

So Very Niigata: Beaches

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Did you know that Niigata actually has the most beaches per prefecture? There's no better way to beat the summer heat than hitting the beach! Check out one of the beaches below this summer with your friends or family!



Sasagawa Beach

Sasagawa Beach

Sasagawa Beach is located right in the center of the renowned Sasagawa Nagare coastline, well known for its jutting rock cliffs and beautiful waters. Very popular in summer, many visitors take a drive to see the rest of the coast. You can grill here and there's a path to the nearby Itagai beach.

Season: Mid-July to mid-August

Location: Sasagawa, Murakami

Access: 15 min walk from JR Kuwagawa Station.

Senami Onsen Beach

This is a 1 kilometer beach stretching out from the famous Senami Onsen area. With over 100,000 visitors every summer, this is an incredibly popular locale, and people staying overnight can go straight from their ryokan to the beach!

Season: Mid-July to mid-August

Location: Senami Onsen area, Murakami

Access: 10 min bus ride from JR Murakami Station or a 14 min drive from the Murakami Senami Onsen IC.

Unohama Swimming Beach

The Unohama Swimming Beach is popular both with people from Niigata and nearby prefectures, due to its soft sand and beautiful water. The beach is also only a short walk away from JR Katamachi station, making it an easy day trip.

Season: Early July to late August

Location: Ogata-ku Kudohama, Joetsu

Access: 15 min walk from JR Katamachi Station, 6 min drive from the Ogata Smart IC

Sekiya Beach

Located right in the heart of Niigata City, Sekiya Beach is easy to get to by car, and is lined with little shops and restaurants where you can relax and enjoy a delicious meal and refreshing drink. The beach is also next to the Marine Pia Aquarium.

Season: Early July to mid-August

Location: Sekiya, Chuo-ku, Niigata City

Access: 20 min walk from JR Sekiya Station, 20 min car ride from Niigata-nishi IC or the Niigata Chuo IC

Futatsugame Beach

Futatsugame Beach is one of the most scenic places in Niigata. Snuggled in between two rock outcroppings the beach is a little difficult to get to, but worth the trip. It was chosen as one of the 100 best beaches in Japan, one of only three beaches in Niigata to be so honored.

Season: Mid-July to mid-August

Location: Washizaki, Sado

Access: 60 min by car from Ryotsu port, 20 min walk from Futatsugame bus stop



Futatsugame Beach

Things to do while the Weather is Hot: Fireworks

Known as the “Kingdom of Fireworks,” Niigata has some of the biggest and best fireworks displays in all of Japan, which start in mid-June and then last until mid-September. With displays at over 70 different places in Niigata, there’s sure to be one that you and family or friends can enjoy!

For a more complete list of fireworks displays, check out the website below:

<http://www.niigata-kankou.or.jp/oshirase/14052202.html> (Japanese)

Gion Kashiwazaki Fireworks

Taking place out over the ocean, the finale of the Kashiwazaki fireworks will include the continuous firing of 300 ball fireworks, including one display where 100 will be fired at the same exact time.

Address: Minatomachi Seaside Park, Kashiwazaki

Access: 20 minute walk from JR Kashiwazaki Station

Dates: July 26th

Nagaoka Fireworks Festival

Perhaps the most famous fireworks display in Japan, the Nagaoka fireworks festival was originally started to celebrate the reconstruction of the city following bombing in WWII. This year’s festival will feature 20,000 fireworks and is sure to be an unforgettable sight.

Location: Shinano River, next to the Chosei Bridge

Access: 20 minute walk from JR Nagaoka Station, 20 minute car ride from the Nagaoka IC

Dates: August 2nd and 3rd



Nagaoka Fireworks Festival

Niigata Festival Fireworks

Not to be outdone by Nagaoka, Niigata City puts on three nights of spectacular fireworks during the annual Niigata Summer Festival. The first night will feature a brief 5 minute opening, but the show on the second night will be a very unique show, in which music is matched to the fireworks display. The third night is the grand finale and will feature over an hour of fireworks!

Location: Along the banks of the Shinano River, between the Bandai Bridge and the Yachiyo Bridge

Access: 15 minute walk from the JR Niigata Station

Dates: August 8th – 10th



Niigata Fireworks Festival

Ojiya Festival Fireworks

Funded by the citizens of Ojiya, this festival is home to Niigata’s largest fireworks barrage. The grand finale will include 5 giant ball fireworks being shot off at the same time.

Location: Downriver from the Asahi Bridge, Ojiya

Access: 15 minute walk from JR Ojiya Station

Dates: August 23rd

Katakai Festival Fireworks Display

With a history dating back to the Edo period, the fireworks at the Katakai Festival are a great show of traditional fireworks. The centerpiece is a giant ball firework, whose explosion can reach up to 800 meters across!

Location: Katakaimachi, Ojiya

Access: 20 minute bus ride from JR Ojiya station, 30 minute bus ride from JR Nagaoka station. 5 minute car ride from the Ojiya IC.

Dates: September 9th and 10th

ALT Interview: Bianca Yanuaria

Bianca Yanuaria is an Assistant Language Teacher who currently works in Sanjo.

Q) What brought you to Niigata?

I'm from Hawaii where there are a lot of Japanese-American people and many Japanese tourists. In my opinion, Japanese tourists are the most kind out of all of the visitors that come to Hawaii. I've frequently traveled outside of the US, but I wanted the experience of living in another country. I thought Japan would be the best choice after seeing how interested Japanese people are in Hawaii and our culture, it made me curious about Japan too. Plus I knew I would be able to survive with eating delicious Japanese food every day. Through the JET Program, I was placed in Niigata.

Q) What was your first impression of Niigata and Japan? Has that impression changed?

Before moving to Japan, I had never visited this country. My first initial impression of it from my bird's eye view from the airplane was that it was beautiful and covered in green. When I rode the bullet train from Tokyo to Niigata, I saw mountains and lots of rice fields. I was very excited to be moving to a place filled with so much nature. I have been able to truly experience its beauty during all the seasons. (In Hawaii, we only have summer all year round.)

Q) Did anything surprise you about life in Japan?

On my first day in Niigata, I was surprised by the sink on top of the toilet. I thought it was such an ingenious idea and I think we should definitely have this in America too. I was also surprised that many people who get sick wear masks and continue going to school/work. In my country, people usually stay home to rest and get better. Onsens were surprising as well, but now I'm a huge fan!

Q) Do you have a favorite spot or thing to do in Niigata?

My favorite restaurant in Niigata is Hakoiva, a katsu restaurant in Niitsu. The food is very, very yummy! And the family that owns the restaurant is so amazing! They treat everyone like they are a part of their family too.



Bianca planting rice

Q) Is there anything you really like about living in Niigata? And do you find anything difficult about living in Niigata?

I love that people are friendly, welcoming and open to foreigners. Even with my lack of Japanese and (some) Japanese people's lack of English, I have luckily made many friends and have gotten

to know my co-teachers well.

The winter was the most difficult part of living in Niigata for me. It was beautiful to see snow falling for the first time, but driving was nerve-racking especially in the mornings and it was cold not just outside, but inside of my apartment as well. I was stuck under my kotatsu for the majority of winter.

Q) Have you shared any aspects of your own culture with the people in Niigata?

Yes! I danced hula for my students at their afterschool clubs and I performed a special Christmas hula for the teachers at an end of the year party. In my classes, I have taught my students about Hawaii - local Hawaiian foods, foods that were introduced to Hawaii from Okinawa, the different islands, our state symbols such as the flag, fish, flower, tree and bird, the population, our high school system, sports, and water activities.

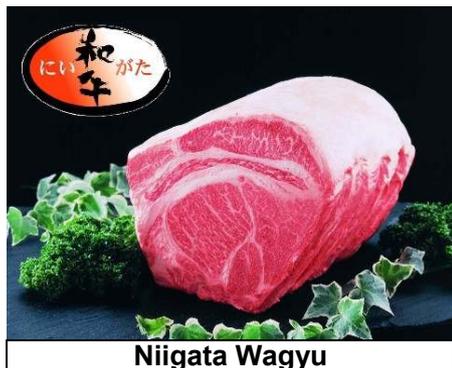
Q) What are your future plans?

I will be returning to Hawaii to work as an elementary school counselor this August.

Q) Do you have any advice for anyone else living in Japan?

Be completely open to embracing Japanese culture (even trying foods like raw horse meat) is the best advice I could give. :) I've tried Judo, tea ceremony, went diving for seaweed used in miso soup, kayaked in a cave with 10,000 bats, made sushi rolls and plum wine, did pottery, planted rice and more. My year in Japan has been an amazing opportunity for more amazing opportunities. And I hope everyone gets to try lots of new things that they wouldn't have the chance to do in their home countries too.

いただきます: Niigata Wagyu



Niigata Wagyu

Japanese beef, or *Wagyu*, is known all over the world for its rich texture, impressive marbling, and incredibly high quality. *Wagyu* has a long history, but really coalesced in the late 1800s when cattle farming started becoming more commonplace in Japan. In an effort to raise the finest cattle, farmers would give them high quality grain and sake, and massage them so that they didn't get stiff on the cramped Japanese farms. Nowadays, *Wagyu* is graded both by the meat yield on a scale from A to C, and on the quality of the meat, including things like color, firmness, and texture, on a scale from 1 to 5.

Though the most famous brand abroad is likely Kobe beef, a number of places produce high quality *wagyu* in Japan, one of them being Murakami, right here in Niigata. In order to be certified as Niigata *Wagyu*, the beef has to meet the following four criteria.

1. The meat can be proven to have come from a neutered "Japanese Black" steer or virgin heifer.
2. The cow was fattened in Niigata, and spent most of its life here.
3. The meat is an A or B in yield, and a 3 or above for quality.
4. Be able to certify the movement history of the beef from birth to shipment through the livestock individual identification system.

Beyond this, only *wagyu* made in Murakami, Sekikawa, or Tainai with a quality rating of 4 or 5 is allowed to be called Murakami *Wagyu*. If you're interested in trying some of Niigata's amazing *Wagyu* beef, try looking in your local grocery stores for the Niigata *Wagyu* seal.

Events Calendar

24th Niigata Jazz Street-Duke Ellington Memorial

Held in memory of the Jazz great Duke Ellington, who was made an honorary citizen of Niigata in 1966, various establishments in Niigata City will feature live jazz performances.

Dates and times: July 19-20, 2014; 12:00~23:00

Location: 30 locations in Furumachi/Bandai/south side of Niigata Station, Chuo-ku, Niigata City

Access: To Furumachi: 10 minutes by bus from JR Niigata Station on any bus headed through Furumachi (古町); to Bandai: 10-15 minute walk from the Bandai exit of JR Niigata Station; south side of the station immediately accessible from JR Niigata Station

Costs: Outdoor events are free; 1,000 yen for a 1-day pass, 500 yen per drink

Don-GALA! Festival

This festival in Kashiwazaki is dedicated to *yosakoi* dancing. Teams from all over Niigata and other prefectures will perform in various locations around the city.

Dates and times: July 19-20

July 19: 18:00- 21:00 in front of Kashiwazaki Station and on Nikoniko-dori

July 20: 11:00-17:00 in front of Kashiwazaki Station, Nikoniko-dori, Pikkara-dori

Locations: Kashiwazaki Station, Nikoniko-dori, Pikkara-dori, Enma-dori

Access: 10 to 20 minute walk from JR Kashiwazaki Station depending on the performance

Uonuma Summer Snow Festival

Even though summer is great, the heat and humidity can make some people pine for the days of winter. Thankfully, the folks in Uonuma have found a way to enjoy the best of both worlds! After storing lots of snow in winter, they bring it out to have two days of fun in the sun and snow. There will be sledding, canoeing, hiking, and all kinds of fun things to do.

Dates and times: July 26-27, 2014; 10:00-15:00

Locations: Ginzandaira, Uonuma

Access: 40 minutes by car from the Koide IC on the Kanetsu Expressway via R352 and the Okutadami Silver Line

Sea of Japan Sunset Concert

A special stage will be set up on Aoyama Beach for an evening concert featuring Tomomi Kahara, Satoru Shiotani, Misato Watanabe, and Hiromi Motomiya.

Dates and times: August 9, 2014; doors open at 16:00, concert from 17:00 to 20:30

Locations: Aoyama Seaside Special Stage, Aoyama, Nishi-ku, Niigata City

Access: 15 minute walk from JR Kobari Station; 25 minutes by shuttle bus from JR Niigata Station

Earth Celebration 2014

Earth Celebration is an amazing musical event put on by the one of the world's premier Taiko groups, Kodo. Despite the fact that Kodo tours the world performing, every year in late August they return to their home location on Sado for Earth Celebration. The three days will be filled with workshops, performances, an open air market, and amazing fun, leading up to three main concerts each night. Earth Celebration is a chance to see some of the best Taiko players in the world doing what they do best.

Dates and times: August 22-24

Locations: Sado Island, Shiroyama Park and other areas

Access: 10 minute walk from Ogi Port on Sado Island, 60 minute drive from Ryotsu Port.

Homepage: <http://www.kodo.or.jp/ec/en/>

Echigo-Tsumari Craft Fair

Dozens of different artisans specializing in everything from paper craft to stonework will gather in Tsuman for a massive craft fair.

Dates and times: September 13-14; 10:00-17:00 (until 16:00 on the 14th)

Locations: New Greenpia Tsuman, 12300 Akinari, Tsuman

Access: 15 minutes by taxi from JR Tsuman Station; 60 minutes by car from the Echigo-Kawaguchi and the Shiozawa-Ishiuchi IC on the Kanetsu Expressway

Summer Festivals

One of the best things about summer in Japan is the festivals! Though most Japanese festivals have some things in common, like food stalls, games, and fireworks, each one has a distinctly unique flavor as well. Below is just a small sampling of the festivals in Niigata, and there is sure to be one near you, so get out and enjoy the summer!



Kanbara Festival

Kanbara Festival

One of the most famous festivals in the prefecture, the Kanbara festival is the perfect place to experience a summer festival with a "Niigata" charm. Nearly 400 stalls will be set up in the area around Kanbara shrine, selling all kinds of goods, and you can even get your hands on some of Niigata's famous Poppoyaki snacks! On the temple grounds there will also be shooting games, ghost stories, and a haunted house to really get you into a summer festival mood.

Date and times: Monday, June 30 to Wednesday, July 2 **Location:** 3-18 Nagaminemachi, Chuou-ku, Niigata City

Access: 15 minute walk from the Bandai exit of JR Niigata Station. 20 minutes by car from either the Niigata-nishi IC on the Hokuriku Expressway, or the Niigata Chuo IC on the Banetsu Expressway.

Hakusan Shrine Summer Festival

The shrine and park grounds will be bustling with people coming to visit the shrine and enjoy some delicious festival food. As the shrine is home to a god of marriage, many couples also come to visit.

Dates and Times: July 12-18

Location: Hakusan Shrine, 1-1 Ichibanboridori-cho, Chuo-ku, Niigata City

Access: 10 minute bus ride on Kanko Junkan "Dokaben" buses from the Bandai exit of JR Niigata Station (get off at the Hakusan Koen stop); 10 minute walk from JR Hakusan Station

Urasa Summer Festival

The festival will feature traditional dancing, a formal procession on Saturday, and fireworks on Sunday night,

Dates and Times: July 19-20; parade from 1-9pm on the 19th, fireworks from 8pm on the 20th

Location: Hakusan Shrine, Urasa, Minamiuonuma

Access: 5 minute walk from the west exit of JR Urasa Station

Murakami Arakawa Festival

Enjoy traditional Arakawa music, delicious food, and fireworks, including a streak of 100 explosions for the finale!

Dates and Times: August 1-2, parade from 7pm on the 1st, fireworks from 7pm on the 2nd

Location: Sakamachi station area and the banks of the Arakawa River, Murakami

Access: Just outside of JR Sakamachi Station; 14 minutes by car from the Arakawa-Tainai IC on the Nihonkai-Tohoku Expressway

Niigata Festival

As perhaps the biggest festival in the prefecture, the Niigata Festival is not to be missed! The highlight is the folk dance procession, where roughly 15,000 people will gather on the streets of Niigata to dance the night away!

Dates and Times: August 8-10; folk dancing parade from 7pm on the 8th, parades starting at 10am on the 9th and 10th, and fireworks from 7:15-9pm on the 10th

Location: Furumachi and Bandai, Chuo-ku, Niigata City

Access: 5-10 minutes by bus from JR Niigata Station on any bus headed to Furumachi

Sanjo Summer Festival

A great summer festival with all of the favorites, parades, fireworks and Soh Odori!

Dates and Times: August 1-3, parade and dancing from 6pm on the 1st, fireworks from 7:30pm on the 2nd, and Soh Odori from 5:30 on the 3rd.

Location: Grassy area by the river, Honcho 6-chome, Sanjo

Access: 10 minute walk from JR Kita-Sanjo Station; 10 minutes by car from the Tsubame-Sanjo IC on the Hokuriku Expressway

Akadamari Port Festival

This is not your typical summer festival! The main event of the Akadamari Port Festival is sumo wrestling on a platform on the water. Participants can be male or female and everyone from elementary school students to adults can participate. There's also a cardboard boat race, in which participants color boats made of nothing but cardboard and tape, then try to race them 60 meters paddling with their hands. Plus there's regular festival stuff, too-parades, fireworks, food stalls, etc.

Dates and Times: August 2-3, fireworks from 8pm on the 3rd

Location: Akadamari Port area, Sado

Access: 1 minute walk from Akadamari Port, Ferry from Teradamari Port in Nagaoka



Akadamari Port Festival

Echigo Kamo River Summer Festival

Enjoy fireworks and setting paper lanterns adrift on the Kamo River.

Dates and Times: August 14, festival from 12:15-9pm, fireworks from 8:30 pm

Location: Kamo River bank, Kamo

Access: 8 minute walk from JR Kamo Station; 20 minutes by car from the Tsubame-Sanjo IC on the Hokuriku Expressway

Niitsu Summer Festival

There will be a huge parade of traditional dancers on the 16th and 17th, and on the 19th and 20th the streets will be lined with shops as giant traditional floats are crashed into each other in an amazing spectacle.

Dates and Times: August 19, 20

Location: Menukidori, Honcho, Niitsu, Akiha-ku, Niigata City

Access: 5 minute walk from JR Niitsu Station; 10 minutes by car from the Niitsu IC on the Banetsu Expressway

Kurosaki Festival

There will be plenty of events going on at the Niigata Furusato Village.

Dates and Times: August 24; festival from 11:15am-3:30pm, edamame festival from 10am-2pm; traditional craft demonstrations, displays, and shop stalls open from 10:30am-2pm; fireworks from 7:30-8:30pm

Location: Furusatomura, 2307 Yamada, Nishi-ku, Niigata City

Access: 20-30 minutes by bus from JR Niigata Station (take buses from platform 9 headed to Ono, Shirone/Katahigashi, and Kiba); 5 minutes by car from the Niigata-nishi IC on the Hokuriku Expressway. You may also take the Niigata Water Shuttle to the "Niigata Furusato Mura" stop.

Suibara Festival

There will be a parade of people dressed in feudal costumes on the 24th, and a fireworks show on the night of the 25th.

Dates and Times: August 24-25

Location: Daikansho to Honchodori, Agano

Access: 5 minutes by car from JR Suibara Station; 15 minutes by car from the Niitsu IC on the Banetsu Expressway

Ojiya Festival

With over 7000 fireworks going off, the Ojiya festival will definitely be a fun time!

Dates and Times: August 22-24; fireworks from 7:15 on the 23rd

Location: Honchodori/Asahi Bridge and other locations, Ojiya

Access: 15 minute walk from JR Ojiya Station; 5 minutes by car from the Ojiya IC on the Kanetsu expressway to a special parking lot from with a shuttle bus will operate on the 25th for the fireworks show

Kenshin Festival

Uesugi Kenshin, local hero of the Sengoku era (late 15th-late 16th century, lived in the Joetsu region, so his heroism is celebrated every year by a parade of men dressed in traditional armor followed by a reenactment of the battles of Kawanakajima. The famous musician Gackt is expected to reprise his role as Kenshin!

Dates and Times: August 23-24

Location: Around the remains of Kasugayama Castle, Joetsu

Access: 10 minute walk from JR Kasugayama Station



Ojiya Festival

Koide Festival

A festival with all the regular fun things, plus a folk dance on Sunday night that everyone is welcome to join!

Dates and Times: August 25-27; 5:30-9pm on the 25th, 9am-9pm on the 26 (fireworks from 7:30-9:00pm), 7:30am to 8:45pm on the 27th

Location: Honchodori, former town of Koide, Uonuma

Access: 5 minute walk from JR Koide Station; 5 minutes by car from the Koide IC on the Banetsu Expressway

Tokamachi Festival

A great traditional festival filled with folk dances, fireworks, parades, and even a kids sumo tournament.

Dates and Times: August 25-27 (Folk dancing starts at 7:30pm on the 25th, fireworks start at 7:30pm on the 26th)

Location: Ekidori, Honchodori, Takadachodori, and Showachodori, Tokamachi

Access: Tokamachi Station area (accessible by JR and Hokuhoku lines), 30 minutes by car from the Muikamachi IC on the Kanetsu Expressway

Mochihito Festival

Held to celebrate a local hero from the Heian period, this festival includes a costume parade, taiko drums, Japanese court music, and even a fireworks show.

Dates and Times: August 24

Location: Special stage in front of the grain elevator of the JA Kashiwazaki Oguni branch/146 Ara-machi, Oguni-machi, Nagaoka

Access: From JR Nagaoka Station, take a bus that goes to the Oguni Shako stop and get off at the Aramachi Shimoguchi stop, then walk 5 minutes. 15 minutes by car from the Ojiya IC on the Kanetsu Expressway. Free shuttle bus available from the Nagaoka City hall's Oguni-machi branch office.

Niigata Soh Odori

Niigata Soh Odori is a traditional dance that was originally started 300 years ago as a way to pray for safety from disaster and disease, and has grown into a huge modern dance festival! With over 260 *yosakoi* dance groups and some 16,000 dancers, there will be dance performances all over the city during this two day event.

Dates and Times: September 13-15

Location: Bandai City and other locations throughout Niigata City

Access: 10 minute walk from JR Niigata Station

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