

Live Like A Local: Discovering the Cultures of Japan on Rural Overnight Stays

Far from the urban attractions of Japan's big cities, many rural areas in lesser-known regions cultivate local specialties in agriculture and fisheries that have earned them a niche reputation through premium products and spiritual cuisine. Nohaku (farmstays) are a great opportunity for curious or food-oriented visitors to gain firsthand experience and intimate insight into these pockets of cultural heritage, especially through the shared rituals of cooking and eating together with local residents.

The G7 Agriculture Minister's Meeting in Miyazaki Prefecture and G7 Transport Minister's Meeting were held this year respectively in Ise-Shima, Mie, so let's explore Nohaku experiences in these prefectures, as well as another in Yamagata Prefecture.

Stay on a Sustainable Farm in Takachihogo-Shiibayama, Miyazaki

Nestled in the heart of rural Kyushu, the area of [Takachihogo-Shiibayama](#) includes several towns and villages in [Miyazaki](#) prefecture that thrive on a sustainable, composite system of agricultural forestry. A Nohaku experience here allows guests to gain firsthand experience in sustainable forestry with opportunities to work alongside farmers to hopefully acquire the rural culture and wisdom that has helped them coexist with nature for generations. During their stay, guests might learn how to prepare local cuisine as they make meals with their hosts or help prepare the Goemon, a cauldron-shaped bath heated by fire. Experiences include learning to build a fire and grill fish, making your own bamboo chopsticks, and making traditional Kagura tools for the rituals.

Beyond the treasured relationships to be created here, visitors can enjoy some of Miyazaki's other treasures. These include some of Japan's most beautiful terraced rice paddies, acres of beautifully maintained forests, and Kagura, a local ritualistic performance containing elements of Japan's history and a request for blessings from the gods.



Photo by GIAHS Takachihogo-Shiibayama Site Revitalization Committee

Experience the local fishery industry in Shima City, Mie Prefecture

[Ago Bay](#) in [Mie](#) Prefecture is best known as the cradle of Japan's pearl cultivation industry, producing spherical pearls in the gentle waters off the rugged coast of [Shima city](#). Accommodation facilities in the area range from guest houses to glamping or even the Shima Kanko Hotel, which offers guests with all types of interests and travel style easy access to a variety of activities. Visitors can experience life alongside local families, learning about industry-related activities such as fishing, diving, and conservation efforts, as well as the aforementioned pearl cultivating. Curious visitors can dive with the Ama, female skin divers who helped launch the industry using 1,200-year-old



Photo by Mie Prefecture Pearl Promotion Council



Photo by Mie Prefecture Pearl Promotion Council

methods of holding their breath underwater to harvest seafood such as abalone from the ocean floor. There is something deeply fulfilling that comes from preparing a sustainable meal from the natural bounty of the sea.

Guests can also take some time to relax and enjoy the rugged natural beauty of this southern part of Mie with tidal flats, evergreen tufted islands, and a rugged coastline teeming with marine life. Kayaking and snorkeling are among the popular pastimes along the coast, while Ise-Shima National Park offers forest hikes sprinkled with breathtaking views of land and sea.

Recharge Your Spirit in the Mountains of Tsuruoka, Yamagata

If the experiences in Miyazaki and Mie can be considered gentle introductions into the local cultures, [Yamagata](#) Prefecture offers a unique Nohaku experience with roots in ancient times. Yamabushi culture experience has a history of over 1,400 years in Tsuruoka City and its origins lie in Shugendo culture and Shojin Ryori, a vegetarian cuisine eaten by Shugendo practitioners. Shojin Ryori, which represents the food culture of Tsuruoka, was one of the reasons why Tsuruoka was designated a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. "[Yamabushi Reset Training](#)" is an experience where visitors can sample the ancient culture represented by these vegetarian dishes. This three-day experience takes place in the [Dewa Sanzan](#) area of the mountains of Tsuruoka, an area used for centuries as a training ground for ascetic practicing Yamabushi pilgrims. The training consists of prayer and meditation, a challenging trek up and down Mt. Haguro, and a stay at a mountain pilgrim lodge where visitors can try Dewa Sanzan Shojin Ryori, the vegetarian cuisine of Yamabushi practitioners. During the experience, a Yamabushi master provides spiritual care and wisdom to participants, creating an atmosphere which is often life-changing.



Photo by Yamabushido

Importantly, the fees to participate in this experience contribute to the sustainability of this vulnerable ancient tradition, while preserving the beautiful environment of ancient cedars and other natural resources that the Yamabushi serve to protect. Although not an experience fit for every visitor to Japan, the Yamabushi Reset Training is one that cannot be experienced anywhere else in the world.



Photo by Yamabushido

Whether staying at Nohaku or in a pilgrim lodge, each of these unique opportunities share one thing in common: a chance for visitors to Japan to experience life alongside local Japanese people and build lasting friendships.

Japan Tourism Topics

1. Dive into Art and Nature at Echigo-Tsumari Art Field 2023, through November 5, Niigata



Ilya&Emilia Kabakov, The Rice Fields,
Photo Nakamura Osamu

Niigata prefecture hosts the year-round art festival Echigo Tsumari Art Field 2023. This event is held throughout the year and paves the way for the Triennale, which will be held in 2024. Here, art serves as a guide through the picturesque countryside. Set against the backdrop of the Echigo-Tsumari region in Niigata Prefecture, which is facing depopulation and aging challenges, this festival aims to breathe new life into the area. Visitors can explore the Satoyama, a vibrant rural landscape shaped by the harmonious coexistence of people and nature, and view over 200 installations ranging from permanent to seasonal artworks, as well as various exhibitions that can be viewed on their own or

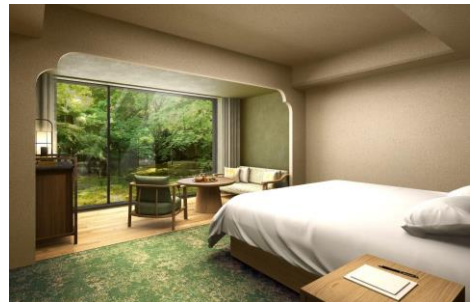
as part of one of the many guided tours available.

Moreover, visitors will have the rare opportunity to spend the night in former elementary schools that have been converted into cozy accommodations, in addition to other abandoned houses that have been transformed into artworks for the event.

[Echigo-Tsumari Art Field 2023](#)

2. Stay at the Lavish Shisui, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Nara

Privileged guests will be among the first to enjoy a luxurious escape at the soon-to-be-opened Shisui, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Nara. The building was designed by Japanese architect Kuma Kengo, who blended the town's rich heritage with contemporary aesthetics. Nestled amidst the lush greenery, the hotel is located in the enchanting Nara Park, which is famous for its free-roaming deers, as well as many notable temples and other attractions, making it the ideal hub for an exclusive stay in Nara. Within the hotel premises is the Yoshiki-en Garden, a traditional Japanese garden where guests can take a break to stroll among the mossy landscapes and picturesque ponds while touring the ancient capital of Nara, a city whose history is even older than Kyoto's. Shisui, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Nara will open in August 29th, 2023.



[Shisui, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Nara](#)

3. See Traditional Folk Dances at the Owara Kaze-no-Bon Festival, September 1-3, Toyama



Photo by General Incorporated Etchu Yatsuo
Tourism Association

The Owara Kaze-no-Bon Festival has been held for nearly 300 years in the small town of Yatsuo, Toyama. This event, which takes place over three days from September 1st to 3rd, promises visitors an enticing cultural journey through the region's traditions. Owara Kaze-no-Bon is a festival that draws both locals and tourists, with over 200,000 spectators every year.

The highlight of the event are the graceful dancers dressed in traditional yukata and straw hats who parade through Yatsuo's historic streets after sunset, accompanied by the rhythmic melodies of the Shamisen, a traditional Japanese instrument, and the captivating beats of Taiko drums. Visitors can walk down

illuminated streets decorated with countless paper lanterns in a truly magical atmosphere.

[Owara Kaze-no-Bon Festival](#)

4. Experience the hypnotic bonfires of the Gozan Okuribi, August 16th, Kyoto

The Gozan Okuribi is a cherished summer tradition with a long-standing history that bids farewell to ancestral spirits during the Obon season - a traditional Japanese holiday dedicated to deceased ancestors. This grand event takes place on the night of August 16th, and features massive bonfires lit on six mountainsides in Kyoto, captivating locals and visitors alike.

The bonfires are arranged to form various shapes, including the Kanji character for “big”. These massive flames illuminate the city and create a hypnotic sight.

The fires are lit one by one from 8 pm, each burning for about 30 minutes before being extinguished. As each bonfire is lit, the crowd waits with bated breath to watch the mesmerizing procession of glowing embers.

[Kyoto Gozan Okuribi](#)



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5. Cheer For Your Favorite Team at the FIBA Basketball World Cup in Okinawa



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Sports lovers can enjoy the FIBA Basketball World Cup with events held in Okinawa, Indonesia, and the Philippines, bringing 32 teams, to participate in this international basketball classic. From August 25th to its climax on September 10th, national teams will compete to bring home the Naismith Trophy, named for the inventor of the sport. Past teams have included many of basketball’s international stars, and this year will be no different. Why not get tickets for a suite to watch the games in style?

Between events, basketball fans can enjoy Okinawa’s renowned natural beauty, including turquoise waters perfect for diving and other watersports.

[FIBA Basketball World Cup](#)

Notes:

- The above details are correct as of the time of publication, and are subject to change.

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