

# Trends in Japan

## Food & Travel

Sample Japan's hottest culinary and travel delights

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## Potpourri of Scenic Beauty and Historic Architecture



Nikko Toshogu shrine. (C)Nikko Photo Contest Winning Entry



Lake Chuzenji (C)Nikko Photo Contest Winning Entry

When it comes to cuisine, the specialty of Nikko is *yuba*, a subtle, protein-packed delicacy made by skimming off the film that forms on the surface of heated soy milk. Fresh, unprocessed *yuba* is called *nama-yuba* and is typically eaten with just soy sauce and wasabi. Flat-dried *yuba*, known as *hira-yuba*, is commonly used in soups, while deep-fried rolls of *yuba*, known as *agemaki yuba*, is often cooked in broth. *Yuba* can also be eaten as a topping for *soba* (buckwheat noodles); recently, people have even begun to make *yuba* sushi and *yuba* curry.

Nikko is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Japan. It is famed above all for its historic temples and shrines, but the surrounding area also offers hot springs, scenic lakes, and even theme parks. With its rich blend of cultural heritage and natural beauty, including foliage that takes on fiery hues in the fall, Nikko has long been loved by both domestic and foreign travelers.



Fresh *yuba* from Nikko. (C)TAISHI-FOOD Inc.

## Enjoy the Island Delights of Okinawa and Ishigaki



An Okinawa rail. (C)Yanbaruno Morino Yoru

Okinawa is a group of sun-kissed islands in the southern seas of Japan. It welcomes visitors with a lush natural environment and a culture of its own. In recent years Okinawa has become popular with foreign tourists. Thanks to its subtropical location, it enjoys a mild climate all year round.

Aside from its natural attractions, Okinawa has unique cultural experiences to offer that are markedly different from anything else in Japan. The traditional dances and music of the Ryukyu Kingdom are still very much alive, as exemplified by the *sanshin*, an Okinawan three-stringed musical instrument. The once-razed Shuri Castle, the former royal palace of the Ryukyu Kingdom on Okinawa Island, has been reconstructed; its remains, along with eight other related properties, have been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site.



A manta ray. (C) OCVB



Kabira Bay on Ishigaki Island. (C) OCVB



Goya (bitter melon). (C) OCVB

# Hakuba's Majestic Snowy Peaks

## World-Class Winter Sports Destination Is Popular Year-Round

Hakuba is perhaps best known as having been the venue for various Alpine and Nordic events during the 1998 Winter Olympic Games in Nagano. Perched in the northwest of centrally located Nagano Prefecture, Hakuba is also popular among hikers and as a summertime retreat. In recent years, it has been welcoming a growing number of international visitors. Hakuba is surrounded by the peaks of the Hida Mountain Range, also called the Northern Alps, stretching through Nagano, Niigata, Toyama, and Gifu Prefectures.

After a day on the slopes or a trek along mountain paths, a hot bowl of soba (buckwheat noodles) can be very appetizing. Nagano is a center of buckwheat production, and its noodles are famous nationwide. Soba plants prefer a cool, dry, high-altitude climate, making Nagano a perfect place to grow them.



The Hakuba Happoone Ski Resort. (C)  
Nagano Prefectural Tourism Association



Hoppo Pond. (C) Hakuba



Soba. (C) Nagano Prefectural  
Tourism Association



# Lake Towada and Oirase Stream

## Enjoy the Changing Colors of the Seasons

Lake Towada, along with its tributary the Oirase Mountain Stream, is a famous sightseeing spot in the Tohoku region of northeastern Japan and is known for its scenic natural beauty. The beautiful blue lake, flowing river, and surrounding mountains never fail to impress.



Lake Towada.



Oirase Stream in autumn.



Grayling cuisine.  
(C)Maple.net/Shobunsha

Lake Towada and the Oirase Mountain Stream have long been popular tourist destinations. The area was declared a Place of Scenic Beauty and Natural Monuments in 1928, designated as the Towada-Hachimantai National Park (formerly Towada National Park) in 1936, and named a Special Place of Scenic Beauty and Natural Monuments in 1952. Although most people visit during autumn to see the resplendent red and yellow foliage or in late spring to enjoy the lush new foliage, the area's frozen waterfalls in winter also display a solemn beauty.



An open-air hot spring bath in Oirase.  
(C) Oirase Keiryu Hotel

# Tourist-Friendly Hida Takayama

## Historic Town Boasts World Heritage Site, Natural Beauty

The town of Hida Takayama in Gifu Prefecture is renowned for its historic townscapes. Having flourished as a castle and merchant town beginning in the sixteenth century, Hida Takayama's 400-year-old commercial district and Buddhist temple remain to this day. Strolling through the town's streets, visitors become swept up by the feeling they have been transported back in time.

Hida Takayama has several celebrated local dishes. One of these is *hoba miso*, made by cooking miso (fermented soybean paste), onions, and *shiitake* mushrooms on top of a large magnolia leaf. The simple flavor of the dish makes it a splendid complement to rice. Another local specialty, Hida beef, is of exceptional quality and flavor. Visitors have the choice of enjoying either Japanese or Western-style cuisine.



The old streets of Takayama.  
(C) Takayama City



Floats at the Takayama Festival.  
(C) Takayama City



Hoba miso. (C) Takayama City

# Soy Sauce Desserts

## Sweet Uses for Salty Condiment

Soy sauce is a versatile traditional condiment used in a wide range of Japanese dishes. Although it has a famously salty taste, chocolate and other sweets flavored with soy sauce have hit the market and are enjoying something of a boom.



Soy sauce gelato with soy sauce wafers.  
(C)kamebishi Co, Ltd. (Lamaison kamebishi)



Heiwado Shodoshima Crème Caramel.



Nanaotorii Soy Sauce Roll Cake.

Kagawa, a prefecture on the island of Shikoku, is dotted with soy sauce breweries, and recently even long-established producers from the region have been putting new soy sauce products on the market. Kamebishi Co., for example, has been in business since 1753. The company's new product, Soy Chocolat, has stirred considerable interest since going on sale. It combines Belgian chocolate with a light, freeze-dried soy sauce that has been aged for three years. The company also makes several unusual flavors of gelato, including soy sauce, balsamic vinegar, and *moromi* (unfiltered soy sauce produced during the manufacturing process).



## "Doctor's Restaurants" Combine Food and Health

Everyone enjoys eating tasty food, but many people worry about the negative effects on their health caused by frequent dining-out. A new type of eatery called a "doctor's restaurant," which caters to such people, is becoming popular in Japan. Such restaurants provide menus that have been certified by physicians from a medical standpoint.



The insulin room.  
(C)Chishokusyunsai ETSU

One such establishment is Tokyo Food Theater 5+1, located in Tokyo's Akihabara district. Medical specialists were involved in planning this restaurant's menu. The "anti-aging and beautiful skin" course, for example, was developed under the supervision of Professor Shirasawa Takuji, who teaches a course on anti-aging medicine at Juntendo University, Graduate School of Medicine. These healthy and delicious dishes are the results of collaboration among top chefs, medical experts, and nutritionists. The restaurant also offers cuisine designed around such themes as low sugar content and combating osteoporosis.



A tasty and healthy meal. (C)Tokyo Food Theater 5+1



The restaurant's wide-open interior.  
(C)Tokyo Food Theater 5+1