

Japan Travel News

2006

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JAPAN NATIONAL TOURIST ORGANIZATION

Level 18, Australia Square Tower, 264 George Street, Sydney N.S.W. 2000 Australia

TEL : Public (02) 9251 3024 FAX : (02) 9251 3031

Email : jnto@tokyonet.com.au Home Page : www.jnto.go.jp



It was with great sadness that the JNTO Sydney office said farewell to Executive Director, Mr Kozo Takeda. Mr Takeda returned to Tokyo at the end of March to resume work at the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport (MLIT). Before his departure Mr Takeda reflected on his time in Australia and had the following to say:

"I can't help thinking how time flies. When I think about it, it's almost two and a half years since I saw those Jacaranda blossoms when I came from the MLIT in October 2003 to take up my post at the JNTO Sydney office. Over these years, thanks to the support of my peers and staff, my work as well as my life here in Sydney with my wife and three children has been very fulfilling.

With Visit Japan Campaign (a Japanese government initiative) activities having started in Australia from April 2005 and 2006 being the Japan-Australia Year of Exchange, we can expect big steps forward for both Japan and Australia. Recently in Japan, the spotlight has been on ski tourists, with the focus on Niseko. Personally I think visitors to Japan should experience things a little more traditional or cultural and I would be very pleased if more people would visit Japan and deepen their understanding of the country.

My family and I have just spent night after night packing up our things to take back to Japan. And I never expected that my eldest son would say that he's going to take his cricket bat and wickets back to Japan."

Mr Takeda's successor is Mr Jotaro Horiuchi, also from the MLIT based in Tokyo.

The JNTO Australia/New Zealand regional website www.jnto.go.jp/syd/index.html has recently been updated to include information on school excursions, and transits/stopovers in Japan. The FAQ section of the website has also been updated and expanded. Several information sheets (PDF format) are available for viewing in the FAQ section.

Some other changes at the JNTO Sydney office include a new general enquiry email address. The jntosyd@tokyonet.com.au address has been replaced with jnto@tokyonet.com.au and we ask that all enquiries be directed to this new address. Also, as of June 2006 (the next issue), regrettably Japan Travel News will be available in PDF format only. If you are currently receiving a hard copy of the newsletter and would like to receive it via email please let me know by sending an email with your details to the above email address. I look forward to hearing from you and also welcome any comments and suggestions. Japan Travel News will also be available for download on the JNTO Australia/New Zealand website.

Rebecca Honda

INSIDE

Ski Japan Experience powder snow, spectacular alpine scenery and natural hot springs in Nagano

Jigokudani Monkey Park See Japan's famous snow monkeys



Omotesando Hills Tokyo's new hot spot

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Visit our website www.jnto.go.jp

SHIGA KOGEN

Consisting of 21 ski areas, Shiga Kogen is Japan's largest ski resort. Located in the Joshin'etsu Kogen National Park, north east of Nagano City, the area boasts a huge variety of terrain and runs to cater for all levels of skiers and boarders. Shiga Kogen hosted a variety of events in the 1998 Winter Olympics including the Ski Giant Slalom, Ski Slalom, Snowboard Giant Slalom and Snowboard Halfpipe. Due to its high altitude (1500m+) Shiga Kogen's ski season runs from mid November to the end of May, although ski areas are limited at the beginning and end of the season. Shuttle buses operate around the entire resort so all 21 ski areas can be accessed with ease. Lift ticket holders can use the buses free of charge. Night skiing is available at Shiga Kogen.

HAKUBA

Nestled in the heart of the Japan Alps, the Hakuba Valley comprises of 10 resorts, has over 200 different trails and boasts some of the longest vertical skiing in Japan. The resorts in the valley offer an incredible variety of terrain for skiers and snowboarders alike, and runs up to 8km long. Hakuba hosted a variety of events in the 1998 Winter Olympics including the Downhill Ski, Slalom and Ski Jumping, and continues to host FIS World Cup ski races and other alpine events. Some of the resorts have night skiing. Hotels and ski resorts offer complimentary shuttle services to the closest ski resorts and some hotels are within walking distance of the slopes. There is also a local bus service that operates in the valley, providing access to all of the ski resorts.

ACCESS

Take the Nagano bullet train from Tokyo to Nagano.
Express buses to Shiga Kogen and Hakuba depart from the East Exit of Nagano station.
Nagano to Shiga Kogen: 70+ minutes (depending on the resort)
Nagano to Hakuba: 70-95 minutes

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

HOT SPRINGS

There are more than 250 natural hot spring (onsen in Japanese) resorts in Nagano Prefecture, so it would be fair to say that a trip to the Nagano ski fields would not be complete without a visit to one of them. After a day in the snow the best way -some say the only way - to relax and rejuvenate is to soak in a hot spring. Many hotels and inns in Shiga Kogen and Hakuba have indoor and outdoor hot springs for their guests, with some allowing general visitors to use their facilities for a small fee. Public hot springs, called sotoyu, can also be found in the hot spring districts of Nagano. The Shibu Onsen area, the gateway to Shiga Kogen, has nine public hot springs, and Hakuba has thirteen.

YUDANAKA FOOT SPA

Located at Yudanaka station, "Kaede no yu" foot spa is popular among locals and visitors alike. If you have some time while waiting for the bus or train, or if you just have some time, the foot spa is well worth a visit. The water in the spa is natural hot spring water that has been cooled to around 42 degrees, and contains minerals which are said to be effective relief for a variety of complaints including muscle and joint pain, poor circulation and fatigue. "Kaede no yu" means "maple hot water", and was named after the maple trees around the station area. The foot spa is free of charge and is open throughout the year.



Kaede no yu Foot Spa

- Shiga-Kogen
- Hakuba
- Nagano Prefecture
- Jigokudani Monkey Park
- Snow Japan

www.shigakogen.gr.jp/english/
www.vill.hakuba.nagano.jp/e/
www.nagano-tabi.net/English/
www.jigokudani-yaenkoen.co.jp/english/top/english.html
www.snowjapan.com



SHIGA KOGEN



HAKUBA



JIGOKUDANI MONKEY PARK

Jigokudani Monkey Park is located in the Joshin'etsu Kogen National Park and is home to more than 200 Japanese macaque monkeys. The park is open throughout the year and the monkeys are observable year round, though the best time to visit is during winter when the monkeys gather in and around the hot spring to keep warm. Every two years in May the monkeys produce their offspring so if visiting late in the northern spring you can see lots of baby monkeys. Though, there are plenty of cute little monkeys running around in the winter months as well.

Access to Jigokudani Monkey Park

Jigokudani Monkey Park can be accessed from Nagano by taking the Nagano Dentetsu line to Yudanaka (approx. 40 minutes).

Take a bus or taxi from Yudanaka station to Kambayashi onsen (15 minutes).

From Kambayashi onsen it is a 1.6km/30 minute walk into the park along a mountain path. There is no vehicle access to the park.

Jigokudani Monkey Park Hours

April – October 8:30am-5:00pm
November - March 9:00am-4:00pm
Admission: Adult 500 yen, Child 250yen

TOKYO'S NEW HOT SPOT — OMOTESANDO HILLS

Opened on February 11 this year, Omotesando Hills is Tokyo's newest trendy spot. The six level complex (3 levels below ground) was designed by world renowned architect, Tadao Ando and houses upmarket shops, restaurants, cafes, and beauty salons. Several apartments are located on top of the complex. Shops are open daily from 11:00 to 21:00 and restaurants until midnight. Cafes are open from 8.00am to 23:00. Omotesando Hills can be accessed from Omotesando subway station (2 min walk), Meiji-Jingumae subway station (3 min walk), and JR Harajuku station (7 min walk). Omotesando Hills will be closed August 22-23, 2006 and Feb 20-21, 2007.

More at www.omotesandohills.com

Osaka Castle



KANSAI INTERNATIONAL TOURISM PROMOTIONAL SEMINAR

As part of the Visit Japan Campaign (VJC) the Japan-based Kansai International Tourism Promotion Centre held a tourism seminar and reception at the Sheraton on the Park hotel in Sydney for east coast travel agents and media on 16 February 2006. Representatives from Kansai International Airport Co., JTB Western Japan and JAL Sales Western Japan also joined the seminar and reception. Titled "Japan is yours to discover in Kansai", the seminar was designed to promote the Kansai region as a holiday destination for Australian travellers and to further educate travel agents and media about the attractiveness and accessibility of the region.

Fukuoka



i NEW "i" INFORMATION CENTRE

In January this year the Ise City Tourist Information Centre (Jingu Geku) in Mie Prefecture, was designated as an "i" information centre by JNTO bringing the national total to 127. The "i" information centre system was set up especially to assist travellers visiting Japan from overseas with each centre providing information relevant to its local tourist sites. The Ise City Tourist Information Centre has English speaking staff and a range of facilities to handle enquiries from overseas visitors. The centre has earned a good reputation among overseas visitors largely thanks to the volunteer guide service which provides tours in English, Chinese and Korean. In 2004, 1120 visitors from overseas used the Ise City Tourist Information Centre.

Services: Provision of local tourist information by English speaking staff, pamphlets and maps in various languages, tours of Ise Jingu by volunteer guides. Tours for the inner shrine (Naiku) need to be booked one week in advance.

Located: 5 minute walk from Ise-shi station near Ise Jingu outer shrine (geku)

Open: 8:30-17:00 (closed Dec 29 & 30)

Tel: 0596-28-3705

ALL KYUSHU FREE TICKET

Nishitetsu Group (Nishinohon Tetsudo) has announced that it will start selling the "All Kyushu Free Ticket" which can be used for unlimited travel on highway and local buses in Kyushu for 3 consecutive days. The ticket will be on sale for a trial period from 1 April until 30 September 2006 and is valid for travel on 2000 bus routes of 37 participating companies.

Sale period: 1 April- 30 September 2006

Ticket validity: 3 consecutive days (from date specified by ticket holder)

Cost: 10,000 yen (child fare not available)

Area of travel: Valid for travel in all 7 prefectures of Kyushu (Fukuoka, Nagasaki, Saga, Kumamoto, Oita, Miyazaki, Kagoshima)

Routes: 100 Highway & Express bus routes, 1900 local bus routes

*Not available for use on 1) overnight highway buses connecting Kyushu with Honshu and Shikoku; 2) Nagasaki-Miyazaki highway bus.

Participating companies: Nishitetsu Group, Kyushu Express Bus, JR Kyushu Bus, Showa Bus, Saihi Bus, Nagasaki Pref. Transport Office, Nagasaki Bus, Shimahara Tetsudo, Kyushu Sangyo Kotsu Group, Oita Bus Group, Oita Kotsu Group, Hita Bus, Kamenoi Bus, Miyazaki Kotsu, Iwasaki Corp. Group, Hayashida Bus.

The ticket will be on sale at the major highway bus ticket counters of the participating companies. Major travel agencies across Japan (except in Kyushu & the Chugoku region) will sell vouchers which can be exchanged for the ticket at major highway bus ticket counters of the participating companies.

Calendar of Events

TOKYO AND VICINITY

May 17-18

Grand Spring Festival of Toshogu Shrine, Nikko

Held in commemoration of the life of shogun Ieyasu Tokugawa, the festival features a spectacular procession of more than 1000 armor-clad men escorting three sacred shrines through the streets.



Asakusa Sanjo Festival

May 19-21

Sanja Festival of Asakusa Shrine, Tokyo

One of Tokyo's three largest festivals, this event is famous for its spectacular procession of portable shrines. The ancient Shinto ritual consisting of music and dance which is performed at the beginning of the festival has been designated as an intangible cultural property.

KANSAI REGION

1-30 April

Miyako Odori (Dance of the capital), Kyoto

Maiko and geisha perform traditional dances at Gion Kobu Kaburenjo Theatre, Kyoto to celebrate spring and the cherry blossom season. First performed in 1872, the dance was originally introduced to promote Kyoto after a decline in the city's prosperity following the capital being moved to Tokyo in 1869.



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Miyako Odori

June 14

Otaue-Shinji, Rice Planting Festival, Sumiyoshi Shrine, Osaka

Young girls in traditional farming costumes transplant rice seedlings in the shrine's paddies, and pray for a good harvest.

NATIONAL

8 April

Buddha's birthday (Hana Matsuri)

Celebrated at all Buddhist temples in commemoration of Buddha's birthday. A small image of Buddha is displayed in temples and sweet tea called Amacha is poured over the image as an expression of devotion.

April 14-15

Takayama Festival of Hie Shrine, Takayama, Gifu Prefecture

Considered as one of Japan's three most beautiful festivals, the event is well known throughout Japan for its spectacular procession of gorgeously decorated floats. The floats are pulled in a festival procession both in the daytime and evening. In the evening, the floats are decorated with more than 100 paper lanterns.

Takayama Festival



April 29

Greenery Day (national holiday)

May 3

Constitution Memorial Day (national holiday)

May 4

Adjoining national holiday between two holidays

May 5

Children's Day (national holiday)

Culture Corner

Visiting Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines

Shrine

At the entrance to shrines you will find a purification fountain. Use the ladle provided to rinse both hands with fresh water from the fountain. It is also customary to rinse your mouth, by pouring some water from your hands into your mouth without allowing it to touch your lips. The water should not be transferred directly from the ladle to your mouth and should not be swallowed. Once inside the shrine, throw a coin into the offering box, bow deeply twice, clap your hands twice, bow deeply once more and then say a prayer.

Temple

At temples, it is customary to throw a coin into the offering box and to say a short prayer in front of the sacred object. Some temples sell incense for visitors to burn during their visit. The smoke from the incense is believed to have healing powers, so you will often see people fanning some smoke towards themselves or a part of their body which is injured. Some temples require visitors to remove their shoes before entering the temple buildings and often have shelves for storing shoes at the entrance. Keep a look out for notices about photography as it is forbidden to take photos in some places, such as the inside of some temples.

