

# Japan Travel News

June - August 2009



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Japan National Tourism Organization, Sydney

Winter 2009

## JNTO Sydney welcomes new director

The JNTO Sydney office has welcomed a new executive director to its team with Yukio Yamashita taking over from former executive director Jotaro Horiuchi on March 20.

Yamashita hails from Japan's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) and has moved from Tokyo to Australia to take up his first overseas posting.

Yamashita has visited Sydney before although that was 15 years ago and only for a day. When asked about his impressions of the city he will call home for the next three years, Yamashita said that when he first found out about his new position, he was anxious about moving overseas.

But after spending a few weeks settling in, he says he is feeling more confident.

"I'd heard from people that Sydney is one of the world's most livable cities and since I've been here I have realized that's true," Yamashita said.

"I feel confident that I'll have no problems living here."

On the work front, Yamashita said he is delighted to be promoting his country to the Australian market.

"The central part of my job here in Sydney is to convey to Australians what a fantastic destination Japan is," he said.

"Over the past years, the JNTO Sydney office has received the cooperation and support of the travel industry and media in promoting Japan. Thanks to these PR efforts, Japan too has become recognized as a tourist destination for Australians."

"During my time in Australia, I intend to continue the various advertising and media projects, seminars and other marketing activities that JNTO has been focusing on. I'm looking to achieve high quality results for Japan's inbound tourism."

When asked about the impact of the world financial crisis on Japan's inbound tourism, Yamashita said like many

other markets, Japan too has been adversely affected.

"The unstable economic situation and the sharp change in the exchange rate have affected Australian visitor numbers to Japan in the past months, however I believe Australians still have an interest in Japan and will start travelling again in the not too distant future," Yamashita said.

"With the Australian dollar gradually gaining strength against the yen and reduced fuel surcharges - in particular JAL will remove the surcharge on tickets from this coming July - I think visitor numbers will pick up."

"A number of travel agents have recently released their new brochures for the coming year. Many agents have developed a number of new Japan products so there is now more choice than ever for Australian travellers."

Editor: Rebecca Honda

## Japan at Snow Travel Expo

The JNTO Sydney office will continue promoting Japan's snow fields with a Japan stand at the upcoming Snow Travel Expos in Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney.

Local representatives from Nagano, Niigata, Tohoku and Hokkaido resorts will also be at the expos with heaps of information and advice about Japan's world-class resorts, awesome powder snow and renowned warm hospitality.

Expo dates and locations are

listed below.

**Melbourne:** Sunday May 17, Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre, Southbank.

**Brisbane:** Saturday May 23, Royal National Showgrounds, Lower Commerce Building.

**Sydney:** Sunday May 24, Sydney Exhibition and Convention Centre, Hall 6.

Expos on 10:00am - 4:00pm. Admission free!

Come and learn more about Japan's snow sport offerings.

[www.snowtravelexpo.com.au/](http://www.snowtravelexpo.com.au/)



Boarding at Niigata Prefecture's Myoko-Kogen

## Japan's natural hot springs

The Japanese archipelago is blessed with more than 1800 natural hot spring (onsen) areas, at which a large number of hot spring resorts have sprung up over the 2000 odd years that the Japanese have been enjoying a good hot bath.

In the 22nd annual *Nippon no*

*Onsen Hyakusen*, a rating of the nation's best hot springs as voted by travel companies and compiled by The Tourism Economy News, Gunma's Kusatsu Onsen came in at no. 1 for the sixth consecutive year.

The top ten line up was as follows: no. 2 Noboribetsu

(Hokkaido); no. 3 Ibusuki (Kagoshima); no. 4 Yufuin (Oita); no. 5 Kurokawa (Kumamoto); no. 6 Beppu Hatto (Oita); no. 7 Gero (Gifu); no. 8 Arima (Hyogo); no. 9 Dogo (Ehime); no. 10 Kinugawa/Kawaji (Tochigi).

Check out JNTO's selection of hot springs at the link below.

JNTO's Japanese hot springs PDF [www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/rtg/pdf/pg-809.pdf](http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/rtg/pdf/pg-809.pdf)

## Useful information

### Three Kyoto stations renamed

Three Keihan Railway stations in Kyoto City have been renamed to facilitate easier access to the nearby sightseeing spots. The renamed stations are as follows:

Marutamachi ⇒ Jingu Marutamachi; Shijo ⇒ Gion-Shijo; Gojo ⇒ Kiyomizu-Gojo.

### Antique kimono exhibition

Nishijin Lifestyle Museum TONDAYA in Kyoto will hold an antique kimono exhibition from August 18 to 30. TONDAYA, a wholesale kimono business which has been run by the same family for 13 generations, will display its

collection of antique kimono from the Meiji era (1868-1912). Admission to the exhibition is 1500 yen. TONDAYA also offers other traditional Japanese cultural experiences including tea ceremony and kimono dressing.

### See the summer sunrise from Japan's sacred peak

JAPANiCAN - JTB's hotel, ryokan and Sunrise Tours booking site - has launched its two day Mt Fuji climbing tour packages for the 2009 season. The tours run from July 26 through August 20 on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday, with the exception of

August 16. The tour is planned so that climbers reach Fuji's summit in time to see sunrise over Japan. Included in the package is a well deserved visit to a hot spring after the climb. The tour costs 28,800 yen - a ten percent lower rate than last year's tour.

### Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial

The world's largest international art festival will be held in Echigo-Tsumari, Niigata Prefecture from July 26 to September 13. The Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial, being held for the fourth time in 2009, will see more than 150 artists from 26 countries exhibit over 300 artworks.

**TONDAYA...**  
will display its  
collection of  
antique  
kimono from  
the Meiji era.

Nishijin Tondaya

JAPANiCAN Mt Fuji climb

Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial

[www.tondaya.co.jp/English/indexE.htm](http://www.tondaya.co.jp/English/indexE.htm)

[www.japanican.com/climb\\_fuji](http://www.japanican.com/climb_fuji)

[www.echigo-tsumari.jp/english/](http://www.echigo-tsumari.jp/english/)

## Useful websites

### Go! Nagano

Nagano Prefecture recently launched a new and improved sightseeing website for international visitors. Featuring blogs from local international residents as well as a wealth of information on the prefecture's sightseeing spots, outdoor activities, hot springs, cuisine, events, souvenirs and cultural experiences, this site is a one-stop shop for all the information to plan a trip to

Nagano.

[www.go-nagano.net](http://www.go-nagano.net)

### National Park Resort Villages of Japan

National Park Resort Villages (NPRV) operate a chain of 36 Kyukamura hotels all of which are located in national park or quasi-national park areas of Japan. Kyukamura properties are perfect for travelers looking to experience Japan's vast wilderness and enjoy

outdoor recreational activities at a reasonable price.

[www.qkamura.or.jp/](http://www.qkamura.or.jp/)

### JAPANiCAN.com ryokan FAQ

If you want to know more about staying in a traditional inn, including etiquette tips and bathing rules, visit JAPANiCAN's ryokan FAQ page for the low down on this essential traditional Japanese experience.

[www.japanican.com/ryokanFAQ](http://www.japanican.com/ryokanFAQ)

## Saikoku 33 pilgrimage temples show hidden Buddhas

A number of temples in Kyoto Prefecture belonging to the Kansai region's Saikoku 33 pilgrimage will display their original hidden Buddha statues to the public over the coming months. Why not take this opportunity to visit these temples and experience a rare glimpse at these sacred Buddha statues?

The dates the hidden Buddhas will be shown at each pilgrimage site are as follows:  
Mimurotoji (site 10)

Uji City  
October 1 - November 30, 2009  
Kamigaigoji, Junteido (site 11)  
Fushimi-ku, Kyoto City  
May 1 - November 30, 2009  
Imakumano Kannonji (site 15)  
Higashiyama-ku, Kyoto City  
November 1 - 30, 2009 and  
May 1 - 30, 2010

Kiyomizudera (site 16)  
Higashiyama-ku, Kyoto City  
Until May 31, 2009

Yoshiminedera (site 20)

Nishikyo-ku, Kyoto City  
September 1 - October 31, 2009 and April 1 - May 31, 2010

Naraiji (site 28)  
Miyazu City  
Until May 31, 2009

Matsunodera (site 29)  
Maizuru City  
Until September 30, 2009.

Saikoku 33 Temple Pilgrimage  
[www.saikoku33.gr.jp](http://www.saikoku33.gr.jp)  
(Japanese only)



**Yoshiminedera in autumn**  
©Akira Okada

## Ibusuki Hakusuikan: experience the true Kagoshima

The city of Ibusuki is located on the southwest tip of Kyushu in Kagoshima Prefecture and is home to Ibusuki Hakusuikan, a Japanese-style inn with a large Japanese garden that sits above Kagoshima Bay - one of the Japan's most scenic sites. The inn offers comfort in a traditional atmosphere that makes guests feel as though they've slipped back in time to the Edo Period (1600-1868).

One of the highlights of Ibusuki Hakusuikan is its natural hot spring. There are three types of baths: *Genroku*,

open-air and sand bath. *Genroku* (which refers to the Japanese period that was considered to be the Golden Age of the Edo era) tries to capture the atmosphere of the Edo era hot spring when the baths were a place of social interaction.

The open-air bath, as the name suggests, is outside.

Ibusuki is well known for its sand baths and is the only place in Japan where you can experience them. Visitors can bury their body in the hot sand and relax while listening to the

sounds of the surf from the bay.

Another highlight of the inn is the *Satsuma Denshokan*, a gallery that features exhibits on the history of Satsuma, the former name of Kagoshima. Satsuma was one of the most powerful feudal provinces in the Edo era and played an influential role in the Meiji era (1868-1912), when Japan opened to the West. Ibusuki Hakusuikan is located about seven minutes by car from JR Ibusuki Station.  
[www.hakusuikan.co.jp/en/](http://www.hakusuikan.co.jp/en/)



Image courtesy of JTBGMT

## Kurobe Gorge Railway opens for 2009 season

The warmer weather is here, the snow has melted and the Kurobe Gorge Torokko Train is off and running!

The Kurobe Gorge Railway located in the Northern Japan Alps of Toyama Prefecture reopened their lines on May 1 and are now operating daily *Torokko Train* (best translated as tramcar) services through the scenic Kurobe Gorge. The train runs from Unazuki Onsen - Toyama Prefecture's most famous hot spring - to Keyakidaira in one hour and

twenty minutes with a top speed of 20.1km per hour and average speed of 16km per hour.

Kurobe Gorge is Japan's deepest V-shaped gorge, blessed with deep green foliage in the spring and summer, and a vivid blend of colours in the autumn.

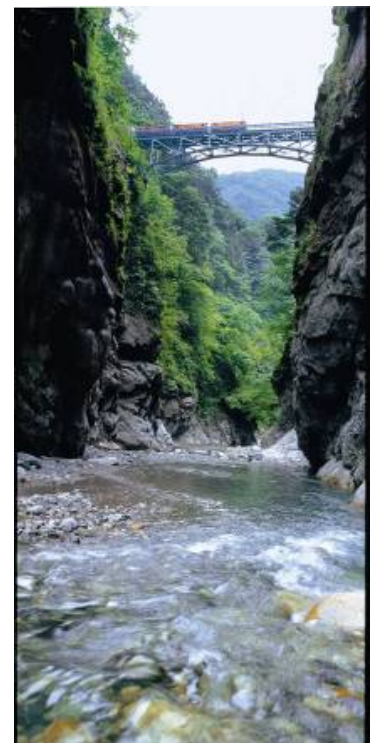
The Keyakidaira area at the end of the rail line has walking and hiking paths which take in views of the Okukane Bridge perched above the Kurobe

River, the *Hitokui-iwa* (Man-eating Rock) and for the more energetic the mysterious Z-line of the Sarutobi Gorge.

Visitors can also enjoy soaking in remote open-air hot springs such as Meiken Onsen and Babadani Onsen.

The Kurobe Gorge Railway *Torokko Train* runs until the end of November when the snow starts to accumulate.

[www.kurotetu.co.jp/en/](http://www.kurotetu.co.jp/en/)



**Atobiki Bridge set 60 metres above the river in the deepest area of the Kurobe Gorge.**

## Tobu Railway discount travel tickets

Tobu Railway offers a range of convenient and cost effective travel passes exclusively for international visitors, for travel between Tokyo's Asakusa and Nikko/Kinugawa Onsen.

Below is a round-up of the passes which are offered throughout the year by Tobu Railway.

### 1. ALL NIKKO PASS

► For those who want to visit the most famous places and historic sites in Nikko or enjoy the natural beauty in Oku-Nikko and for those who want to make several days of the trip.

Price:

4400 yen for adults; 2210 yen for children.

Validity: Four consecutive days

Includes:

- A round-trip train ticket between Asakusa and Tobu Nikko/Shin-Fujiwara.

- Complimentary admission to Nikko Toshogu, Nikko-san Rinnoji and Futarasan Jinja.

If using ordinary tickets for the trip from Asakusa to Tobu Nikko and ordinary bus tickets for the trip from Tobu Nikko Station to Nishisando, and paying admission to the temple and shrines the total cost (for adults) would be 4240 yen. By traveling the same route using the World Heritage Pass travellers can save 640 yen.

The World Heritage Pass is the most popular of the discount passes.

### 3.KINUGAWA THEME PARK PASS

► For fans of theme parks.

Price:

- For pass including entry to

(Passengers can get on and off trains freely between Shimo-imaichi and Tobu Nikko and Shin-Fujiwara).

- A ticket for unlimited travel on local buses between JR Nikko Station, Tobu Nikko Station, Chuzenji Onsen, and Yumoto-Onsen/Kotoku Onsen/Kirifuri Kogen.

If using ordinary tickets for the trip from Asakusa to Tobu Nikko and ordinary bus tickets for the trip from Tobu Nikko Station to Yumoto Onsen, the total cost (for adults) would be 5940 yen. By traveling the same route using the All Nikko Pass travellers can save 1540 yen.

### 2. WORLD HERITAGE PASS

► For those who want to visit Nikko's World Heritage listed shrines and temple - Nikko Toshogu (shrine), Futarasan Jinja (shrine) and Nikko-san

Tobu World Square: 4000 yen for adults; 2000 yen for children.

- For pass including entry to Nikko Edo Village: 6000 yen for adults; 3000 yen for children.

- For pass including entry to both Tobu World Square and Nikko Edo Village: 7200 yen for adults; 3600 yen for children.

Validity: Two consecutive days

Includes:

- A round-trip train ticket between Asakusa and Tobu Nikko/Shin-Fujiwara (Passengers can get on and off trains freely between Shimo-Imaichi and Tobu Nikko/Shin-Fujiwara).

Rinnoji (temple), and to learn about the area's history. Also recommended when visiting the area as a day trip or overnight stay.

Price:

3600 yen for adults; 3200 yen for senior high school students; 3000 yen for junior high school students; 1700 yen for children.

Validity: Two consecutive days

Includes:

- A round-trip train ticket between Asakusa and Tobu Nikko/Shin-Fujiwara (Passengers can get on and off trains freely between Shimo-imaichi and Tobu Nikko/Shin-Fujiwara.)

- A ticket for unlimited travel on local buses between JR Nikko Station, Tobu Nikko Station, Nishisando, and Rengeishi.

- A ticket for unlimited travel on shuttle buses from/to Kinugawa Onsen Station, and inside Tobu World Square and Nikko Edo Village.

The Kinugawa Theme Park Pass can save (adult) travellers from 1900 yen when compared to making the trip using ordinary tickets.

Please visit the Tobu Railway website listed below for more information about the discount passes and services offered by Tobu Railway.

Additionally, the Tobu Sightseeing Service Centre located inside Tobu Asakusa Station has English speaking staff on hand to assist international visitors with tourist information.



Nikko Toshogu's five storey pagoda  
©Yasufumi Nishi/©JNTO

**The World Heritage Pass is the most popular of the discount passes.**



A ninja character at Nikko Edo Village ©Edo Wonderland  
Nikko Edo Mura/©JNTO

Tobu Railways  
Tobu World Square  
Nikko Edo Village

[www.tobu.co.jp/foreign/](http://www.tobu.co.jp/foreign/)  
[www.tobuws.co.jp/default\\_en.html](http://www.tobuws.co.jp/default_en.html)  
[www.edowonderland.net/index.html](http://www.edowonderland.net/index.html)

## Japan Railways Group news

**Hokkaido Rail Pass**  
The price of the Hokkaido Rail Pass increased on April 1, 2009. The new adult prices are listed below.

**Ordinary Pass**

3 consecutive day: 15,000 yen  
5 consecutive day/Flexible 4 day: 19,500 yen

**Green Pass**

3 consecutive day 21,500 yen  
5 consecutive day/Flexible 4 day 27,000 yen

The child price is half of the adult price. Children 6 to 11 years old can travel on a child pass. Children 12 years and over must travel on an adult pass.

The Hokkaido Rail Pass is

valid for unlimited travel on all JR Hokkaido railway lines and selected JR Hokkaido bus routes during the validity period of the pass.

**Travel more comfortably to Kanazawa from Kansai**

On June 1, new rail carriages will be introduced on the Limited Express *Thunderbird* route from Osaka to Uozu, via Kyoto, Fukui, Kanazawa and Toyama.

**Improved rail services**

An additional round trip Limited Express *Hakutaka* service will operate between Echigo-Yuzawa and Kanazawa from June 1, bringing the service frequency to one an

hour. This new service will make rail travel between Tokyo and Kanazawa even more convenient with 13 round-trip connections daily, all via Echigo-Yuzawa on the Joetsu Shinkansen Line.

**Non-smoking areas increase**

- From June 1, JR Central and JR West will make all of their long distance limited express trains completely non-smoking with the exception of the Tokaido and Sanyo bullet trains and overnight sleeper trains.

- From July 1, JR West will make the interior of all its stations in the Kyoto, Osaka and Kobe area completely non-smoking.



**Kyoto Station**  
©Japan Convention Services Inc./  
©JNTO

JR schedules available at [www.japanrail.com/JR\\_timetableandfare.html](http://www.japanrail.com/JR_timetableandfare.html)

## Seishun Juhachi Kippu

Japan Rail's *Seishun Juhachi Kippu* (Seishun 18) is an economical way for those who are not in a hurry to travel in Japan by train.

*Seishun Juhachi Kippu* is a seasonal discount pass consisting of five tickets for travel on JR local and rapid local trains. The tickets may be used by one person on any

five days or by a group of five people traveling together on one day. Each ticket is valid for unlimited travel on one calendar day (i.e. from midnight until 23:59) and must be used within the designated term of validity.

**Price:** 11,500 yen (same price for adults and children)

**Summer season:**

On sale July 1 - August 31; valid for travel July 20 - September 10.

**Winter season:**

On sale December 1, 2009 - January 10, 2010; valid for travel December 10, 2009 - January 20, 2010.

**Seishun Juhachi Kippu** [www.jreast.co.jp/e/pass/seishun18.html](http://www.jreast.co.jp/e/pass/seishun18.html)

## Summer Hokkaido sightseeing

The arrival of summer in Hokkaido sees the fields filled with the vivid colours of wildflowers and the commencement of the seasonal *Furano Lavender Express* and *Furano-Biei Norokko Train* services.

*Furano Lavender Express*, is the limited express train which seasonally runs from Sapporo to the central Hokkaido city of Furano which is famous for its

lavender fields. Services will begin on June 6 and operate through October 12.

After arriving in Furano on the limited express, visitors can enjoy panoramic views of the countryside on a leisurely journey to Lavender Farm Station on the wide window *Furano-Biei Norokko Train*. Located seven minutes from Lavender Farm Station is Farm Tomita, one of Hokkaido's

premier flower farms. Entry to the farm is free of charge and visitors can wander around enjoying the stunning summer flora at their own pace.

Both tourist trains are covered by the Japan Rail Pass and Hokkaido Rail Pass.

Check the *Travel Info* section on JR Hokkaido's website for more Hokkaido summer news and special summer train timetables.



**Lavender field in Furano**  
©Furano Tourism Association

**Japan Rail's  
Seishun  
Juhachi Kippu  
is an  
economical  
way for those  
who are not in  
a hurry to  
travel in  
Japan by  
train.**

**JR Hokkaido** [www.jrhokkaido.co.jp/index.html](http://www.jrhokkaido.co.jp/index.html)

## Japan National Tourism Organization, Sydney

Level 7, 36-38 Clarence Street, Sydney NSW 2000 Australia

Tel: 02-9279-2177  
(2:00-5:00pm Tuesday & Thursday)

Fax: 02-9279-3166

Web: [www.jnto.org.au](http://www.jnto.org.au)

JNTO changed its official name to Japan National Tourism Organization on March 15, 2009.



## 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. During the 2007-08 ski season, more than 30,000 Australians visited Japan's snowfields.



### National holidays in Japan during June - August

July 20 (Mon) Marine Day

*Obon* (Lantern Festival), is held each year from August 13 to 16, and although not a national holiday, it is one of Japan's peak travel seasons. *Obon* is a Buddhist ceremony to welcome back and appease ancestors. On August 13 in the early evening a lantern to welcome back ancestors (*mukaebi*) is lit at the front gate, and on August 16 a farewell lantern and fire (*okuribi*) are lit to guide the souls of ancestors back to their world.

### Tokyo and vicinity

**August 29-30 Tokyo Koenji Awaodori Festival, JR Koenji Station area, Tokyo**  
Japan's second largest Awaodori Festival. Now in its 53rd year, the Koenji dance festival attracts around 1.2 million spectators who turn out to watch 12,000 participants from 188 teams dance to uplifting music and rhythms in the streets of Tokyo's Koenji.  
[www.koenji-awaodori.com/indexEn.html](http://www.koenji-awaodori.com/indexEn.html)

### Kansai Area

**July 30 - August 1 Sumiyoshi Festival, Osaka City**  
Osaka's final summer festival for the season. The festival's *Nagoshi* Shinto purification ritual in which beautifully dressed ladies and children walk through a large thatched ring to purify themselves and wish for good health, is a designated intangible cultural asset. The general public also have the opportunity to walk through the thatched ring. After the ceremony, two dances - *Kumanomai* and *Sumiyoshiodori* are performed. The thatched ring is placed at the Sumiyoshi Shrine gate until the festival ends on the evening of August 1.

### Other regions

**July 1-15 Hakata Gion Yamakasa, Kushida Shrine, Fukuoka City**  
With a history of more than 750 years, Hakata Gion Yamakasa is the annual summer festival held by Kushida Shrine. The highlight of the festival is the *yamakasa* (portable shrine) race through the streets of Hakata in the early hours of the morning on July 15. Teams carry the 1 tonne *yamakasa* along a 5km course at full speed in a bid to complete the course in the fastest time.  
[www.jnto.go.jp/eng/indepth/history/traditionalevents/a32\\_fes\\_yamakasa.html](http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/indepth/history/traditionalevents/a32_fes_yamakasa.html)

**July 11 - Sept 5 Gujo Odori Festival, Gujohachiman City, Gifu Prefecture**  
One of the three most traditional dance festivals in Japan. Dating back 400 years, it has been designated a significant intangible folk cultural asset. For 31 festive nights, thousands of people dance the traditional dances in the streets. For four nights in mid-August, during *Obon*, the dancing goes on all night!  
[www.gujohachiman.com/kanko/gujo\\_odori\\_e.htm](http://www.gujohachiman.com/kanko/gujo_odori_e.htm)

**July 28-29 Bellybutton Festival, Furano, Hokkaido**  
Furano's Bellybutton Festival draws people from both Japan and overseas, with more than 5,000 people participating in the two dance bellybutton dance festival, and tens of thousands more gathering to watch last year. It is held rain or shine!  
[www.furano-kankou.com/english/hyperlinks/F-furano\\_heso.htm](http://www.furano-kankou.com/english/hyperlinks/F-furano_heso.htm)

## What's on in Japan



From top: Sumiyoshi Festival, Gujo Odori Festival, Furano Bellybutton Festival.

Images courtesy of Osaka Convention & Tourism Bureau, Gujo City and Furano Tourism Association.