

Niigata's Onsens

Niigata ranks third in number of onsens per prefecture, and the onsens of Niigata are renowned for much more than just their hot water. Some claim to heal ailments, give you energy, and even make you more beautiful! Niigata onsens also gained fame thanks to Yasunari Kawabata's famous novel "Snow Country" which is set at the Echigo-Yuzawa onsen in Niigata. Many people consider autumn to be the best season for onsens, we highly recommend you find time to make a trip.

Contents:

Niigata's Onsens	1
Niigata History and Culture	2
ALT Interview	3
So Very Niigata	4
Things to Do While the Weather is Cool	5
Event Calendar	5-6

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Echigo Yuzawa Onsen

The setting of "Snow Country," Echigo Yuzawa onsen has been one of Niigata's main attractions for many years. Next to the station, there are a number of hotels with onsen baths, and a hot springs foot bath to rest your feet after a long day.

Health Benefits: Helps muscle pain and nerve pain, and helps rejuvenate you.

Access: A short walk from the JR Echigo Yuzawa station.

Gozu Hot Spring Village

With an 800 year history, the Gozu hot spring village is made up of Imaita onsen, Deyu onsen, and Murasugi onsen. The village offers visitors a variety of different onsens.

Health Benefits: Helps nerve pain, muscle pain, joint pain, rheumatism, and dermatitis.

Access: A 30 minute bus ride on the Agano City bus from the JR Suibara Station.

Aikawa Onsen

Located on Sado's western side, this area is famous for the beautiful view of the ocean. A number of hotels use the hot spring waters here, and with the Sado Goldmine nearby, they are great places to stay during a trip.

Health Benefits: Helps muscle pain and nerve pain, and helps rejuvenate you.

Access: 50 minutes away by car from Ryotsu port. Shuttle buses are available at many of the hotels.

Iwamuro Onsen:

The Iwamuro onsen area is noted for having a variety of different hot springs and inns to stay at, and it is also the birthplace of the Echigo geisha. You can still catch performances today.

Health

Benefits: Helps nerve pain, muscle pain, joint pain, injuries, and chronic skin disease.

Access: 5 minutes away by taxi from the JR Iwamuro station.



Yutagami Onsen

Originally built in 1738, Yutagami Onsen is situated part way up Mt. Gomado, and has a stunning view of the Niigata plain area. On a clear day you can see all the way out to Sado.

Health Benefits: Helps chronic skin disease, digestive problems and constipation. Also good for sick children.

Access: 5 minutes by taxi from the JR Tagami station.

Senami Onsen

This hot spring town lies on the sea and you can relax in a hot bath while watching the waves roll in. Many people like to go around sunset to see the sun sink into the Sea of Japan.

Health Benefits: Helps nerve pain, lower back pain, rheumatism, and skin diseases.

Access: 10 minutes by taxi from the JR Murakami station. Some hotels also offer shuttle bus service.

Niigata History and Culture: Craft Beer

Niigata has long been famous for its Sake; and with 92 different breweries, Niigata manages to brew some of the most highly lauded sake in all of Japan. But Niigata has a history with another one of Japan's favorite drinks; beer! The Echigo Beer Brewery was the first microbrewery ever to open in Japan, and continues to be a point of pride in Niigata.

For many, many years, Japan had strict Japanese brewing laws that required a brewery to produce at least 2 million liters of beer a year, essentially ensuring that no small breweries could get into the business. So for years, the Japanese beer landscape was dominated by the big four, Sapporo, Kirin, Suntory, and Asahi. But in 1994, the requirement for a brewing license was dropped to a mere 60,000 liters per year, opening to floodgates for a host of smaller craft breweries to be founded. And the first among those was Echigo Beer, operated right out of Niigata City.

Nowadays, there are six microbreweries here in Niigata, offering everything from porters to ales, ambers, stouts, and even barley wine! No matter your tastes, Niigata has a brew to please. So if you're getting tired of the regular *Nama-chuu*, why not try some of our prefecture's finest craft beers?

Hakkaisan Izumi Beer



Produced by the famous Hakkaisan sake brewery, these beers are made using clear snow-melt water.
HP: www.hakkaisan.co.jp/sake/beer

Niigata Beer



Makers of Japan's first champagne-style beer.
HP: www.niigatabeer.jp

Echigo Brewery



Japan's first micro-brewery, with a wide variety of European style brews.
HP: www.echigo-beer.jp

Tainai Kogen Beer



First brewed under the tutelage of a German beer master, this brewery uses only the finest hops and malts.
HP: www.tainaibeer.com

Nihonkai Yuhi Brewery



Enjoy these beers, made using Niigata's famous Koshihikari rice, at the brewery's seaside Italian restaurant
HP: www.yuhibeer.com

Swan Lake Beer



With multiple beers winning categories at the World Beer Awards, including world's best amber, you can be sure of the quality of their brews.
HP: www.swanlake.co.jp/main/

ALT Interview: JD Duquette

JD is currently an ALT in Niigata City.



Q) What brought you to Niigata?

My wife! Well, she would say I'm the one who followed her here... She is from Niigata City but we met in Canada, where she lived for a few years. After she moved back to Japan, we spent some time visiting each other back and forth between the two countries. We ended up getting married in my hometown of Quebec and had our first daughter. We then decided to try living in Japan for a bit and I applied with the JET Program. This was over 5 years ago. Even though my contract is expiring next July, we're still planning on staying here a while.

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

My first trip to Japan was in 2008. Previously, my impression of Japan was pretty much what you see on TV and in movies. So I came here with no specific expectations. On that trip, I visited Tokyo, Kyoto and Niigata. My first thoughts were about how simultaneously different and similar North America and Japan were. It felt really unique yet, not completely foreign. That being said, the best realization was how many genuinely nice and helpful people there was! The only things I could say were *ありがとう*, *すみません*, and *日本語わかりません*. Yet, locals always went out of their ways to guide me and help me

understand how all these automated things worked. On my first year on the JET Program, I was placed in Minamiuonuma. My wife's family lives in Niigata City so we were travelling back and forth quite a bit between the inaka and the city. I feel like I now have a pretty good understanding of the duality between traditional and modern Japan. I think what changed in my perception of Japan is how deep and intricate the society is.

Q) Did anything surprise you about life in Japan?

Honestly, not really. Since I travelled to Japan and married a Japanese woman before moving here, I think I had a pretty good idea of what I was getting into. The only thing that still baffles me is the amount of businesses which choose to display English text in their advertisements without caring whether it makes any sense or not. I don't understand how they can go through the trouble of producing a complete advertising campaign and not have a couple of sentences checked by a professional translator or a copywriter. That, or maybe how reliable trains always are

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

That's a difficult question. There are so many things that I feel fortunate to have here... To mention only a few, I'd say - running on the Yasuragitei. It's just a perfect running route with the Shinano River and the Sea of Japan right beside it. I've been running it many times a week for many years now and I never get bored of it. It's a pleasure every time.
- Playing music at Gioiamia. Every first Monday of each month, there is an open mic at this Italian restaurant where many Japanese and foreigners come together to share their passion for music. Everyone is welcome, everyone can

play. It's an awesome atmosphere of support and joy.

- Playing ice hockey at the new ice arena. As a Canadian, I missed hockey badly for a while. The new arena has solved this problem!

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

Niigata City reminds me a bit of my hometown; it's not too big and not too small. We can find everything we need easily, there are always great restaurants to discover and new things to do. At the same time, it doesn't feel like a crushing metropolis. It's a great place to live. On top of that, we can't deny the greatness of the prefecture's produce; the rice, the watermelons, the sake... *おいしい!*

The thing I find difficult is not specific to Niigata: I still struggle with the language even after living here all these years. My wife is, of course, incredibly helpful in that regard, but when I am by myself, my limits become quickly obvious.

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

I have had the opportunity to teach French (my native language) to a few people and I loved it. I think many people are interested in learning this language here and I hope to be able to help them doing so in the near future (contact me if you'd like a lesson!). My job also allows me to share a lot of my culture with my students and my coworkers. I'm always happy when they are interested and keep asking questions about Canada and Quebec. Music is another thing I love to share with as many people as possible. I have had the chance to play a few French songs during the open mics and it was very well received.

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

Q) What are your future plans?

With my JET Program contract ending soon, the next year will be crucial in deciding my family's future. I have about 10 different ideas of things I could do next. Most of them are right here in Niigata. My wife also has many ongoing projects in the region so we should be here for at least a few more years. That being said, we are also discussing about moving back to Canada eventually... or maybe to

Europe... who knows; life is full of surprises.

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

I was going to say things like: Explore. Try new things. Meet new people. Take risks... But I believe these can apply to anyone living anywhere in the world. If I had to give one practical advice specific to Japan, I think I would say: Find someone who you trust and who can help you navigate the bureaucratic maze from time to time. Whether it is getting a phone

or setting up a bank account, it can get complicated quickly. Having a native speaker who is familiar with these procedures with you can save you a lot of trouble.

But I think the general advices are still best so I will share one of my favorite quotes: "Life is too short to be small" - Benjamin Disraeli

For more info on the Gioiamia Music Night:

<https://www.facebook.com/OpenmicNiigata>

To contact JD:

jddinjapan@gmail.com

So Very Niigata: Yahiko Shrine

Yahiko Shrine, located at the base of Mt. Yahiko and surround by Yahiko Park, is the most famous shrine in Niigata. The shrine has a history dating back some 1300 years, and was mentioned in the *Man'yōshū*, the oldest existing collection of Japanese poetry. Every year thousands flock to the shrine throughout the year to pray, sightsee, and celebrate. The shrine is particularly popular as a site for *hatsumode*, or the first shrine visit of the new year, where Japanese people visit a shrine to pray for a good year. Local superstition says that if a couple visits the shrine their relationship will end, but the truth is that back in the Edo period, men would go to the onsen area near Yahiko to relax, play, and visit the geigi there. To keep their wives from coming along, they would lie and say that the god of Yahiko shrine was a woman, and would get too jealous if couple went together.

The shrine actually houses the god Ame no Kagoyama no Mikoto, a grandson of the Sun goddess Amaterasu. Legend says that he assisted Emperor Jimmu in his conquests, and was told to go to the ancient Echigo province and watch over the people there and develop it. After crossing the Sea of Japan and arriving in what is now modern day Niigata, he taught the people here how to fish and collect salt from sea water. His descendants would then carry on ruling and assisting the people of the Echigo area for the next seven generations, creating the ancient Echigo culture and industry that is still felt today.



Yahiko shrine is surrounded by a beautiful cedar and keyaki tree forest, and the area is one of the most popular spots to see fall colors in Niigata. The park contains a museum housing ancient artifacts, including a 2.2 meter sword from 1415, a small deer sanctuary, and even a chicken farm. If you are a hiker, the way up to the top of the mountain is a fairly easy and clear hike. For those interested in a bit more relaxation, there is also a ropeway straight to the top which offers a great view going up of the mountain. At the peak, the view is almost breathtaking; the mountain is nestled between the blue of the Sea of Japan on one side, and the flat green expanse of the Echigo plain on the other. On a clear day you can even catch a glimpse of Sado Island in the distance. Visiting the shrine and the park doesn't take a huge amount of time, making it the perfect location for a day tip this fall!

Things to do when the weather is cool: *Momijigari*

Autumn is a special time in Japan, as the normally green countryside explodes with color, a beautiful display of red, orange, and yellow. All across Japan people visit temples, shrines, forests, and other areas where the colors are especially beautiful in a practice called *Momijigari*, or “Maple leaf hunting.” Niigata boasts a number of great places to see the autumn foliage, but the four below are some of the more famous ones. Be sure to ask friends and neighbors for other areas near you! The autumn colors in Niigata are generally at their best from mid-October to mid-November.

Yahiko Park

While other locations are known for the variety colors, Yahiko Park is famous for turning completely red! The park is filled with maple trees whose leaves turn bright red in autumn, and also has a bright red Japanese bridge. The intensity of the colors is a sight not to miss.

Season: Late October to early November

Illumination: Late October to mid-November, 4:30pm-9:30pm

Access: The park is a 1 minute walk from the JR Yahiko station.

Agano River Line (Aga)

Though the Agano River Line boats run year round, the cruise is most beautiful in autumn when the surrounding hills turn red and orange. Boat rides last roughly 40 minutes, and are ¥2000 for adults and ¥1000 for children.

Season: Late October to early November

Access: The Aga River Port is a 20 minute walk from JR Higashigejo station

Kiyotsu Canyon

Designated one of Japan’s three great canyons, the Kiyotsu Canyon is a sight any time of the year, but is especially beautiful in fall. The trees and foliage that line the top ridge of the canyon turn beautiful colors and stand out in stark contrast to the surrounding rock.

Season: Late October to early November

Access: There are busses from JR Echigo Yuzawa station, which leave at 9:30, 13:40, 15:00, and 16:40. After getting off the bus, it will be a 20 minute walk to the canyon.

Naena Waterfall

At a height of 55 meters, Naena waterfall is quite an impressive spectacle, and has been designated one of Japan’s 100 greatest water falls. Often called “earthquake falls” due to its booming sounds, the falls are especially beautiful in fall.

Season: Late October to early November

Access: The waterfall is a 30 minute bus ride from the JR Myoko Kogen station.

Event Calendar

Chrysanthemum Festivals

With a chill crisp in the air and winter approaching, these chrysanthemum festivals could be your last chance to see beautiful flowers before the snow season! Hundreds of flowers of all different colors will be on display.

Urasa (Minamiuonuma)

Dates: November 1- 10

Location: Fuko-ji Temple, Urasa, Minamiuonuma

Access: 5 minutes by foot from JR Urasa Station; 15 minutes by car from the Koide IC of the Kanetsu Expressway

Kamo

Dates: November 6-24

Location: Fuyudorigoe Ski Park, 186-7 Hase, Kamo

Access: From JR Kamo Station, take any buses headed to Tsuchikura (土倉) or Maki (牧) and get off at the Fuyudorigoe stop; 50 minutes by car from the Sanjo-Tsubame IC of the Hokuriku Expressway

Yahiko

Dates:

November 1-24

Location:

Yahiko Shrine,
Yahiko

Access: 15 minutes by foot from JR Yahiko Station; 25 minutes by car from the Sanjo-Tsubame IC of the Hokuriku Expressway

Joetsu

Dates: November 1-9

Location: 2-20-1, Teramachi, Joetsu (Joetsu welfare exchange center Gymnasium)

Access: 15 walk from JR Takada station.



Holiday Illuminations

The weather may be getting colder, but these holiday illuminations are sure to warm your heart. For a full list, see the following link: <http://www.niigata-kankou.or.jp/tanoshimu/winter/illumination/index.html>

Hotel Green Plaza Joetsu

Dates: Early November 2014 – late March 2015

Location: Kabanosawa 112-1, Minamiuonuma

Access: 5 minutes by bus from the Joetsu-Kokusai-Ski-jomae station

Bandai Romantic Circus

Dates: November 22, 2014 – December 25, 2014

Times: 17:00 -21:00

Location: Bandai City Park, Bandai 1-6-1, Chuou-ku, Niigata City

Access: 10 minute walk from the Bandai exit of the JR Niigata Station

Ote-dori Winter Illumination

Dates: December 5, 2014 – January 12, 2015

Times: 16:00-23:00

Location: Ote-dori, Nagaoka

Access: 1 minute from the Ote exit of JR Nagaoka Station



The 2014 Niigata Lights Pageant

Dates: December 5, 2014- January 12, 2015

Times: 17:00-24:30

Location: Keyaki-dori, Niigata City

Access: 3 minutes by foot from the south exit of JR Niigata Station

Tainai City Illumination

Dates: Early December 2014 - late February 2015

Location: Area around JR Nakajo station and JR Hirakida station

Access: Immediately in front of JR Nakajo station and JR Hirakida station

Local Events

Joetsu Soba Festival

For only 200 yen, you get a bowl and the chance to try lots of Joetsu-made Soba!

Dates and Times: November 16, 10:30-14:00 **Location:** 58-1 Fujimaki, Joetsu.

Access: 10 minutes by car from the Joetsu IC on the Hokuriku Expressway

Sake Houryou Festival

The Sake Houryou Festival literally means “The Big Salmon Haul Festival” and is held to celebrate the huge amount of salmon caught in the Tanne River. At the festival you can catch salmon with your bare hands, eat tasty food and treats, and even artificially fertilize some salmon yourself!

Dates and Times: November 22-23; 10am-4pm (22nd), 9am-3pm(23rd)

Location: Kashiwazaki Sake no Furusato Koen, Kashiwazaki

Access: 2 minute walk from JR Oumigawa station

Yuzawa Winter Fireworks

The slopes in Yuzawa will be awash with color as the different ski resorts in the area put on fireworks shows! The theme changes every year, so each show is sure to be unique and special. What better way to enjoy a long day skiing than with a beautiful fireworks display?

Dates and Times: Late December until late March **Location:** Ski resorts in the Yuzawa area



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