

# Japan Travel News

April - May 2009

Japan National Tourism Organization, Sydney

Autumn 2009



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## Sakura sakura!

As we head in to the chilly season the Japanese are welcoming the arrival of spring and of course their beloved cherry blossoms.

Due to warmer than usual weather in both February and March in the eastern and western regions of Japan, the cherry blossom season has arrived earlier than usual in many places. In fact, in some cities in Kyushu and Shikoku the pretty pink blossoms appeared almost two weeks earlier than the average year.

According to the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA), cherry trees started flowering in Tokyo and Kyoto, on March 21 and 19, respectively, also earlier than usual.

The cherry blossom season is forecast to begin in Tohoku from early April and the first forecast for Hokkaido will be announced by JMA on April 8.

### It's Hanami time!

The Japanese celebrate the cherry blossom season with picnic style parties - known as *Hanami* parties - under the

flowering cherry trees in public and private gardens, and parklands across Japan.

This centuries old tradition involves getting together with family, friends, colleagues or classmates and admiring the exquisite pink blossoms over some sweet dumplings and sake (over 20s) and juice for the kids.

Temples, shrines and castles are popular cherry blossom viewing spots, especially during the evening illuminations.

**Remember:** Full bloom (no less than 80 percent of the blossoms are open) and optimum viewing time occurs approximately **one week** after the estimated blooming date.

The JMA advises that actual blooming dates may vary from the estimated dates by approximately two to three days on average.

Rain, wind and temperatures can have a major effect on the cherry blossom viewing season, such as delaying or shortening it considerably.



Cherry blossom updates

[www.jnto.go.jp/eng/indepth/seasonal/sakura2009](http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/indepth/seasonal/sakura2009)

Popular cherry blossom spots

[www.japan-guide.com/e/e2011\\_where.html](http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2011_where.html)

## Gorgeous geisha grace Sydney travel show

Two maiko (apprentice geisha) and one geiko (full fledged geisha) from Kyoto were special guests at the Japan stands at the Sydney Travel XPO on March 14-15. The three girls, known as Miharu (maiko), Kanoka (maiko) and Hinagiku (geiko) in the geisha world, came from Kyoto's famous Gion

district where they are traditional entertainers. The trio, wearing elegant kimono, and elaborate hairstyles and makeup, chatted with visitors at the Japan stands and gave traditional Japanese dance performances on stage at the Expo's entertainment space.

Hinagiku (left) and Miharu.  
©Y.Kakimoto



## Relax at Tokyo's Spa LaQua



Image courtesy of JTGMT

Relaxing at a natural hot spring is an experience not to be missed when visiting Japan. Although most hot springs are located outside Tokyo, there is good news for the busy traveller. Tokyo's Spa LaQua offers a relaxing and rejuvenating experience right in the middle of Tokyo, at its natural hot spring baths.

LaQua is located inside Tokyo Dome City and consists of three zones: spa, attraction, and shop and restaurant. The spa zone, Spa LaQua, includes a Healing Baden Zone,

Rendezvous Zone, Spa Zone, Restaurant Zone, and Relaxation Zone. The spa water which is sourced from a natural hot spring 1,700 metres underground, is of the highest quality.

Spa LaQua features an outdoor bath, a massage bubble bath and saunas.

Visitors don't need to bring anything along to the spa - towels and other accessories are provide - which makes it a great place to relax with friends and family after a busy

day.

Spa LaQua is having its *Spring Fair 2009* which offers special spa treatments using cherry blossom salts and oils and a healthy Japanese lunch, until April 18.

LaQua is located right outside Korakuen Station on the Marunouchi Line and Suidobashi Station on the JR Line. It is a ten minute walk from Tokyo Station.

[www.tokyo-dome.co.jp/e/](http://www.tokyo-dome.co.jp/e/)  
(click on LaQua)

## Useful information

### Japan for Free

JNTO produces a *Japan for Free* travel guide listing some places to see and things to do for free. Check it out now and make your yen go further.

### Silver Pavilion maintenance

The Silver Pavilion building (*Kannoden*) at Kyoto's Ginkakuji is currently undergoing maintenance and has been covered over thus is not able to be viewed. Visitors may still pass through the temple garden as usual. The

work will continue until around February 2010.

### Free entry to Yoshikien

International visitors can receive free entry to Nara City's Yoshikien (garden) upon presentation of their passport. The usual entry fee for adults is 250 yen. Yoshikien features a moss garden, a pond garden and a teahouse garden and is open daily from March 20 through December 27. Located ten minute's walk east of Kintetsu Nara Station.

### Hamamatsu International Mosaiculture (MIH) 2009

Hamamatsu City will play host to this major international horticultural event from September 19 through November 23. Mosaiculture is a type of horticultural art involving the creation of three dimensional floral sculptures. Around 1.3 million people are expected to visit the 66 day event. Mosaiculture from more than 30 countries will be on display.

**Mosaiculture is a type of horticultural art involving the creation of three dimensional floral sculptures.**

**Japan for Free** [www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/rtg/pdf/pg-813.pdf](http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/rtg/pdf/pg-813.pdf)

**Hamamatsu International Mosaiculture** <http://mih2009.com/english/index.html>

## Useful websites

### Japan-i

Tokyo Chizu Publishing Co., Ltd have launched a website and free paper for international visitors to Japan. Entitled, Japan-i, both provide the latest information about sightseeing and travelling in Japan, as well as information about Japan's culture, arts and fashion. The Japan-i website is available in four languages and boasts more than 100 new items of information every month. The

free paper is published at the end of each month and can be picked up from around 900 locations in the Tokyo Metropolitan area, including Narita Airport, hotels, department stores, stations, major tourist information offices, travel agencies and embassies.

<http://japan-i.jp/>

### QL Liner

QL Liner is a courier company offering luggage delivery

services across Japan. The company offers delivery services to and from Narita Airport and in addition to suitcases and hand luggage, handles ski equipment and golf bags.

[www.qlliner.com/index.html](http://www.qlliner.com/index.html)

### Super Hotel

Check out Super Hotel for comfortable and economical accommodation. They have 37 properties across Japan.

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

## Experience spring vegetarian cuisine at Mt Koya

World Heritage listed Mt Koya is a religious town in the Koya mountain range south of Osaka. It is home to more than 100 Buddhist temples, halls and towers, a Buddhist college and 5000 residents, 1000 of whom are Buddhist monks.

There are 52 temple lodgings (*shukubo*) which offer overnight stays for visitors. During a stay at a temple lodging, visitors can experience morning prayers and *shojin ryori*, the vegetarian cuisine of Buddhist monks.

*Shojin ryori* is skillfully

prepared without using any meat, fish, onion or garlic, hence it has a very subtle flavour. *Shojin ryori* can include tempura, fried spring wild plants, herbs, *koyadofu*, *gomadofu*, miso soup, sweet and sour seaweed in a vinegar sauce and many other vegetable dishes.

For over 1,100 years, the old recipes and cooking methods have been passed down from monk to monk, chef to chef.

One of the most important dishes is *gomadofu*, a type of tofu made from sesame

seeds. At first glance, *gomadofu* looks like regular soybean tofu, but it is actually more nutritious and tastes even better.

The ideal time to visit Mt Koya for a temple stay is in spring and summer while the weather is warm.

With an elevation of 1000 metres, Mt Koya is freezing in winter so visiting the town on a day trip is recommended during the chilly season.

Mt Koya can be accessed by the Nankai Railway.



**Shojin ryori doesn't include any animal protein, onion or garlic.**

Mt Koya Tourist Association  
Nankai Railway

[www.shukubo.jp/eng/index.html](http://www.shukubo.jp/eng/index.html)  
[www.nankai.co.jp/global/index.html](http://www.nankai.co.jp/global/index.html)

## Tsukiji Fish Market

Tokyo Central Wholesale Market (Tsukiji Fish Market) has been, for many years, a popular spot for tourists with the famous tuna auctions taking top spot on visitors' "must see" lists.

However, due to various problems that have arisen, JNTO recommends members of the general public (both from overseas and Japan) do not visit Tsukiji Fish Market for the purpose of observing the early morning auctions. The auctions are held exclusively for professional traders and

are not designed to be a tourist attraction.

Visitors to the market must obey strict rules that have been set in order to maintain both serious business in the market and tourist safety.

These rules are: 1. No flash photography; 2. No carrying of dangerous goods; 3. No pets; 4. No smoking; 5. No unaccompanied access by wheelchair; 6. No babies, infants or strollers; 7. No sandals or high heels; 8. No large bags or suitcases; 9. Move around in groups of five

or less. A list of rules is to be picked up from one of the Inspection Stations located at the Main Gate, Ichibashi Gate, Kaikobashi Gate and Kachidoki Gate.

Visitors can enjoy both the atmosphere of the Fish Market and fresh seafood at the *Uogashi Yokochi* restaurant area without having to visit the auctions. Sushi and other fresh seafood dishes are served here on the days the market is open. It closes around 1:00pm and is popular among tourists and locals alike.

**Visitors can enjoy both the atmosphere of the Fish Market and fresh seafood at the Uogashi Yokochi restaurant area.**

## See the sights of Tokyo by bicycle

Tokyo Great Cycling Tour has been running cycling tours for international visitors since 2006 and to date has shown people from 19 different countries the sights of Tokyo by bicycle.

The bicycle tours visit the major sightseeing spots in Tokyo and are run on weekends throughout the year, with a different route on

each day. The Saturday tour is the *Tokyo Bay Ride* and takes in the sights of Nihonbashi, Tskudajima, Tsukiji, Odaiba, Tokyo Tower and Imperial Palace. The Sunday tour is the *Sumo Wrestler's Ride* and includes Nihonbashi, Ryogoku, Asakusa, Ueno, University of Tokyo and Imperial Palace. Tokyo Great Cycling Tour also offers special seasonal tours.

Watch their website for details.

Bookings for tours are essential and can be made by phone, email or online.

Tour fee: 10,000 yen (includes bike rental, helmet, lunch, insurance and guide).

Tel: +81-3-4590-2995  
Email: [info@tokyocycling.jp](mailto:info@tokyocycling.jp)  
[www.tokyocycling.jp](http://www.tokyocycling.jp)



**Tokyo Tower is one of the city's icons that can be seen on the cycling tour. ©Yasufumi Nishi / ©JNTO**

## *New and unique hotels*

Several new accommodation properties are set to open in Japan in the coming few years. The properties will cater to both business and leisure travellers and offer unique attributes such as renowned architectural designs, and countryside locations with easy access to nearby cities. A few properties are highlighted here.

### **Shangri-La Tokyo (opened March 2009)**

This luxurious international hotel opened a new property on March 2, 2009 in Tokyo's Marunouchi district, an emerging commercial hub in

central Tokyo. With a prime location in the heart of Tokyo's business district, Shangri-La Tokyo is just a ten minute walk from the Imperial Palace and major commercial areas.

### **St. Regis, Osaka (Oct 2010)**

St. Regis will make its premiere in Japan in the country's third largest city. With its location in a newly developed commercial tower on Midouji Avenue - Osaka's historic main street - the St. Regis will be right in the centre of the city's historic merchant culture and close to international air transport. Lively Osaka has much to see and do, and this new luxurious

Western style hotel will provide an urban oasis to business and leisure travellers alike.

### **Westin Hotel, Sendai, Miyagi (August 2010)**

Westin Hotels is opening a new property with 287 rooms in Sendai, the largest city in Japan's Tohoku (north eastern) region. As one of the business and commercial hubs in the country, Sendai is the gateway to several of the region's historic and cultural destinations. Opening in August 2010, Westin Sendai intends to target international travellers and conventions.

### **Sheraton Okinawa Ginowan Hotel (March 2011)**

Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide is planning to open their first property in Okinawa in the northern spring of 2011. The Sheraton Okinawa Ginowan Hotel is a 40 minute drive from Naha Airport, and a 15 minute drive from downtown Naha. Ten percent of the 245 guestrooms will be suites. Located south of the Japanese archipelago, Okinawa is blessed with beautiful beaches, coral reefs and a rich local culture known for longevity of life. Okinawa's subtropical climate makes it the largest beach resort destination in Japan.

### **The Capitol Hotel Tokyu (northern autumn 2010)**

With a location in Tokyo's Nagatacho 2-chome area, this new hotel will be the flagship property of the nationwide Tokyu Hotel Group. The property is being built on the former site of the Capitol Tokyu Hotel which closed its doors in November 2006. Several shopping areas and Imperial Palace are in walking distance of the site.

### **Capella Hotels and Resorts, Niseko, (winter 2010)**

Capella Hotels and Resorts are developing a new property in Niseko. Capella Niseko will be designed by world-

renowned architect Tadao Ando and will have 80 guestrooms, all with a private hot spring bath. The resort will also feature approximately 150 residences including townhouses, villas and condominiums. Capella Niseko will be set on 32 acres adjacent to Niseko Annupuri International Ski Area.

***This new hotel will be the flagship property of the nationwide Tokyu Hotel Group.***

**Tokyo's Imperial Palace is a short walk from Shangri-La Tokyo.**



**Niseko Annupuri, the location of Capella Hotels and Resorts' new property opening in winter 2010.**

**Capella Niseko** [www.capellahotels.com/niseko.php](http://www.capellahotels.com/niseko.php)

**Shangri-La Tokyo** [www.shangri-la.com/en/property/tokyo/shangrila](http://www.shangri-la.com/en/property/tokyo/shangrila)

**St. Regis Osaka**

[www.starwoodhotels.com/stregis/property/overview/index.html?propertyID=3198](http://www.starwoodhotels.com/stregis/property/overview/index.html?propertyID=3198)

**The Westin Sendai**

[www.starwoodhotels.com/westin/property/overview/index.html?propertyID=3453](http://www.starwoodhotels.com/westin/property/overview/index.html?propertyID=3453)

**Sheraton Okinawa Ginowan**

[www.starwoodhotels.com/sheraton/property/overview/index.html?propertyID=3410](http://www.starwoodhotels.com/sheraton/property/overview/index.html?propertyID=3410)

## Japan Rail News

The Japan Railways Group launched new train schedules and passenger services on March 14. Following are some of the features of the new services.

### Shinkansen improvements

- JR has increased Nozomi and Kodama services on the Tokaido/Sanyo Shinkansen Lines, and Hayate services on the Tohoku Shinkansen Line.

- All N700 series Nozomi and Hikari trains operating on the Tokaido Shinkansen Line between Tokyo and Shin-Osaka now offer internet access service at all seats.

- All 17 stations on the Tokaido

Shinkansen Line are equipped with wireless LAN in waiting rooms. Until March 14, only six stations had this service.

### Non-smoking areas increase

- JR Central's station platforms for regular lines are now non-smoking.

- From April 1, JR East station buildings in the Tokyo Metropolitan area will become completely non-smoking.

- All JR Kyushu Limited Express Services are non-smoking within the JR Kyushu area.

### Other useful information

East Japan Railways has a telephone information service

called the JR East InfoLine, to assist visitors with questions about rail travel that may arise while they are journeying through Japan, no matter which JR company they are using.

Operating daily between 10:00am and 6:00pm (closed Year End and New Year holidays), the service provides information in English, Chinese and Korean

While the JR East InfoLine does not handle reservations, the InfoLine staff can however direct travellers to the nearest station with a reservations office.



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**JR East InfoLine in Japan**  
**050-2016-1603**  
**(not toll free number)**

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

## JR East Pass vouchers available online

JR East Pass exchange vouchers are now available for purchase online at JR East's foreign language website. The new service was launched on February 2 and gives overseas visitors to Japan the added convenience of being able to purchase the exchange vouchers via internet from home or work.

The online sales service requires customers to pay by credit card (Visa and

MasterCard only) before a confirmation email which serves as the exchange voucher, is sent. Customers must print a copy of the email and take it to an official JR East Pass exchange office once in Japan to receive their rail pass(es).

The JR East Pass is an economical and flexible rail pass for traveling around the East Japan area. It is valid for travel on both JR East's

Shinkansen super express services and regular services.

The pass is available in 5-day, 10-day and Flexible 4-day varieties, with discounts on ordinary (economy) passes available for children (6-11 years old) and youths (12-25 years old).

More information at [www.jreast.co.jp/e/eastpass/](http://www.jreast.co.jp/e/eastpass/)

**The JR East Pass is an economical and flexible rail pass for traveling around East Japan.**

## Kyushu shinkansen named Sakura

West Japan Railway Co. and Kyushu Railway Co. have announced that the bullet train that will run on the Kyushu Shinkansen's Kagoshima route when it opens in 2011, will be named *Sakura*.

The name which means cherry blossom, was selected by the public and received 7927 out of the 168,951 votes cast.

Other names for the train which proved popular were *Hayabusa*, *Hayato*, *Satsuma* and *Mirai*.

*Sakura* will commence services in the northern spring of 2011 and will run between Shin-Osaka and Kagoshima-Chuo, providing a direct connection between the central Kansai region and southern Kyushu.

At present, the Sanyo Shinkansen service terminates at Hakata in northern Kyushu and the Kyushu Shinkansen service begins from Shin-Yatsushiro in western Kyushu and runs to Kagoshima.

The completion of the link between Hakata and Shin-Yatsushiro will make travel to and from Kyushu even more convenient.



**Sakura will run between Shin-Osaka and Kagoshima (pictured above).**

## Japan National Tourism Organization, Sydney

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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 April - May

April 29 (Wed)	Showa Day
May 3 (Sun)	Constitution Day (holiday to be observed on May 6)
May 4 (Mon)	Greenery Day
May 5 (Tues)	Children's Day

The period April 29 through May 6 (in 2009), is Golden Week, a peak travel season in Japan.

## What's on in Japan

### Tokyo and vicinity

May 7-15

#### **Kanda Matsuri, Kanda Myojin (shrine), Tokyo**

One of the three biggest festivals in Tokyo, the Kanda Matsuri honours the three deities enshrined at Kanda Myojin. With the main festivals held only in odd numbered years, the Kanda Matsuri is a dramatic and impressive event. [www.jnto.go.jp/eng/indepth/history/traditionalevents/a23\\_fes\\_kanda.html](http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/indepth/history/traditionalevents/a23_fes_kanda.html)

May 15-17

#### **Sanja Matsuri, Asakusa Jinja (shrine), Tokyo**

Another of Tokyo's biggest festivals, the Sanja Matsuri attracts 1.5 million spectators over its three day run. The festivities begin on the Friday afternoon with a parade featuring traditionally dressed musicians and dancers. The highlights of the weekend include the carrying of *mikoshi* (portable shrines) on Saturday and the appearance of three large *mikoshi* on Sunday. [www.jnto.go.jp/eng/indepth/history/traditionalevents/a26\\_fes\\_sanja.html](http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/indepth/history/traditionalevents/a26_fes_sanja.html)

### Kansai Area

April 1 - May 24

#### **Spring Geiko and Maiko dances, Kyoto City**

Each spring song and dance performances are staged by Kyoto's Maiko's quarters. The dates and venue for each quarter are: **Miyako Odori** April 1-30 at Gion Kōbu Kaburenjo; **Kyo Odori** April 4-19 at Miyagawa-cho Kaburenjo; **Kitano Odori** April 15-25 at Kamishichiken Kaburenjo; **Kamogawa Odori** May 1-24 at Pontocho Kaburenjo. (*Kaburenjo* means theatre)  
Miyako Odori information [www.miyako-odori.jp/miyakoodori/english.html](http://www.miyako-odori.jp/miyakoodori/english.html)

### Nationwide

April 8 **Hana Matsuri**

A celebration of Buddha's birth Temples all over Japan perform a memorial service and a baby Buddha figurine is sprinkled with sweet tea (*ama-cha*) by worshippers.



Tokyo's Kanda Matsuri  
©Y.Shimizu/©JNTO