So Very Niigata: Snow and Mr. Lerch

Whenever someone starts up a conversation about Niigata Prefecture, it doesn’t take long for the topic to shift to snow and eventually to Mr. Lerch, the beloved mascot of the prefecture. On average, the Niigata gets significantly more snow than many other prefectures, making winter a very distinct season every year. Niigata has a proud history of skiing, and it’s all thanks to the Austro-Hungarian soldier Theodor Edler von Lerch, after whom the mascot is named! In fact, skiing has been practiced in Niigata for over 100 years now, ever since Theodor von Lerch gave Japan’s very first skiing lesson right here in Niigata in 1911.

The mascot Mr. Lerch is referred to as Reruhi-san in Japanese and is a common feature of events, promotions, business cards, and more. Reruhi-san even has his own event in Joetsu that usually takes place around January or February.

For more information about Major Lerch and Reruhi-san, please refer to “Niigata FYI (winter 2015)”. 
Making the Most of the Snow

For many, cold weather can be an excuse to hole up inside and do nothing, but with so many exciting opportunities to enjoy the snow with friends and family, we think you’ll find it harder not to go out! We’ve compiled a brief list of a few ways that you can turn the chill into so much more. Check them out below!

Skiing, Snowboarding, and More

Gala Yuzawa
One of the easiest slopes to access by train, Gala Yuzawa has 15 trails and an onsen nearby, making it the perfect place to go for a fun day and a relaxing night.
Open: Until May 8
Access: Immediately next to the JR Gala Yuzawa Station.

Mt. Naeba
Mt. Naeba has two different ski resorts on it, Naeba Ski Area and Kagura Ski Area. With a single shared ticket, you get access to both ski lifts, giving you access to a total of 51 trails!
Open: Until May 8
Access: Shuttle buses from JR Echigo Yuzawa Station.
To Kagura, ~30 minutes.
To Naeba, ~50 minutes.

Echigo Hillside Park
If you’re looking for a spot that has more than just skiing and snowboarding, then the Echigo Hillside Park might be just what you’re after. Yes, it has skiing and snowboarding, but it also has sledding, areas for kids to play, and a snow shoes course!
Open: White Season continues through March
Time: 9:30AM-4:30PM
Access: ~40 minutes by bus from JR Nagaoka Station

Festivals in the Snow

Reruhi-sai (Lerch Festival)
This festival in Joetsu City celebrates the beloved Theodor von Lerch and includes fireworks, music, and then some. Want to see how much people in Niigata love this man? Check out his namesake festival!
Dates: February 6 and 7
Access: Free shuttle buses available from Takada Station.
~10 minutes by car from Takada Station.

Yuzawa Snow Festival
The Yuzawa Snow Festival has all kinds of things to enjoy, including the crowning of Miss Komako, watching portable shrines being carried in the snow, and watching an amazing fireworks display!
Date and time: March 5, 6:00pm-9:00pm
Access: ~5-minute walk from the West Exit of JR Echigo Yuzawa Station.
What we’ve shown so far are but a few of the many ways you can spice up your winter experience. Take a look at the following lists for more ideas.

**Skiing and Snowboarding**
- Akakura Kanko Resort
- Ikenotaira
- Ninox Snow Park
- Cupid Valley

**Festivals**
- Echigo Matsudai Fuyu no Jin
- Minamiuonuma Snow Festival
- Tsunan Snow Festival
- Tokamachi Snow Festival
- Koide International Yukigassen (Snowball Fight)

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**KANJIKI Race World Championship 2016**  
~ Exciting snowshoe battle on the white field of Aga, Niigata ~

**Date and time:** February 28 (Starts 11:00 AM)  
**Location:** Mikaguraso (2088 Hirotani-otsu, Aga Town)

What is KANJIKI?  
KANJIKI is traditional snowshoes typically used in northern Japan. In Aga Town, too, KANJIKI have been used for centuries to walk on heavy snow. Handling KANJIKI is a part of our winter life in the beautiful snowy land.

<Race events>
- 50m sprint individual (adult / junior)
- 50m × 4 relay
- 2,000m endurance race

**Entry Fee:** ¥1,000 yen per person for as many events as you like  
(¥0 for junior: elementary school student or younger)  
including free rental KANJIKI and natural spa

<Handmade KANJIKI workshop>
You can also make your own KANJIKI at optional workshop.

- (1) 4 pm, February 27
- (2) 10am, February 28

**Fee:** ¥3,000 including KANJIKI kit and instruction

<Snowman Festival>
On-site event “Snowman Festival” is open for everybody. Make an original snowman and win a prize! (Entry Free!)  
The super sleigh slope is also waiting for you!

For more information, please contact  
e-mail: info@mikaguraso.com  
Phone: 0254-95-2121  
Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/events/91472935291440/](https://www.facebook.com/events/91472935291440/)
Every year, the Niigata Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching (Niigata AJET) puts on a musical in order to raise money for charity. This year’s production of the classic tale Robin Hood will send all of its profits to Habitat for Humanity Philippines. Entry is free, but donations are greatly appreciated and go to a good cause!

The participants choreograph the entire thing, coming up with their own dances, songs, and their own version of a classic story. Doors open 30 minutes before the show starts.

**Website:** [http://ajetniigata.com/robinhood/home.html](http://ajetniigata.com/robinhood/home.html)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Address</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 30 (Sat.)</td>
<td>19:00</td>
<td>Joetsu</td>
<td>Region Plaza (リージョンプラザ) Address: 〒942-0063 上越市 大字下門前 446-2 Phone: 025-544-2122</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 31 (Sun.)</td>
<td>14:00</td>
<td>Arakawa (Murakami)</td>
<td>Arakawa Community Center (荒川地区公民館) Address: 〒959-3143 村上市羽ケ榎 104-25 Phone: 025-462-3050</td>
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<td>February 6 (Sat.)</td>
<td>18:00</td>
<td>Tokamachi</td>
<td>Tokamachi-shi Senju Chuo Community Center (十日町市千手中央コミュニティセンター) Address: 〒948-0143 十日町市水口沢 76-7 Phone: 025-768-2308</td>
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<td>February 7 (Sun.)</td>
<td>14:30</td>
<td>Sanjo</td>
<td>Chuo Community Center (中央公民館) Address: 〒955-0072 三条市元町 13-1 Phone: 025-632-4811</td>
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<td>March 5 (Sat.)</td>
<td>19:00</td>
<td>Niigata</td>
<td>Higashi-ku Plaza (東区プラザ) Address: 〒950-8709 新潟県新潟市東区下木戸 1-4-1 Phone: 025-250-2145</td>
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<td>March 6 (Sun.)</td>
<td>13:30</td>
<td>Kashiwazaki</td>
<td>Energy Hall (エネルギーホール) Address: 〒945-0055 柏崎市駅前 2-2-30 Phone: 025-723-3138</td>
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<td>March 19 (Sat.)</td>
<td>18:30</td>
<td>Sado</td>
<td>Sado Assembly Hall and Community Center (佐渡会館・公民館トキのむら元気館) Address: 〒952-0106 佐渡市新穂瓜生屋 362-1 Phone: 025-922-4800</td>
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