

2025 January Vol.2

News!

1. Two Japanese Towns Selected as Best Tourism Villages 2024



Nishikawa Town, Yamagata Prefecture



Amagi Town, Kagoshima Prefecture

Two Japanese towns have made the Best Tourism Villages list: Nishikawa in Yamagata Prefecture and Amagi in Kagoshima Prefecture. In 2021, the UN Tourism began this initiative to facilitate rural tourism and encourage the preservation of local landscapes and traditions. The 2024 list of Best Tourism Villages has been announced, consisting of 55 carefully selected destinations from a pool of 260 entries. Their inclusion on the list means that these towns have been recognized for their achievements and empowering their communities through tourism. The designation of these two towns has brought the total of Best Tourism Villages in Japan to eight, with previous selections including Biei and Niseko in Hokkaido, Miyama in Kyoto, Oku-Matsushima in Miyagi, Hakuba in Nagano, and Shirakawa in Gifu. In addition to the Best Tourism Villages, the areas of Yamakoshi in Niigata Prefecture and Shirayama in Fukui Prefecture have been chosen for the Upgrade Programme, which will help them receive guidance to be recognized as Best Tourism Villages in the future. Asuka Village in Nara Prefecture was also part of the Upgrade Programme in 2023.

*Click [here](#) to check out the stories of Japanese regions that have put much effort into sustainable tourism developments and have been internationally recognized.

[Amagi Town, Kagoshima Prefecture](#)

[Nishikawa Town, Yamagata Prefecture](#)

New Open

2. Feel as Though You Are Staying Right by the Water at a Port City Hotel in Yokohama, Opening February 26, Kanagawa



Tokyo's neighboring port city of Yokohama will soon welcome the GATE HOTEL YOKOHAMA. It is a "lifestyle hotel" that aims to be an oasis from busy city life while allowing guests to indulge in the charms of Yokohama, which is known for its blend of Japanese, Western and Chinese cultures. The hotel is designed to let guests relish the natural open air of Yokohama while feeling the presence and energy of the city. There are five different types of rooms, ranging from basic to suites, with refined designs that create a sense of authenticity. The restaurants overlook Yokohama's beautiful scenery, including the nearby Yamashita Park and Port of Yokohama. The hotel also has an exclusive rooftop terrace with a fantastic view while basking in the sea breeze. The nightscape is particularly fabulous, with Yokohama Bay Bridge glittering in the darkness. Only a 3-minute walk from Motomachi-Chukagai Station, the hotel's location offers easy access to famous destinations, such as Yokohama Chinatown and the CUPNOODLES MUSEUM Yokohama.

[THE GATE HOTEL YOKOHAMA by HULIC](#)

New Open

3. Spend the Night at the Gateway to the Setouchi Region, Opening March 24, Hiroshima



©Hotel Granvia Hiroshima South Gate

Hotel Granvia Hiroshima South Gate will act as a new "gateway" to the city and Setouchi region, as it will be situated directly above Hiroshima Station, accessible by Shinkansen bullet train. The hotel's prime location also makes it easy to explore Hiroshima Prefecture, with must-visit sightseeing spots, such as the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and Hiroshima Castle being less than 15 minutes away by bus and Miyajima around one hour away by train and ferry. All the comforts needed for a relaxing stay are available at the hotel, making it the perfect hub for both business and leisure activities. There are 380 guest rooms that feature warm wooden tones that are inspired by the beautiful nature of the Setouchi region, large windows that overlook Hiroshima City, and a restaurant that serves delectable dishes that use local ingredients. Guests can also easily store their baggage before and after checking in at the Self-Service Baggage Drop, letting you get out into the city without heavy luggage.

[Hotel Granvia Hiroshima South Gate](#)

Festival and Event

4. Support the Next Generation of Talents at Artists' Fair Kyoto 2025, February 28 – March 2



©ARTISTS' FAIR KYOTO Organising Committee

Artists' Fair Kyoto is centered around the concept of "art singularity" – aiming to help young, up-and-coming artists grow their own talents and expand into the global market. Under the recommendation of domestically and internationally acclaimed artists or from the abundant public applicants, the artists selected for this art fair handle all the planning themselves, from organizing the fair to exhibiting and selling their pieces, thus breaking the mold of traditional art festivals and leading to the creation of a new art system. The fair offers a unique opportunity to understand each piece of art, as attendees can speak directly with the artists about their creations. In addition to captivating exhibits showcasing young artists, the fair will also include satellite exhibitions by the advisory board and past participating artists, along with art awards and talk programs. Located in the ancient city of Kyoto, the fair's venues are set among historical and culturally significant backdrops, such as the Meiji Kotokan Hall at the Kyoto National Museum, the Kyoto Shimbun Bldg. B1F, and Tofukuji Temple, highlighting the city's whimsical blend of the traditional and modern.

*The Advisory Board Exhibition at Tofukuji Temple will be held February 28 - March 6, 2025.

[ARTISTS' FAIR KYOTO 2025](#)

Festival and Event

5. Anime Lovers From Across the World Unite at AnimeJapan, March 22 – 23, Tokyo



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AnimeJapan is one of the biggest anime-related events in Japan, featuring everything anime lovers would want: performances, live events, exhibitions, merch, and more. Having welcomed a record of over 130,000 people last year, it will be held at Tokyo Big Sight again this year. Anime lovers come from around the world to bask in the effervescent atmosphere and celebrate this beloved part of Japanese pop culture along with other anime enthusiasts. There are even exhibitions and stage events limited to kids and their guardians, so the event can be enjoyed by people of all ages. Cosplayers can also be seen roaming the event hall, often generously stopping for pictures, so you can get a one-of-a-kind memento of your time at AnimeJapan along with special merch. General tickets are required for entry and special tickets to attend the stage events are limited, so be sure to keep an eye on the official site for more information.

[AnimeJapan 2025](#)

Festival and Event

6. Discover the Wonders of Japanese Green Tea at the World O-CHA Festival, April 19 – May 21, October 23 – 26, Shizuoka



Green tea has been enjoyed in Japan for hundreds of years and has recently been gaining traction worldwide thanks to both its taste and health benefits. Shizuoka Prefecture is one of the main tea producers in Japan, and it will also be the location of the 2025 World O-CHA Festival. The festival is held once every three years, and this is its 9th iteration. It allows visitors to dive deep into the world of tea by introducing international tea cultures, showcasing a selection of

tea-related products from around the world, and more. The previous festival welcomed around 740,000 visitors from 20 different countries and regions, further facilitating the international appreciation of tea. Of course, various tea brands and blends are available for purchase, so after deepening your tea knowledge, be sure to buy some souvenirs that you can indulge in at home. [World O-CHA Festival 2025, Shizuoka, Japan](#)

Seasonal Topic

7. Enjoy a Relaxing Ride on a Retro Locomotive Train, Until March 31, Fukuoka



The Shiokazego is a period-style sightseeing train that runs past the charming townscape of the Mojiko Retro District and idyllic Kanmon Strait. The marine-blue cars are pulled by a romantic diesel locomotive across 2.1 kilometers for a trip that lasts about ten minutes. Although short, the ride offers memorable views of the scenery as the train chugs along at a leisurely pace, and the open windows allow passengers to enjoy a lovely breeze. A fantastic spectacle awaits when the train goes through a tunnel, as the ceiling of each car glows with projections of buildings from the Mojiko Retro District or shows fish that swim in the Kanmon Strait. The train runs on weekends and holidays and stops at Kanmon Kaikyo Mekari Station, which is right by an underwater tunnel that connects Kyushu and Honshu, offering plenty of sightseeing opportunities after disembarking.

[Mojiko Retro Seaside Train](#)

Seasonal Topic

8. Marvel at a Vast Canopy of Camellia Blossoms, Until Late March, Yamaguchi



Located at Toragasaki, the northern tip of Mt. Kasayama in Hagi City, is a camellia grove that stretches for about 10 hectares. It holds about 25,000 "Yabutsubaki" camellia trees that begin to bloom around December. The Yabutsubaki camellia is endemic to Japan and many species have been cultivated for ornamental gardens since ancient times. There are several varieties, including the "Hagi-komachi," "Hagi-no-sato," and "Kasayama-wabisuke," all of which differ in color, size, and appearance, which seem to surround the walking paths on all sides. You can enjoy the sight of the vibrant flowers decorating the tall camellia trees and the fallen blossoms painting the ground red. The Hagi Camellia Festival takes place during the blossoms' peak, which is around mid-February to mid-March. During the festival, you can visit vendors and other events. The grove is about a 20-minute drive from the Hagi Bus Center, located in a serene corner of the prefecture that lets you enjoy the tranquility of nature.

[Mt. Kasayama Camellia Grove](#)

National Park

9. See a Mountainside Dyed with the Gentle Pink of Cherry Blossoms, Nara



©Ministry of Environment

Yoshino Kumano National Park, which stretches across the three prefectures of Nara, Wakayama, and Mie, boasts a varied topography, with a coastline, forests and mountains. It is also renowned as one of the top cherry blossoms viewing destinations in Japan, particularly Mt. Yoshino, which marks the northern end of the Omine Okugake Trail—a sacred Shugendo route linking Yoshino and Kumano. Over 30,000 cherry blossom trees grow along the slopes of Mt. Yoshino, reaching their peak around early April as they bloom in succession from base to summit. Carefully tended by kind locals, they blanket the mountain in fluffy pink clouds, creating a breathtaking sight as the blossoms gradually shift to a delicate hue. The cherry blossoms of this mountain have been regarded as sacred since En no Gyoja, the founder of "Shugendo" (Japanese mountain asceticism), carved religious images on a cherry blossom tree while on the mountain. Be aware that traffic restrictions are in place during the peak viewing period to alleviate congestion.

[Yoshino Kumano National Park](#)

10. Witness the Dynamic Morning Practices of Professional Sumo Wrestlers and Eat Traditional Chanko Nabe, Tokyo



©TOKI

Sumo is said to be the national sport of Japan and is now arguably one of the most famous of the traditional sports that originated in the country. With a history that can be traced back more than 1,500 years, it still enjoys popularity among crowds who gather to witness the powerful matches that are centered around rituals and traditions that have remained largely unchanged for centuries. For a more intimate look into this ancient Japanese sport, consider this exclusive tour that takes you to the morning practices of the sumo wrestlers and immerse yourself in authentic Japanese culture. With the help of a guide/interpreter, you will get more detailed insight into the world of sumo as you watch the formidable wrestlers put their hearts and souls into their practices in preparation for an official sumo tournament. Your guide will teach you how to respectfully observe the practices while deepening your appreciation for the sport's traditions. After watching the engrossing morning matches, you will get to speak with the sumo wrestlers directly over a piping hot bowl of "chanko nabe," a hearty type of hot pot dish that is known as the dish of sumo wrestlers.

[Lunch with Sumo Wrestlers](#)

Expo 2025 Osaka Kansai

Immersing in Japan's Spirit of Culture, Nature, and Tradition



From Tokyo's bustling Kabukicho district to Hokuriku's serene landscapes, this journey across Japan captures the essence of cultural immersion and personal growth, aligning with one of Osaka Expo 2025's themes, "Empowering Lives." Kanto's energetic cityscapes provide a lively contrast to Hokuriku's peaceful nature, inviting travelers to explore both traditional and modern Japan. The Shinjuku Kabuki Hall showcases festival-inspired flavors from across the country, while Tobira Onsen Myojinkan offers relaxation in harmony with the mountains. In Fukui, ESHIKOTO blends sake heritage with culinary artistry, and Toyama's Museum of Art and Design empowers creativity and expression. Ending with the breathtaking Kurobe Gorge Railway, this journey is a tribute to Japan's rich tapestry of tradition and innovation.

For a unique side trip, visit the Tateyama Kurobe Alpine Route in late April and explore the famous Tateyama Snow Corridor. Towering snow walls, some over 20 meters high, create an unforgettable 500-meter pathway, where the pure white snow meets the vibrant blue sky.

For more details, visit the JNTO Expo 2025 website.

URL: <https://www.japan.travel/en/expo2025/article/kanto-hokuriku-shinetsu/>

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.

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