

Japan Travel News

Sept - Nov 2009

Japan National Tourism Organization, Sydney

Spring 2009



Inside this issue:

- Tourism news 2
- Useful websites 2
- Treasure hunting in Tokyo 3
- Japan Rail news 4
- JAL & JR Tokai tourism promotion 4
- Sayuki of Asakusa 5
- What's on in Japan 6



The season of autumn leaves & harvest moons

Just as the Japanese love cherry blossoms in spring, so too are they fond of the stunning blend of red and yellow hues in autumn. The word *momijigari* is used for the custom of visiting scenic areas where leaves have turned red or yellow in the autumn.

Another popular autumn tradition in Japan is moon viewing (*Otsukimi*) which dates back to the Heian era (784-1185) when the aristocracy would admire the full moon and drink sake and write poetry. These days a spot is chosen from which to admire the moon, and decorations of *tsukimidango* (rice dumplings), *susuki* (pampas grass) and autumn fruit are displayed. Moon viewing parties sometimes also include admiring the moon from the water.

Here are some popular autumn foliage and moon viewing spots. Please note the

autumn colours depend on climatic conditions and vary from year to year.

Tokyo

* Imperial Palace grounds: A tranquil space in the heart of the metropolis, the Imperial Palace grounds are perfect for an autumn stroll amid gold and crimson leaves. The road from Tokyo Station to the palace is lined with old ginkgo trees.

Best time: usually late November

* Takaosan: This sacred mountain located west of Tokyo is a popular hiking area and autumn foliage viewing spot. The mountain's summit and cable car are great places from which to view the spectacular crimson maples. The Takaosan Momiji Festival will be held November 1-30.

Best time: usually mid November

Kyoto

* Arashiyama: The autumn colours along Arashiyama's

Hozu River can be enjoyed by boat or from the Sagano Scenic Railway that runs beside the river. The famous Togetsu Bridge is another spot which draws crowds of people every year.

Best time: usually mid-late November.

<Moon viewing>

* Kyoto's Daikaku Temple's Kangetsu-e

When: October 2-4, 2009 from 5:00pm until 9:00pm. The event includes moon viewing from Osawa Pond, a full moon Buddhist ceremony, tea ceremony and traditional music performances.

www.daikakuji.or.jp/english/

Central Japan

* Hida Kokubun Temple, Takayama: View the changing autumn leaves of the spectacular 1200 year old Ginkgo tree inside the temple grounds.

Best time: usually late October - late November.



Oirase River has 15 small and large waterfalls and is popular for its beautiful mountain stream. ©JNTO

Hoshino Resort's Hoshinoya Karuizawa is the first property in Japan to become part of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World brand.

Tourism news

100 Landscapes of Heisei - ten most popular sites
Earlier this year, *The Yomiuri Shimbun* asked its readers to vote on landscapes they thought reflected modern day Japan as part of its *100 Landscapes of Heisei* project commemorating the 135th anniversary of the newspaper. Based on readers' votes, the project's selection committee made the final selection.

The top ten sites are: 1) Mt Fuji (Yamanashi & Shizuoka Prefs.), 2) Shosen Gorge (Yamanashi Pref.), 3) Shiretoko (Hokkaido), 4) Lake Towada, Oirase River (Aomori, Akita Prefs.), 5) Gasshozukuri - houses (Toyama & Gifu Prefs.), 6) Temples & shrines of Kyoto (Kyoto Pref.), 7) Himeji Castle (Hyogo Pref.), 8) Kamikochi (Nagano Pref.), 9) Hakodate's night view (Hokkaido), 10) Oze (Gunma, Fukushima & Niigata Prefs.).

The Yomiuri Shimbun then held its *35 Routes on the Island of Four Seasons* competition in which readers were invited to submit travel plans incorporating at least one of the 100 Landscapes of

Heisei. Prize winning plans will be announced in November.

Hoshinoya Karuizawa joins Small Luxury Hotels brand
Hoshino Resort's *Hoshinoya Karuizawa* is the first property in Japan to become part of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World (SLH) brand.

SLH places enormous emphasis on ensuring that the highest standards of excellence are consistently delivered across the entire brand and so all hotels applying to become part of SLH must undergo a rigorous inspection process. The fact that only five percent of the hotels that apply to join are successful is testament to the high standards SLH demands.

Two Japanese airports in World Top 10

Osaka's Kansai Airport and Nagoya's Centrair have been named in the Top 10 Airports in the world for 2009, in the World Airport survey results published by Skytrax. Kansai Airport ranks sixth worldwide, and this year was awarded the

airport with the cleanest washrooms. Centrair Nagoya entered the top ten for the first time, coming in ninth.

Restoration of Himeji Castle Main Keep

The main keep of World Heritage listed Himeji Castle, will undergo major restoration work for a period of five years from October 2009. During the work, the main keep will be covered with roofed scaffolding from which visitors can view the repair work and enjoy the view as if they were in the keep itself.

TIC TOKYO now open

A tourist information centre for international travelers has opened in the Marunouchi Trust Building in front of Tokyo Station. TIC TOKYO's services include provision of tourist information for Tokyo and selected regions of Japan, hotel reservations, Tokyo volunteer tour guides, tour bookings and Tobu Discount Pass sales. The TIC is staffed by English, Chinese, Korean and Japanese speakers. Open daily 10:00am to 7:00pm, except year-end/New Year and the building's holidays.

100 Landscapes of Heisei	www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/features/heisei100/announcement/index.htm
SLH Hoshinoya Ryokan	www.slh.com/japan/karuizawa/karhos.html
World Airport Awards	www.worldairportawards.com/
Himeji Castle restoration	www.city.himeji.lg.jp/s70/2845684/_11311/_17981.html
TOKYO TIC	www.tictokyo.jp/en/

Useful websites

Odakyu Electric Railway

Odakyu Electric Railway Co., Ltd has renewed its foreign language websites to include information about the services offered by the Odakyu Group. As well as the Odakyu travel and sightseeing services, the site now has information about shopping, dining and staying in the Shinjuku area where the company is based.
www.odakyu.jp/english/

WAK Japan

Kyoto based WAK Japan, offers home visits, cultural experiences, special interest and luxury programs, and guided tours for international visitors to the ancient capital. Among the line up of courses are Japanese home cooking, koto (Japanese harp) playing, taiko drumming, sake tasting, and Yuzen silk dyeing.
www.wakjapan.com/

Tohoku Tourism Guide

Set up by the Tohoku Tourism Promotion Organization, this site has a wealth of useful information about the local seasonal attractions, natural hot springs, festivals and the cultural and historical heritages of Aomori, Akita, Iwate, Fukushima, Yamagata, Miyagi & Niigata Prefectures. Tohoku Ski Campaign.
www.tohokukanko.jp/english/

Ohitaki thanksgiving ritual at Tondaya

During November, shrines in Kyoto perform a special thanksgiving ritual call *Ohitaki*, meaning 'building a fire'. Local residents also perform the ritual in their homes.

Nishijin Lifestyle Museum Tondaya will offer tour plans from November 1 through 30, giving visitors the opportunity to perform the *Ohitaki* ritual. During the ritual at Tondaya, visitors will burn a note with

their wish written on it, appreciate the fire and pray to come through the harsh winter ahead. They can also try a special Japanese cake made for *Ohitaki*.

Recommended plans at Tondaya

*Townhouse Tour + special meal + tea ceremony with *Ohitaki* cake + *Ohitaki* ritual 8400 yen per person

*Townhouse Tour + tea ceremony with *Ohitaki* cake + *Ohitaki* ritual
3150 yen per person

Nishijin Lifestyle Museum
TONDAYA www.tondaya.co.jp

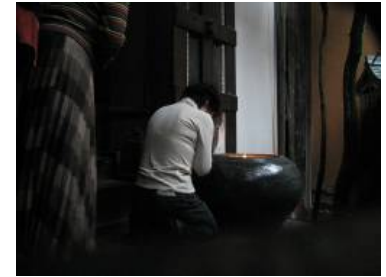
(English link on this page)

Address: Ichijo-agaru Omiya

Kamigyoyou-ku Kyoto

Tel: +81-75-432-6701

Open: 10:00am -500pm



Ohitaki ritual.
Image courtesy of Tondaya

Treasure hunting in Tokyo

It's no secret that Tokyo is one of the world's best shopping cities, but its backstreets of rare antiques are a little less known to visitors to the city. Japan's megalopolis is full of antiques and other items that wouldn't be found anywhere else. Located between Shinto shrines, temples and modern urban architecture, open-air flea markets are a part of local Tokyo life reflecting the city's culture and history. Here are some recommendations for travellers looking for the best places to 'antique' during their stay in Tokyo.

Antique Mall Ginza

Located in the epic shopping district of Tokyo, this mall specialises in antique items including books, furniture, kimono, fabrics, pottery and jewellery. Home to more than 200 stores, Antique Mall Ginza is one of the biggest in Asia.

Open: 11:00am - 7:00pm
(closed Wednesdays).

Address: Da Vinci Building, 1-13-1 Ginza, Chuo-ku, Tokyo

Access: Two minute walk from Ginza 1-chome Station on the Yurakucho Subway Line, or

three minute walk from Kyobashi Station on the Ginza Subway Line.

Oedo Antiques Fair

With about 250 dealers, Oedo Antiques Fair is one of the largest open-air markets in Japan. The market articulates over 400 years of Edo (today's Tokyo) in antiques displayed by dealers. The market takes place on the first and third Sunday of the month at the prominent convention facility of Tokyo International Forum.

Open: 9:00am - 4:00pm

Address: 3-5-1 Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo.

Access: One minute walk from Yurakucho Station on the JR Yamanote Line or Yurakucho Subway Line.

Salvation Army Bazaar

This British-born philanthropy organisation is well known in Japan for its charitable thrift store, open to the public every Saturday.

Open: 9:00am - 2:00pm

(Closed during year-end and New Year holidays).

Address: 2-21-2 Wada,

Suginami-ku, Tokyo

Access: Ten minute walk from Nakano-Fujimicho Station on the Marunouchi Subway Line.

Although known more for pop culture in recent years, the Harajuku district is still one of the popular neighborhoods with antique markets. Here are some great places to visit.

Togo Shrine

Held on the first Sunday of the month from 5:00am to 3:00pm.

Address: 1-5-3 Jingumae, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo

Access: Three minute walk from JR Harajuku Station or five minute walk from Meiji-Jingumae Station on the Chiyoda Subway Line.

Nogi Shrine

Held on the second Sunday of the month (except November) from 6:00am to 3:00pm.

Address: 8-11-27, Akasaka, Minato-ku, Tokyo

Access: One minute walk from Nogizaka Station on the Chiyoda Subway Line.

The market articulates over 400 years of Edo (today's Tokyo) in antiques displayed by dealers.



A stall at one of Tokyo's many flea markets. ©Yasufumi Nishi/©JNTO

Antique Mall Ginza
Oedo Antiques Fair
Salvation Army Bazaar
Nogi Shrine

www.antiques-jp.com/e.html
www.antique-market.jp/eng
www.familystore.salvationarmy.or.jp/english/index.html
www.nogijinja.or.jp (Japanese)

Handy features of JR timetable revision



Nozomi N700 shinkansen

Nozomi shinkansen departures from Tokyo are now scheduled at exact ten minute intervals throughout much of the day....

The major revision of the Japan Rail (JR) timetable last year produced several small but handy changes for travellers to Japan. These little changes may make it easier for travelers putting together an itinerary for travel in Japan. They also show that Japan Railways is constantly improving its service with alterations that may seem small but which actually require a huge amount of planning and preparation.

Shinkansen from Tokyo to Hakata

As you may know, the *shinkansen* (bullet train) service on the Tokaido Line from Tokyo is very frequent. However, until March 2008, train departures from Tokyo were not spaced evenly, sometimes 5 minutes apart, sometimes fifteen or more minutes apart. But since the revision, the schedule is amazingly regular considering the huge number of trains involved.

Nozomi shinkansen departures from Tokyo are now scheduled at exact ten minute intervals throughout much of the day, although some trains do not operate daily. For example, between 12:00pm and 1:00pm, *Nozomi* trains

leave at 12:00, 12:10, 12:20 (not daily), 12:30, 12:40 (not daily), 12:50 and 13:00.

The *Hikari* trains that can be used with a Japan Rail Pass, leave at 12:03 and 12:33, a pattern that also repeats much of the day.

Nozomi services originating at the other end of the line in Hakata (Fukuoka) also show a similar new regularity. Stops in between such as Shin-Osaka and Kyoto are, of course, less regular but still show a more even distribution of service than before. The explanation 'approximately one bullet train every ten minutes' used to be slightly inaccurate but now it is very close to the truth!

Narita Express into downtown Tokyo

For many years the Narita Express has departed from the Narita Airport Station (Terminal 1) at 13 and 43 minutes past the hour. Since March 2008, these trains have been departing at 15 and 45 minutes past the hour. As before, they stop at the Terminal 2 Station just a few minutes later to pick up passengers arriving in that terminal. This is a tiny change of just two minutes, but one that somehow makes the

schedule much easier to explain and remember: "One train every 30 minutes at a quarter past and a quarter to the hour." Again, this used to be a slightly inaccurate description; now it is 100% accurate for much of the day!

The service from Tokyo Station to the airport is not quite so regular but is still pretty easy to explain: trains leave either on the hour and half hour in the early morning, and at three and 33 minutes after the hour from 10:03am onwards.

Haruka: Kansai Airport to Osaka and Kyoto

The Limited Express *Haruka* connecting Kansai Airport with downtown Osaka and Kyoto is likewise very regular. Trains from the airport leave mostly at 16 and 46 past the hour.

Trains from Kyoto to the airport are now all at 15 and 45 minutes past the hour except for morning trains before 9:45am.

Departures from Shin-Osaka to the airport are 30 minutes after Kyoto which means that they too are mostly at 15 and 45 minutes past the hour.

JAL + JR Tokai team up to promote inbound tourism

Japan Airlines (JAL) and Central Japan Railway Co. (JR Tokai) have teamed up in a bid to stimulate demand and boost visitor numbers to Japan.

From July 1, travelers who purchase air tickets to Japan on JAL's international websites can, thanks to the support of JTB run travel site

JAPANiCAN.com, navigate to a tour page offering JR Shinkansen (bullet train) Tour packages which include popular tourist destinations such as Kyoto and Takayama.

JAL and JR Tokai are aiming to attract more international visitors to Japan by combining the unique Japanese hospitality offered by JAL and

the unrivalled service and efficiency of Japan's iconic *shinkansen*.

With JAL as Japan's national carrier and JR Tokai the operator of the *shinkansen* linking Tokyo, Nagoya and Osaka, both companies play an important in Japan's inbound tourism prosperity.



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JR East Pass Special

East Japan Railway Company (JR East) is once again selling its *JR East Pass Special* - a flexible three day rail pass exclusively for international tourists in Japan - for a limited time from September 1, 2009.

The *JR East Pass Special* allows unlimited ordinary class rail travel on the JR East network which covers the area from the Izu Peninsula south of Tokyo to the northern tip of Honshu, on any three days within a one month period between September 1 and December 31, 2009.

At only 10,000 yen (\$125.49*) for adults and 5000 yen (\$62.75*) for children aged six to eleven, *JR East Pass Special* offers an even greater discount on travel when compared with JR East's standard discount tickets like the *Flexible 4 Days* and *5 Consecutive Days* passes that cost 20,000 yen (\$250.98*).

Like all JR East passes, the *JR East Pass Special* covers travel on all JR East lines and trains, including its five *shinkansen* (bullet train) lines,

limited express services, including the *Narita Express* airport service, express and local trains.

The *JR East Pass Special promotion* coincides with JR's *Destination Niigata Campaign*, a tourism promotion focusing on the Sea of Japan coast prefecture of Niigata, from October through December 2009. Niigata City, the prefecture's capital, can be accessed from Tokyo by the Niigata *shinkansen* in as little as one hour and thirty seven minutes.

Niigata Prefecture is well known for its beautiful coastal and mountainous scenery, hot springs, and quality sake and *Koshihikari* rice.

The *JR East Pass Special* is a good opportunity for visitors travelling to Japan in autumn and early winter to enjoy the autumn foliage and other sightseeing attractions offered by destinations in the JR East region.

* Australian dollar price based on exchange rate of AUD1 = 79.69 yen.

*Exchange vouchers for the *JR East Pass Special* will be available for purchase at the same locations as the standard JR East Pass.

*The *JR East Pass Special* will be available for purchase in Japan from September 1 through December 1, 2009 and exchange orders for the Pass available overseas from September 1 through November 20, 2009.

*The *JR East Pass Special* exchange voucher is also available for purchase online.

*There is no green car (first class) version of the pass.

*Exchange orders must be exchanged for the rail pass by December 1, 2009.

*No youth rate is available. Child rate is for children aged six to eleven years. Children 12 years and above travel on adult rate. Children under six travel free, except when a reserved seat is used by a child, then the child must travel on the child -rate pass.



Located 15 minutes by car from Myoko Kogen Station on JR East's Shin'etsu Line is Niigata Prefecture's Naena Waterfall. The autumn foliage at the waterfall is spectacular in October and November. ©JNTO

The JR East Pass Special is a good opportunity for visitors travelling to Japan in autumn and early winter to enjoy the autumn foliage...

JR East Pass www.jreast.co.jp/e/eastpass

Sayuki of Asakusa

Sayuki is Asakusa's newest geisha. Having completed the rigorous apprenticeship in 2007, she made her debut to become the first westerner to become a fully fledged geisha. Sayuki, who originally hails from Australia and holds a doctorate in cultural anthropology from Oxford University, has left her name behind her to join the ranks of Asakusa geisha and fully understand the *flower and willow world*.

Though hundreds of years old, the Tokyo geisha districts have

maintained such a strict code of secrecy that they remain less famous overseas than their Kyoto counterparts. Tokyo geisha, however, practice the same arts as their southern sisters, entertaining guests with traditional music and dance in exclusive tea houses by the banks of the Sumida River.

Sayuki regularly attends geisha banquets in Tokyo, playing the *yokobue* flute and entertaining customers. In addition, Sayuki's understanding of both the

elusive world of the geisha and an outsider's interest in the geisha culture, gives her the ability to translate not only language but also the nuances of an evening in the Asakusa geisha quarter. This makes her the perfect guide into Tokyo's *flower and willow world*.

Exclusive options with Sayuki include visiting a tea house in the Asakusa geisha district, Sayuki's banquet event, geisha tea ceremony, an evening with geisha at Japanese cultural events, and kimono shopping.



©Sayuki 2009

Visit: www.sayuki.net

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(2:00-5:00pm Tuesday & Thursday)

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Web: www.jnto.org.au



The Visit Japan Campaign

An initiative of the Japanese government, the Visit Japan Campaign (VJC) aims to attract 10 million visitors per year to Japan by the year 2010. Japan received a record number of 8.35 million international visitors in 2008; 242,000 of these were Australian, an all time record and an increase of 24 percent on 2006 figures.



National holidays in Japan during September - November

Sept 21 (Mon)	Respect for the Aged Day
Sept 22 (Tues)	People's Day
Sept 23 (Wed)	Autumnal Equinox Day
Oct 12 (Mon)	Sports and Health Day
Nov 3 (Tues)	Culture Day
Nov 23 (Mon)	Labour Thanksgiving Day

While banks, post offices and government offices are closed on national holidays, museums, galleries and other tourist attractions are usually open. If an attraction's regular holiday falls on a national holiday, it will open for the national holiday and close the next day instead. This year, there are public holidays on Sept 21, 22 and 23 which fall adjacent to the weekend giving the Japanese an extra long weekend with five consecutive days off. This holiday break is expected to be a busy travel period in Japan.

Tokyo and vicinity

October 24 - November 4 41st Tokyo Motor Show 2009, Makuhari Messe, Chiba City

The theme of the 2009 show is *Fun Driving for Us, Eco Driving for Earth*. The theme is designed to express the concept of the desire to take pleasure in driving cars and riding motorcycles while also caring for the environment, presenting both Fun and Eco in a positive light. There are expected to be 110 exhibitors from ten countries and one region at the show. Forty two world premieres and 17 Japan premieres are scheduled.

www.tokyo-motorshow.com/en/index.html

Kansai Area

October 22 Kurama Fire Festival, Yuki Shrine, Kyoto City

One of Kyoto's three most eccentric festivals, the Kurama Fire Festival is held at Yuki Shrine, and is said to reenact the scene of receiving the deity in Kurama. At 6:00pm fires called *kagaribi* are lit in unison in front of homes in Kurama and people carrying pine torches parade all night long announcing the arrival of the festival. At 8:00pm people gather at the gateway of Kurama Temple and pay a visit of worship to Yuki Shrine. Later two portable shrines are paraded through the town streets bringing the festival to its climax.

http://kyoto.travel/events/kurama_himatsuri_fire_festival.html

Central Japan

October 14 - 19 Doburoku Festival, Shirakawago, Gifu Pref.

Doburoku is a kind of unrefined white sake. The sake is offered to the mountain gods at Shirakawa, Hatogaya and Ijima Hachiman Shrines in return for the village's safety and prosperity. Everyone attending the festival can receive complimentary cups of *doburoku*. The festival also includes a parade by an eight-legged Shishi (Chinese lion), parades of people with banners and folk singing. Held at World Heritage listed Shirakawa Village.

http://shirakawa-go.org/english/e_kyoudo.html

1st & 2nd week of Nov Gujo Hachiman Momiji Festival, Gujohachiman Castle, Gifu Pref.

The pure white keep of Gujo Castle is magnificently illuminated by blazing crimson maple leaves at the peak of the autumn season. The battle of Hachiman Castle which took place in 1600 is reenacted during the festival using antique firearms. Other events include *taiko* drum and koto (Japanese harp) performances, Gujo Odori at Jokamachi Plaza, and a tea ceremony held under the maple trees. At night the trees are illuminated.

Gujo Hachiman tourist information www.gujohachiman.com/kanko/index_e.htm

What's on in Japan



Kurama Fire Festival © Kyoto Tourism Council;
Doburoku Festival.