

# Escape.com.au – Niseko Boutiques

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# What's Hot in Japan : The Best for 2019

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Ingenious accommodation solutions, more accessibility, fresh rides and exclusive add-ons promise deeper, more enriched travel experiences for Japan into 2019. Futuristic ideals grounded in history, function and convenience give the blossoming nation a leading edge.

## **CRYSTAL-BALL GAZING**

Okinawa's laid-back islands are tipped to become Japan's new hotspot. A post ski-trip drop-and-flop; adventure stop for the surf, dive and hike set; or a colourful intermission of alternative textures – this ecocentric greenway lures Japan fans seeking change.



Okinawa is a slice of paradise in Japan.



## OUTSIDE THE BOX

Cookie-cutter packages are being left on the bench for more connected, special interest tours: One glance at ‘Get the picture tours’ website and you’ll be packing before you can say “cheezu”. The 11-day photo journey promises a study of inspiring faces and places led by photographer Everett Kennedy Brown.

Tempted by tea ceremony, washi papermaking and a wasabi farm visit? Wendy Wu’s enticing 18-day Japan Uncovered tour offers its most all-inclusive, comprehensive trip so far.

APT packages promise to drill down on Japanese culture through its new geisha encounters, taiko drumming performance and visits to must-visit art venues like Hakone Open-Air Museum.



Learning the art of traditional Japanese cooking.

## **WELL INDEED**

Shinrin-yoku (forest bathing) is an ancient natural therapy making strides into the wellness genre. Guided tours are advisable in true wilderness (bears!), but low-risk DIY immersion into forests of calming essential oils and nature sounds is totally doable. Lush Mt Takao's maintained walking tracks are one hour by train from Shinjuku but be sure to choose weekdays for de-stressing in private.

After a complete retreat? Idyllic Amanemu, an impeccably luxurious resort in Ise-Shima National Park offers holistic spa treatments, incredible views, hot springs, sublime cuisine and daily rounds of golf. Wellbeing never looked so good.

## **SEA PERSPECTIVE**

Cruising offers a sophisticated, leisurely alternative to sometimes harried hop-on-and-off coach tours.

Azamara's country-intensive Circle Japan voyages are set to peruse Japan's scenic islands and intimate villages from April.

Viking Cruises' 29-day Far East Exploration, departing September 6, covers 10 Japanese ports including Okinawa plus Busan and Taipei en route to China. No matter which cruise you choose, expert local guides from InsideJapan Tours can escort you from portside to peak and back in time for sail-away drinks.



Enso Anjo Fuya II Pic supplied

## **SPECTATOR SPORTS**

The Rugby World Cup, from September 20 until November 2, offers more than one spectator sport: take advantage of free time in less-frequented host venues to score some true local culture. Perhaps savour Hokkaido's unique food and craft beer at Sapporo's Autumn Festival or peruse Kyushu nature trails between host cities Fukuoka, Oita and Kumamoto – where a special matsuri (festival) will take place in October.

## **NICE ICE BABY**

Skiers who lean towards luxurious, private accommodation should take note of Niseko Boutiques, Elite Haven's first Japan foray, because a stay at one of the 17 gorgeous villas with concierge, transport and private chefs may make leaving impossible.



Unearthing slowly blossoming alpine villages has become an Australian pastime. White-hot tip for people-free slopes is Nagano's Madarao Mountain, where Aya Lodge – accessible via shinkansen from Tokyo in two hours – offers “Scandanese” styled comforts and the best brekkie in town.

Keen to sample Sapporo's snow carving extravaganza but crowds and queuing leaves you cold? Chill out – venture 1½ hours north to the equally magic family-friendly Asahikawa Winter Festival, celebrating its 60th event, February 6-11.



Japanese alpine villages. Picture: Glen Claydon

## ROOM DEBUT

The curtain has been raised on The Pullman Tokyo Tamachi. Upscale interiors hum with Kabuki hues.

Kyoto's Zen-inspired Enso Anjo is a collective of five remotely connected accommodations in an atmospheric neighbourhood. A key element of this groundbreaking configuration is Fuya II, the first Small Luxury Hotels of the World property to land in the old imperial city.

Devotees to stylish simplicity, rejoice. Tokyo's MUJI Hotel Ginza undrapes in March, the same month MGallery by Sofitel launches in Kyoto's historic Higashiyama precinct. Low-rise yet super-luxe Park Hyatt Hotel will join later in the year.

A scrum of new Kyushu accommodations is aiming for RWC kick-off. Fukuoka's City Hotel Hakata looks to reflect its home-base with a breathtaking "city meets nature" concept. In August, Hyatt Regency Fukuoka reveals a new look and ANA InterContinental Beppu Resort & Spa will introduce its luxury onsen resort.



The Pullman Tokyo Tamachi.



## **PAY IT FORWARD**

Reliable, convenient luggage services between accommodation and major transport hubs are available. Ask hotel or airport staff about forwarding services, or book ahead via Luggage-Free Travel.

## **IT TAKES A VILLAGE**

In a drive to maintain integrity and upkeep of Kyoto's World Heritage-listed sites, all stays, including Airbnb, will incur a pp/pn accommodation tax from the end of 2018, so keep spare change for checkout.

## **FROU-FROU TRAIN**

A new JR train station has opened a three minute-walk from the Ashikaga flower park. Two hours from Tokyo it makes one scentsational daytrip. Don't miss April's wisteria festival.



The spectacular Ashikaga flower park.



## **UPGRADE**

Narita airport's Qantas lounge is scheduled for upgrades – expect a facelift and improved dining options.

## **SAYONARA TSUKIJI**

G'day Toyosu! Tokyo's relocated fishmarket is up and running but the tuna auction observation deck stays under wraps until January 15.

## **ART SMART**

Nara Arts Festival 2019 (September to November) celebrates the vibrant cultural heritage of the prefecture. Rub shoulders with creative villagers at jazz concerts, art exhibitions, dance performance and film festivals.

## **MATCHA CLARITY**

Appearing in Tokyo in 2019 is Tokujin Yoshioka's contemporary *Glass Tea House – Kou-An*; showcasing Japan's skill at merging old and new concepts.

Link : <https://www.escape.com.au/world/japan/whats-hot-in-japan-the-best-for-2019/news-story/d0d9408bd9b5c1995aadfde4f1519bd7>