it "honourable cherry blossoms"

The Shingashi River flows through Koedo and Kawagoe in Saitama Prefecture. There are approximately 100 mature cherry blossom trees along a 500-metre stretch of the Shingashi River behind Kawagoe Hikawa Shrine.

The riverside is covered with green grass, and the pink colour of cherry blossoms reflecting on the river surface creates a beautiful scenery.

The Shingashi River has also gained popularity not only as a cherry blossom spot but also as the spot where one can click a photograph of a paddle boat being steered down the river under the blossoms by a man in a festival happi coat and a traditional sugegasa hat. The boat ride is said to have gained popularity from the end of the Edo period to the Meiji era and reached its end at the beginning of the Showa era, but the appearance of carrying the boat for sightseeing can be seen now at the time when cherry blossoms bloom. Riding the boat and/or walking around the Shingashi River are both valuable experiences. Check the operations of the boat ride as it is seasonal. One can also enjoy the illuminated cherry blossom trees around the Shingashi River.



Riding through Japan on your favourite motorcycle, explore all the fascinating places in the country. It is like a dream come true!



MOTO TOUR

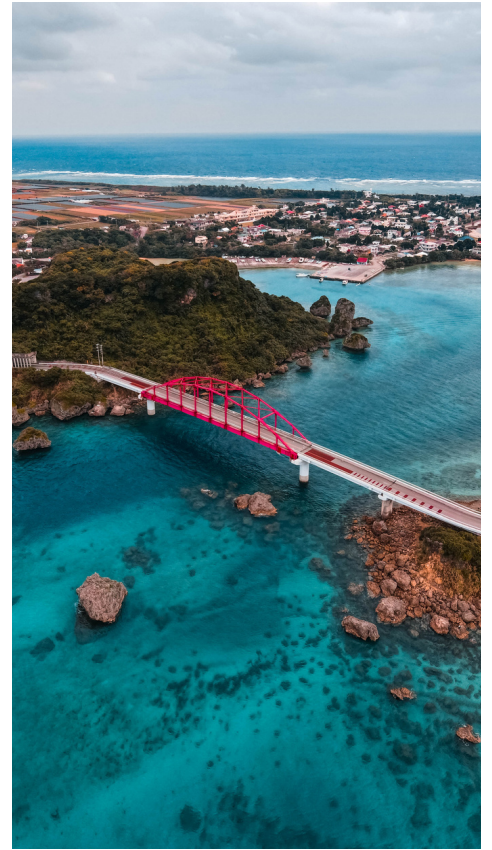
JAPAN



Fukuoka Departure
 19 MAR 2023 -
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 7 Days/ 6 Nights



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OKINAWA'S SOUL, AWAMORI

BY EMA ICHIHARA

Okinawa, Japan, is one of the blue zones, making it home to some of the longest-living people in the world with one of the highest rates of centenarians. It is also home to "Awamori," the island's signature drink.

"Awamori," made from rice and black koji (rice malt) mold, is a distilled spirit produced solely in the islands of Okinawa and consumed entirely on this island itself, which accounts for 80% of the total produced. With a history spanning more than 600 years, this drink is Japan's oldest distilled liquor and is believed to be the predecessor of shochu. The alcohol content in Awamori is 30 to 40% by volume, and it is a strong spirit like tequila or vodka. The distillation technology is said to have arrived in Okinawa, known earlier as the

Ryuku Islands, in the 15th century from Siam, better known today as Thailand. The term "awamori" appeared in a catalogue of items that were delivered as gifts to a general in the Edo shogunate in 1671. From the 18th century, distillation of awamori was limited to three areas in Shuri by local decree; in this way, the government controlled the distillation, sales, and consumption. It became an indispensable.

With the disbanding of the Ryukyu Kingdom in 1875, the controlled production and sale of awamori fell by the wayside. Though production halted during WWII, it recovered in the post-war period and continues to thrive in Okinawa and around Japan.

There are many types of awamori, which you can sample.

- **Kusu**-Awamori, which has been aged for three years or more, is named Kusu. In the rest of Japan, Kusu is known as koshu, which means old sake. Japanese law dictates that the bottled spirits must be at least 3 years old, but Awamori producers often mix older spirits with younger spirits to preserve the stock of older spirits. Before World War Two, there were records of two- to three-hundred-year-old kusu, but unfortunately these were all lost.
- **Habushu**: The Habushu features habu, a venomous Okinawan snake kept in large jars or bottles. The

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vipers are soaked in awamori with herbs and honey for this drink. It has a yellow hue and is believed to have medicinal properties and libido-enhancing qualities. The snake is either drowned alive or frozen unconscious before being gutted and sewn up before dying violently—this is what the producers are looking for. The snake is then preserved in an ethanol bath for a month before being soaked in awamori.

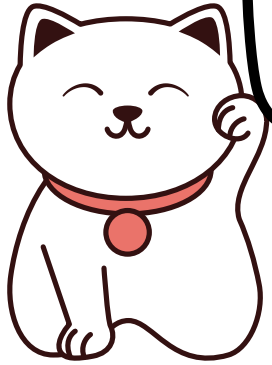
- **Hanazake:** Yonaguni is Japan's westernmost island, which has three distilleries producing a variant of Awamori called Hanazake. Hanazake means "flower sake." This drink packs a punch with 60% alcohol and is drunk straight. It was originally used during religious ceremonies, but today's younger generation drinks it for pleasure and social occasions.
- **Koregusu (Hot Sauce):** Okinawans love eating spicy food. Koregusu is

- made from dried chilli peppers, which are washed and then soaked in awamori for at least 10 days. Koregusu can be purchased in supermarkets. The flavour of Koregusu has the fragrance of Awamori, and this can be added to rice, Okinawan noodles, or sonki-soba as well.
- **Flower-infused Awamori:** Over the years, there has been a flower version of Awamori created in Japan. With local fruits such as passion fruit, mango, plums, and many more available, a new flavour of awamori has been created. One can also try the coffee-milk version of Awamori.

The most traditional style is to drink awamori straight from tiny, almost thimble-sized drinking cups known as chibuguwa. One can enjoy awamori either straight, with water, on the rocks, or with soda as well. Due to its

transparent colour and strong alcohol taste, the drink is on par with most other cocktail-base liquors such as gin or vodka. Awamori can be found at most izakaya around Okinawa, so look for it on menus while dining out. It is also usually available at festivals and even has its own specialty event, the Shimazake Festa.

For someone who wishes to try a little more Okinawan style, try the Southern Island Okinawa: a 30 ml awamori, fruit liqueur, blue Curaçao, and pineapple juice; or the Goya Cocktail: awamori, white Curaçao, sugar syrup, lemon juice, and a few goya slices. There are dozens of distilleries throughout Okinawa, and each of them offers its own signature spirit. Also, Awamori, being distilled alcohol, is a very low-calorie liquor that is completely sugar- and protein-free. Do try awamori when visiting Okinawa, and don't forget to toast.



Useful
Expressions in
Japanese

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learn



DEEP – FUKAI

NARROW OR SMALL – SEMAI

DIRTY – KITANAI

COLD – TSUMETAI

SOUR – SUPPARI

SHALLOW – ASAI

HOT OR SPICY – KARAI

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