

So Very Niigata: Fireworks

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Niigata is known as the “Kingdom of Fireworks,” Niigata has some of the biggest and best fireworks displays in all of Japan. 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 the 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 the JR Nagaoka Station, 20 minute car ride from the Nagaoka Interchange

Dates: August 2nd and 3rd



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 JR Niigata Station **Dates:** August 7th – 9th

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 22nd

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 Interchange. **Dates:** September 9th and 10th

Things to do while the Weather is Hot: Beaches

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!



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. People staying overnight at one of the onsen ryokans 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 the JR Murakami Station or a 14 min drive from the Murakami Senami Onsen Interchange.

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 the JR Katamachi station, making it an easy day trip.

Season: Early July to late August

Location: Oogata-ku Kudohama, Joetsu

Access: 15 min walk from JR Katamachi Station, 6 min drive from the Oogata Smart Interchange

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 just down the road from the Marine Pia Aquarium, making it a great spot for a fun day trip with family or friends.

Season: Early July to mid-August

Location: Sekiya, Chuoku, Niigata City

Access: 20 min walk from JR Sekiya Station, 20 min car ride from Niigata Nishi Interchange or the Niigata Chuo Interchange



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. The beach is very popular during the summer months, and many visitors will also take a drive along the Sasagawa Nagare, which has been named one of Japan's 100 best views. You can also barbecue at the beach, and there is a small path to the neighboring Itagai beach.

Season: Mid-July to mid-August

Location: Sasagawa, Murakami

Access: 15 min walk from the JR Kuwagawa Station.



Futatsugame Beach

Located on Sado, Futatsugame Beach is one of the most scenic places in Niigata. Snuggled in between two 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, Niigata

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

CIR Interview: Kai Wiesner-Hanks

Kai Wiesner-Hanks is a CIR who currently works at the Niigata Prefectural Office.

Q) What brought you to Niigata?

I first came to Japan as a Coordinator for International Relations in 2010, and was placed in Kyoto prefecture. In my second year I applied for transfer, and Niigata offered me a position at the prefectural office. I came out for an interview, got the job, and then moved here in the summer of 2012. I've been working here ever since, but will be finishing up my contract this summer.

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

When I first came to Niigata for the interview it was the middle of winter, and I was shocked and excited to see how much snow there was. I grew up in a very snowy place and Kyoto, despite all the nice things about it, does not have a lot of snow during winter. Every winter since coming to Niigata I've made sure to get out and enjoy the snow, whether it be through skiing, hiking, or some of the snow festivals we have here.

Q) Did anything surprise you about life in Japan?

One thing that always manages to surprise me is the sense of responsibility Japanese people seem to have. Everyone makes sure to do their fair share of work, be it cleaning, setting up for events, or helping out others, even when no one is around to see. I love this part of Japanese culture, and wish we had a little bit more of it back in the states.

That, and the fact that the crows here are massive. Seriously much, much bigger than the ones back home.

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

I have a lot of places I love in Niigata, but to pick one, I have to go with my favorite restaurant; Inoya Ramen near Sekiya station. The chef there makes the thickest, most delicious tonkotsu ramen I've ever had. He also loves to blast metal and rock music, so the store isn't for everyone, but for flavor alone I haven't found anywhere better. I also really like Sado Island.



It has a pretty unique culture and some amazing natural scenery and it's a lot of fun to go out for a weekend trip.

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

Compared to some of the other places I have lived in Japan, Niigata feels very spacious and open. I like having the sense of space, and from the beaches on the Sea of Japan to the Echigo plain, Niigata certainly feels a lot

"bigger" than other places I've lived.

The only real issue I've had living in Niigata is that, because it is pretty big, it can be a hassle to get around. I don't drive, and there are a lot of really, really cool sites like the Seifukuji Temple that are really hard to access without a car.

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

I do a lot of visits to schools and centers in Niigata where I get to introduce a bit about America and American culture. It's always fun to see kids and adults learn a little bit more in depth about American history or pop culture.

Q) What are your future plans?

I will be staying in Niigata for a little bit longer to continue looking for work here.

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

Japan can be a crazy, confusing, exciting place to live for many of us, and I think the best thing you can do is to keep an open mind. There will be parts of living in Japan that can frustrate you, but there are so many positives that people can sometimes forget. From the incredible cultural aspects like tea ceremony and martial arts, to food like ramen and sushi, and even the natural environment like the hills of Echigo Yuzawa and the Shinano River, all of it makes Japan really special, and I think it's important to occasionally take a step back and remember why we all chose to live in this country.

いただきます:Sushi

Perhaps no Japanese food is more famous abroad than sushi, and Niigata's position on the Sea of Japan means that people here can enjoy the freshest, best sushi.

Sushi first got its start in ancient Japan, where fish was fermented with rice for long term storage. Originally, only the fish was eaten while the rice was thrown out, and owing to the fermentation the smell was apparently terrible. The sushi that we know and love today only came about in the edo period of Japan, when small shops started selling quickly made sushi, made by balling up some rice and placing fish on top. The dish became immensely popular, and was spread to the rest of Japan following Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 when many sushi chefs were put out of work and moved to other areas of Japan. The dish continued to grow in popularity, so much so that it is now considered a staple of Japanese cuisine.

Here in Niigata, the Shinano River brings a huge amount of rich nutrients to the ocean surrounding Niigata, which in turn encourages the growth of marine plants, shellfish, plankton, and fish, making the seas around Niigata a perfect home for a large variety of fish. The seas around Niigata are particularly noted for the delicious white meat fish. And of course, Niigata's delicious rice goes a long way in making Niigata sushi what it is. Each type of fish has its own season, and the sushi that are best in summer are aji, sea bass, Bluefin tuna, abalone, squid, and anago.



In an effort to show off the amazing quality of Niigata sushi, a number of sushi restaurants have banded together to offer an amazing treat for any sushi lovers out there. The Kiwami platter is a plate of 10 different sushi pieces, all picked from the tastiest seasonal fish available. Kiwami platters are available at many sushi restaurants in Niigata, and you can find a full list [here](http://www.sushi-kiwami.com/english/index.html).

<http://www.sushi-kiwami.com/english/index.html>

Events Calendar

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 25-26; 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 Stardust Review, Hitomi Yaida, and Masayuki Suzuki among others.

Dates and times: August 8; event area opens at 16:00, concert from 17:00 to 20:00

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 2015

Earth Celebration is an amazing musical event put on by 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 21-23

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 Tsunan for a massive craft fair.

Dates and times: September 12-13; 10:00-17:00 (until 16:00 on the 13th)

Locations: New Greenpia Tsunan, 12300 Akinari, Tsunan

Access: 15 minutes by taxi from JR Tsunan 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!

Sanjo Summer Festival

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

Dates and Times: July 31, August 1-2, parade and dancing from 6:15pm on the 31st, fireworks from 7:30pm on the 2nd, and Soh Odori from 5:00 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



Akadomari Port Festival

This is not your typical summer festival! The main event of the Akadomari Sports 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 1-2, fireworks from 8pm on the 2nd

Location: Akadomari Port are, Sado

Access: 1 minute walk from Akadomari Port, Ferry from Teradomari Port in Nagaoka

Murakami Arakawa Festival

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

Dates and Times: August 7-8, parade from 6:30pm on the 7th, fireworks from 7:45pm on the 8th

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 7-9; folk dancing parade from 7pm on the 7th, parades starting at 10am on the 8th and 10th, and fireworks from 7:15-8:30pm on the 9th

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

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

Echigo Kamo River Summer Festival

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

Dates and Times: August 14, festival from 1:00-9pm, 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 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 17-20

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 22; stage performances from 11:00am-3:30pm, edamame festival from 11am-2pm; traditional craft demonstrations 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.

Ojiya Festival

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

Dates and Times: August 21-23; fireworks from 7:15 on the 22nd

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 which 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 22-23 **Location:** Around the remains of Kasugayama Castle, Joetsu

Access: 10 minute walk from JR Kasugayama Station

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 7:00pm 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

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 performances all over the city during this three-day event.

Dates and Times: September 19-21 **Location:** Bandai City and other locations throughout Niigata City

Access: 10 minute walk from JR Niigata Station

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