

2024 December Vol.2

News!

1. Japan's Breweries and Distilleries Celebrate UNESCO Heritage Listing



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Japanese sake, one of the most well-known elements of Japanese cuisine, has a history that stretches back centuries, with regional varieties made all across the country. This fermented alcoholic beverage is made with rice, "koji" mold, and water. While seemingly simple, the techniques and conditions required to make Japanese sake are unique, leading to the Japanese government proposing "Traditional knowledge and skills of sake-making with koji mold in Japan" to be registered as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, which was approved on December 4 (December 5 JST). This includes not only Japanese sake, but also "shochu" and "awamori", and "mirin" cooking wine. Traditional knowledge and skills of sake-making with koji mold in Japan came to be thanks to the experienced, dedicated "toji" (chief sake maker) and "kurabito" (sake brewery worker) who use koji mold, adjust their brewing processes to work with different climates across Japan, and have passed down their techniques and skills over generations. The sake produced through these traditional methods has deep roots in Japanese society, playing a significant role in Japanese religious rituals, ceremonies such as weddings, and other parts of Japanese culture. The ingredient koji is also used to make miso, vinegar, and soy sauce, making it a crucial element of Japanese food culture and demonstrating the strong ties between sake making and traditional Japanese cuisine. It is expected that the new designation will make the rich history and culture of sake-making more well-known and appreciated worldwide. The deep history and masterful techniques and skills used to make Japanese sake make it a significant symbol of Japanese culture.

Areas all over the country are participating in "Sake Brewery Tourism," which also offers more insight into history and culture. Domestic and international visitors take this chance to visit sake breweries, interact with the brewers, and taste different regional sake. Take a journey into the profound world of Japanese brewing culture and explore the area to learn about the local history!

*"Sake Brewery Tourism" is a registered trademark of Kashima City, Saga Prefecture.

[Traditional Japanese Sake Making](#)
[Sake Brewery Tourism](#)

Festival and Event

2. Savor the Spirit of Japan at Niigata Sake no Jin 2025, March 8 – 9



Advertisement of the upcoming event



Tasting at each booth (Past Venue)

Niigata Prefecture is one of the foremost producers of sake in Japan, and every year it hosts one of the largest sake festivals in the country – Niigata Sake no Jin. It is located at Toki Messe, which is less than a 10-minute taxi ride from Niigata Station. The festival is modeled after Oktoberfest in Germany, and during the event, sake brewers from across Niigata gather to provide hundreds of different Japanese sake labels for attendees to sample. People come from across Japan and even abroad to revel in the extensive selection of delicious sake along with snacks and local Niigata delicacies that keep the sake flowing, as well as other sake-related products. Getting to taste such a wide variety of sake allows visitors to better appreciate the nuances of each sake and even find flavor profiles they might not otherwise have reached for. There are even sake that are only available at the festival and other brand-new labels that are introduced during the event. The event is only open to those 20 or older. Tickets are limited, and those for overseas participants are only being sold until January 14, so be sure to check the official site for more updates and information.

[Niigata Sake no Jin 2025](#)

New Open

3. Experience the Epitome of Luxury in Your Own Private Space in Karuizawa, Opening December 24, Nagano



©GLAMDAY STYLE HOTEL SUITE

GLAMDAY STYLE is a series of resorts that aims to provide extraordinary accommodation experiences with elegant, completely private spaces. Two new locations that are part of its "Hotel Suite" label will be opening in the resort area of Karuizawa in Nagano Prefecture: Kawa-no-ne and Yama-no-fumoto. As the name suggests, they offer the same grandeur as hotel suites, but with a bonus of feeling as though you are staying in an extravagant home accentuated by the ever-changing beauty of the four seasons. They include kitchens, living and dining rooms, multiple bedrooms, and even more luxuries. For food, you can dine at the facilities' restaurants or cook in the privacy of your own space, or even hire a private chef for special occasions. To make your stay even more comfortable, you can also take advantage of the butler service while relaxing at the resort or rely on the concierge and private car services to help you get the most out of your time exploring Karuizawa.

[GLAMDAY STYLE HOTEL SUITE Kawa-no-ne](#)

[GLAMDAY STYLE HOTEL SUITE Yama-no-fumoto](#)

New Open

4. Stay in the Dignified Residence of a Former Samurai Family, Reopening January 11, Fukuoka



©RYOKAN OHANA

Yanagawa Tachibana-tei Ohana was once the residence of the Tachibana family, which ruled the Yanagawa Domain, known for its expansive network of canals, during the Edo period (1603 - 1868). Now designated as a National Cultural Property, the estate boasts a beautiful blend of Japanese and Western architecture, showcasing the affluence of the owners. In addition to the stunningly detailed buildings, the grounds also host an elegant Japanese-style garden centered around a calm pond. The proprietors have been careful in honoring the centuries-old traditions of the estate and preserving it for future generations to enjoy. Not only is the property open for visitations, but it also hosts a restaurant and acts as a "ryokan" inn for those who are interested in staying in a luxurious historical building. To maintain its integrity and to celebrate the restaurant and ryokan's 75th anniversaries, the ryokan will be reopened on January 11th. You can enjoy a wealth of historical articles and traditional elements such as tatami mats throughout the premises, and then retire to your Japanese-modern-style room where you will feel like the lord of your own castle.

[RYOKAN OHANA](#)

[Ohana](#) (English and other foreign languages available after January)

Festival and Event

5. Witness Mystical Illuminations and Traditional Crafts During the Gifu Light Story, January 18 – 26



Gifu, famous for the Hida Takayama region and World Heritage Site Shirakawa-go, will hold its annual illumination event in mid-January. Here, Gifu Park and Shoboji Temple will be transformed into spectacles of light and color. Gifu Park and Shoboji Temple are both about a 15-minute bus ride from Gifu Station and will be enveloped in a fantastic atmosphere with lit-up Japanese umbrellas and paper lanterns respectively, both of which are nationally designated as traditional crafts. Gifu Park will feature art installations made with umbrellas that light up in sync with music. This year, projection mapping will also be used for the first time, creating stunning scenes around the park such as koi fish swimming in a pond and illuminating an impressive 20-meter-tall rock face. At Shoboji Temple, you can see a magnificent collaboration with the Gifu Great Buddha and Gifu lanterns. There will also be food trucks present at the event, offering delicious fare that will keep you full and energized as you explore the glowing scenery and the Gifu Castle panoramic night view being held at the same time. Tickets are required for the Gifu Light Story, so be sure to get yours for a wonderful night while visiting the area.

[Gifu Light Story 2025](#)

Festival and Event

6. Special Snow Lantern Illuminations in a Village of Thatched Roof Houses, January 25 – February 1, Kyoto



©Kyoto Miyama Tourism Association

An 80-minute drive from Kyoto Station will bring you to the National Heritage Site, Kayabuki-no-sato village of Miyama, filled with centuries-old traditional thatched roof houses set among a lush landscape and towering mountains. The region sees heavy snowfall during the winter, creating a pure-white scene that can only be enjoyed during the colder months. During this time, the beloved Yukitouro (Snow Lantern Festival) takes place, with over 200 lanterns illuminating the village in a soft glow that seems to bring a sense of warmth. This popular festival draws visitors from all over who want to discover a new face of Kyoto, different from its historical image. In addition to the awe-inspiring ethereal nighttime views, food stalls serving delicious local fare and snow lantern-making activities will also be present during the event, adding to the festive atmosphere. The pinnacle of the festival is arguably the fireworks show that takes place only one night during the festival period on January 29, further lighting up the winter wonderland with bright bursts and vibrant colors.

[Snow Lantern Festival in Miyama's Thatched Village](#)

Festival and Event

7. Hang Out in Snow Huts During the Yokote Kamakura Festival, February 15 – 16, Akita



©Yokote City Tourism Association

In winter, much of Akita Prefecture is blanketed with thick layers of snow. This has given rise to one of the region's most iconic seasonal sights – "kamakura" snow huts. The kamakura are the highlight of the popular winter event, Yokote Kamakura Festival, which has a history that dates back about 450 years. Kamakura were originally built as a ritual to make offerings to the water deity enshrined inside, with prayers for safety in the home, prosperity in business and abundant harvests. The huts are also illuminated from the inside, and visitors (tourists included) can enjoy "amazake" (a sweet fermented rice drink) within the snowy walls. Kamakura can be found around 10 minutes by foot from Yokote Station, and while their adorable silhouettes are already fun to witness during the daytime, the warm glow coming from the huts at night enshrouds the area with an ethereal atmosphere.

[Yokote Kamakura Festival](#)

Festival and Event

8. Finding a New Purpose for "Trash" at the Sunabi Museum, February, Kochi



You can find art anywhere you go if you just look hard enough. The Sunabi Museum in Kochi Prefecture has taken that ideology and applied it to local beaches, finding beauty in every aspect, including the plants, animals, and even the trash that washes ashore. Instead of buildings, the beach itself is envisioned as a museum. Highlighting its own principles and ideas, the museum has taken what many would consider trash and has transformed it into artwork with the "Washed Ashore Exhibition," which will be exhibited in February 2025. This thought-provoking initiative helps visitors consider their impacts on the environment, as well as how to look at the world through a new lens. A close look at these objects, both natural and manmade, will reveal otherworldly beauty that may have otherwise been overlooked. Other exhibits include the outdoor "T-shirt Art Exhibition" and "Quilt Exhibition in sea breeze," both of which display submissions from all over Japan. They utilize yet complement the effects of the surrounding nature such as the scenery, wind, sounds, and more, creating captivating, immersive exhibits.

[Sunabi Museum](#)

National Park

9. Delight in the Fantastic Enjoyments of Winter at Towada-Hachimantai National Park, Tohoku



©Ministry of Environment

©Sukayu Onsen Ryokan

Towada-Hachimantai National Park straddles Aomori, Akita and Iwate prefectures in northern Japan and is home to pristine nature that highlights the beauty of each season, especially winter. From snowy landscapes with frost-covered trees forming "juhyo" snow monsters to illuminated icefall tours along mountain streams in the stillness of the night, each corner of the national park

offers another natural splendor to marvel at. There are also plenty of activities available within the park that make the winter more enjoyable, including snowshoe hiking, back-country skiing and snowboarding, and more. Not to mention soothing hot springs, such as the famous Sukayu Onsen, which are perfect for refreshing and warming the body after exploring the snowy vista. For a panoramic view of the winter wonderland spreading out before you, consider taking a ride on the Hakkoda Ropeway, easily accessible from Shin-Aomori Station via direct bus. The ropeway extends into the mountains, and you may even be able to see Hokkaido from the ropeway on a clear day.

[Towada-Hachimantai National Park](#)

Cultural Discoveries

10. A Journey Through Japanese History and Culture Starting at The Museum of Art, Ehime



Matsuyama is the capital of Ehime Prefecture, located on the island of Shikoku. It abounds with diverse cultures and can easily be explored on foot and by public transport. Start off your cultural explorations at The Museum of Art, Ehime. This expansive museum opened in 1998 on the grounds of Matsuyama Castle, one of the 12 original castles of Japan. Its collection features a wide assortment of around 12,000 artworks, haiku literature, and more, from both local and world-famous creators. Highlights include works from Yasuda Yukihiko, one of the pioneers of Nihonga art; Nakamura Tsune, a leading Western-style painter in the Taisho period (1912-1926); and graphic designer Sugiura Hisui. After touring the museum, be sure to walk up or take the ropeway to the castle tower of Matsuyama Castle, where you'll gain raw insight into old Japan and enjoy sweeping views of the cityscape and Seto Inland Sea. Do not forget to also visit the nearby archeological spots and cultural sites, such as the Bansuiso Villa, which are part of ten facilities within Matsuyama City that are introduced in a tourism pamphlet and offer entrance discounts and stamps for a stamp rally.

[Exploring Matsuyama: Retro-Modern Design Meets Art and History](#)

Expo 2025 Osaka Kansai

Expressing the Expo Theme and Tourism Experience Through NFT Art!



JNTO will issue 20 types of modern ink art NFTs*, featuring tourism experiences and regional landmarks related to the Expo's three sub-themes (Saving Lives, Empowering Lives, and Connecting Lives), and distribute them to travelers around the world. These NFT artworks can be obtained for free through the "EXPO2025 Digital Wallet" app service provided by the Japan Association for the 2025 World Exposition, after experiencing a virtual journey through the ink paintings displayed on JNTO's special website. The acquired NFTs can be collected within the app.

Through this new promotion utilizing Web3 NFTs, we aim to further showcase the charm of Japan's regions to global travelers interested in Japan due to the Expo.

*NFT stands for Non-Fungible Token, a unique form of digital data based on blockchain technology. This project uses SBT (Soul Bound Token), a new technology expected to be used as "proof of participation" due to its immutability and non-transferability.

For more details, visit the JNTO Expo 2025 website.

<https://expo2025nft.jnto.go.jp/en/nft/>

Notes:

- The above details are correct as of the time of publication, and are subject to change.
- Item 6 is based on information from JNTO Partners.

If you'd like to download photos and videos of Japan's tourist attractions, please visit the [Japan Online Media Center \(JOMC\)](#)

For media inquiries, including requests to use photographs, please contact the JNTO Press at media_inquiry@jnto.go.jp





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