



Japan National Tourist Organization

(Japan Travel Updates <http://www.jnto.go.jp>)

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JAPAN – A KID’S DELIGHT



Note about telephone calls and numbers: All telephone numbers are listed as if dialed direct from within Japan. If you are in the particular city, you must drop the area code. If you are calling from the United States, you must first dial 011-81 and then drop the "0" in front of the area code. In many cases those answering the telephone **DO NOT SPEAK ENGLISH**, so unless otherwise noted, it is best to have a Japanese speaker make the call.

Kids love Japan, and Japan loves kids.

The country is a paradise for children and travelers with children. Not surprising, when you consider the traditional Japanese love for family and the young, and the timeless Japanese love for festivals, spectacles, celebrations and holidays, the more elaborate the better. There are festivals, some specifically involving children, others just delightful for young spectators. There are traditional sports like Sumo (which teenage sports fans will especially appreciate). Mt. Fuji and its surroundings have something for everyone young – from sophisticated young adults to elementary school kids. The geyser and hot spring areas of Japan rival those in Yellowstone. And at the same time, modern state-of-the-art theme parks are almost everywhere.



Pokemon Center

Japanese love to shop, and Japan is a shopping paradise for children. Japanese department stores, and mega-toy stores, combine entertainment and shopping in a mesmerizing mix. Little kids will find the latest, newest toys in Japan long before they reach the U.S. – the next Pokemon craze? – while their older brothers and sisters check out Japan’s cutting-edge cameras, electronics gear, and music machines.

The Shinkansen "Bullet" trains that speed across Japan provide both easy travel and entertainment. All kids are train buffs at heart, and these are the fastest, most comfortable trains in the world.

Animals? Japan boasts some of the finest aquariums in the world, and in Nikko wild monkeys cavort around the Great Bronze Buddha, another favorite with children . . . And that’s only the half of it . . .

Festivals are ubiquitous, year-round in Japan.



Meiji Shrine

Start with festivals especially "about" children.

Every Sunday in **Tokyo**, the **Meiji Shrine** hosts a ceremony which children in kimono and traditional garb attend from all over the city. Open 5 a.m. – 6 p.m. in summer and 6:30 to 4 p.m. in winter. Near the Meiji Jingumae station on the Chiyoda subway line.

On March 3, the **Doll Festival** or "**Hina Matsuri**", once a mystical rite where bad fortune was transferred to dolls which were then floated away on the river or sea, is now a colorful occasion in which families with little girls display gorgeous dolls to guarantee the girls' future happiness. This is held everywhere in Japan. Inquire locally.

In **Kyoto** April 14 – 15, in the "**Nagahama Hikiyama Matsuri**," children perform traditional theater on beautiful floats.

May 5 is **Children's Day**, or "**Tango no Sekku**". This day of flag-flying and family displays of toy armor (for boys) and dolls (for girls) is supposed to ensure health for the children of the household. It's held everywhere in Japan.

October 10 is **Sports Day**. While not an ancient festival, it is so much fun and so quintessentially Japanese that it is worth noting. Throughout Japan, villages, towns and neighborhoods put on lighthearted community track and field competitions, with parents cheering the kids on. You can watch or even participate: everyone is welcome.

Every November 15 is the great **7-5-3 Children's Celebration** or "**Shichigosan**." Three and seven-year-old girls and five year-old boys are taken to local shrines to be blessed. This is especially popular in **Kyoto**, a city which boasts 1600 Buddhist temples and 270 Shinto shrines.

Many other "adult" festivals are particularly interesting for children:

April 14-15 in **Takayama**, 2-and-a-half hours by train from **Nagoya** on the JR Takayama Main Line, the ancient "**Hie Jinja Sanno Matsuri**" is held. Huge floats are topped with delightful robotic puppets, who perform unbelievably complex tricks. Crowds can reach the 200,000 mark during the festival, so be sure and book lodging well in advance.

Another truly grand festival is "**Gion Matsuri**" in **Kyoto**, held July 14-17. This huge festival and colorful, dynamic procession is considered the largest "reenactment" in Japan, it boasts 31 lavish floats and traditional musicians.

July 23-25, the "**Soma Nomaoi**" features wild samurai feats on horseback. To get there is a 2 hour train ride from **Tokyo** to **Sendai**, another 45 minute train ride from Sendai to **Soma**, and then a 20 minute walk to the festival



Hina Matsuri



Hina Matsuri



Aomori Nebuto

grounds. Peak experience: rockets drop prizes out on the plains, which the horsemen then race to retrieve!

Also July 23-25, "*Nebuta*", in **Aomori**, is a festival teenagers especially will enjoy. Hordes of youth dance and quaff sake as surreal illuminated floats move down the streets. It's 3 1/2 hours by train from Tokyo to **Morioka** (Tohoku Shinkansen); then 2 1/2 hours by JR Tohoku Express.

Every September 14-16, the "*Hachiman Matsuri*", with its famous deer dances, is held throughout Japan to celebrate the harvest and honor the War God. The one in **Kamakura**, with archers on horseback, is the most spectacular.

October 7-9, in **Nagasaki** (on Kyushu Island), the *Okunchi Festival* features a Chinese-style Dragon Dance, floats, and music.

Highly recommended is the *Chichibu Night Festival* or "*Chichibu No Yo Matsuri*," held every December 1-3. Access from Tokyo to **Chichibu**: 1 hour 50 minutes by Seibu Railway's Express train from Ikebukuro Station or 1 hour 30 minutes by Seibu Railway's Limited Express Train from Ikebukuro Station. Here you'll experience lanterns and drumming by night, Kabuki and dancing by day, culminating in a huge fireworks gala the last night.

SUMO and OTHER SPORTS

Kids and adults alike love Sumo. There are regular Sumo shows on television in both Los Angeles and New York. And, now that this 2,000-year-old ritualized combat has become an Olympic sport, there are many competitions in Europe and the U.S.A. Tokyo is the unofficial capital of the sport, where the best wrestlers from all over Japan compete in the "Big Show". *Basho* or tournaments are held every 2 months – from the Sunday nearest the 10th of the month for 15 days. Tokyo hosts major tourneys in January, May and September. Other major basho are held in **Fukuoka** in November, **Osaka** in March and **Nagoya** in July.



Sumo Kogugikan-Hall

The Sumo Stadium in Tokyo, **New Kokugikan**, is located virtually next door to the Ryogoku Station. There is a Sumo Museum on premises. Information and ticket sales can be made to them directly over the phone in Japanese only. Have your hotel concierge call 03/5237-9310 for seat reservations between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. or 03/3622-1100 for information between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Seat reservations can also be purchased through the ticket agency *Ticket PIA*, tel. 03/5237-9999. Ticket PIA staff speak English and accept credit cards, but you must have the tickets shipped to a location within Japan. Note: Ticket PIA charges a service fee (about 20%).

The First floor seats are permanently booked by Japanese fans. Second Floor B-section arena seats cost about \$60. However, these and even balcony tickets can be hard to obtain. *Chaya*, semi-official scalpers, sell tickets from booths right in the



Sumo

stadium itself! Try for *muko-jomen* (south) or *shomen* (north) tickets for best views: tickets up in the balcony range from almost nothing to 10,000 yen; opt for something in the mid-range or above. The English-language Tokyo papers and periodicals will have the latest updates on matches. Basho begin at noon, but the best matches usually don't take place until mid-afternoon.

TBI Tours, a major US tour operator selling packages to Japan (800/223-0266 or 603-357-5033), offers a Sumo Wrestling afternoon in Tokyo. The 6-hour *Sunrise Sumo Tour* package includes round-trip transportation from various areas of Tokyo, a tour of the Sumo Museum, a spotlight view of the *dohyo-iri* (entering ceremony), B-class reserved seats on the second floor, complimentary cocktail or beverage, and glossy illustrated brochure. This package is available for specific dates only (approximately six dates per year when the wrestlers are in Tokyo), so advance reservations are required.

Even when there is no basho happening, a visit to a Sumo stable training center or heya is also a special experience for kids. In these establishments, older master wrestlers coach a coterie of younger apprentices, and you can watch practice matches close up for free! Warning: the matches start early, around 6 a.m. Admission should be arranged in advance by someone who speaks Japanese.

A sampling of Tokyo heya with their phone numbers

Asahiyama – 03/3686-4950	Miyagino – 03/3634-6291
Azzumazeki – 03/3625-0033	Nakamura – 03/3655-1808
Dewanoumi – 03/3632-4920	Oshima – 03/3632-6578
Hakkaku – 03/3621-0404	Oguruma – 03/5245-5103
Izutsu – 03/3634-9827	Taiho – 03/3820-8340
Kagamiyama – 03/3673-7339	Takasago – 03/3876-7770
Magaki – 03/3623-7449	Takashima – 03/5607-5488

In an interesting sidelight, **Bull Sumo** matches are held in Okinawa and other parts of coastal Japan. In these bovine basho, scores of bulls spar in Sumo-like shoving matches throughout the day. The Bull Ring or *Togyujo*, held annually in **Uwajima** (in western Shikoku – Ask a Japanese speaker to call 0895/25-3511 for directions and details) is the most important Bull Sumo event in Japan. It is held on the 3rd Sunday in November, March, April and May; July 14th; and January 2nd.

There are a number of websites providing Sumo information. *Sumo World* (<http://iac.co.jp/~sumoworld/>) is an online newsletter, edited by the English-language Sumo expert, Mr. Andy Adams. The *Japan Sumo Association's* (Nihon Sumo Kyokai) website, which – provides an overview of sumo, wrestler bios, statistics and rankings, as well as audio and video augmented wrestler interviews is http://www.sumo.or.jp/index_e.html You can also sign up to have their latest news e-mailed to you free of charge. The *Mainichi newspaper's* (*Mainichi Interactive*) online sumo page (<http://www.mainichi.co.jp/english/sumo/>) provides daily sumo updates.

YABUSAME and HORSEBACK RIDING

Yabusame or equestrian archery, is another ancient sport with an up-to-date jolt of adrenaline. Riders charge full-tilt on their steeds while firing arrows at distant targets.

In Tokyo, there are several big yabusame events per year, including:

- Every October 10th at **Toyama Park** there is a competition sponsored by **Ana-Hachiman Shrine**. Take the Tozai Line to Waseda Station, walk out Exit 2, and it's a 2-3 block walk.
- The third Saturday in April, at **Sumida Park** (next to Asakusa Station on the Ginza Line). Ask your hotel concierge to call 03/5246-1151 for more information.



Tsurugaoko Hachiman-gu

In **Kamakura**, at the 11th century **Tsurugaoka Hachiman-gu Shrine**, there are fabulous yabusame exhibitions at both the summer and fall festivals. Check locally wherever you go in Japan for more yabusame events: many festivals include them as part of their celebrations.

Horseback riding is tremendously popular in Japan. In Tokyo, **Baji Equestrian Park** offers free horseback rides one Sunday every month for 4 to 10 year-olds (tel. 03/3429-5101 for information). **Nagisa Ponyland** offers free horseback riding and riding lessons (tel. 03/5658-5720 for directions, dates, and details). Another Tokyo kids' riding venue is **Higashi Itabashi**, with free pony rides for children three through 11 or 12. (tel. 03/3962-8419 for information).

BICYCLING

Bicycling is also very popular throughout Japan. Rental bikes are available everywhere, and bicyclists are an accepted part of Japanese traffic, whether mingling with cars on the road or pedestrians on the sidewalk. The island of **Hokkaido** is especially good cycling turf, with flat, scenic roads and many roadside campgrounds.

Another bicycle-friendly zone is **Tohoku's Oirase Valley**, with an excellent bike path featuring famous views of autumn foliage. In the **Japan Alps**, both **Hata** and **Takayama** offer abundant rental bikes and good cycling routes. The historic sites of the **Asuka Plains**, near the ancient capital of Nara, are best visited via rental bicycle. The rural scenery is also beautiful, especially in autumn. JNTO can provide information on bicycle tours from North America, as well as bicycle culture centers and rental locations.

BOATING

Boating on rivers is popular around **Kyoto**. At **Arashiyama**, only 45 minutes by train from Kyoto Station, you can take a 2-hour guided boat ride down through picturesque **Hozu Canyon**. December through March 9 departures from

Kameoka are at 11:15 a.m., 12:45 a.m., and 2:15 p.m. The rest of the year the schedule is 9 a.m., 10 a.m., 11 a.m., 12 noon, 2 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. Tickets are 3400 yen.

BASEBALL



Tokyo Dome

Don't forget Japanese baseball. Major cities like **Tokyo** and **Osaka** all have teams. The season roughly parallels our American Major League season, and the level of play is very high, as proved by the increasing number of Japanese ballplayers coming over to play in the U.S. (and vice versa). There are enough peculiarly Japanese nuances to the sport here to make attending a game a cultural experience beyond the enjoyment of the sporting event itself. A Japanese team cap with calligraphic logo makes a great souvenir. JNTO usually receives a copy of the annual game schedule in March.

AMUSEMENT & THEME PARKS

The Japanese may not have invented amusement parks, but they certainly made them their own. A few of the most interesting:

Tokyo Area:

Puroland, is a 6-story amusement complex featuring fantastical robots, special effects and ultra-high tech rides. Call two or three weeks in advance to reserve tickets, tel. 03/5705-1110. If you can't find anyone to call for you in Japanese, you can purchase in English by credit card through **Ticket Pia**. Call 03/5237-9999. A service fee applies, and tickets must be shipped to an address in Japan. Tickets range in price from 2,000 yen to 3,000 yen. 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. on weekdays, 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. on weekends, closed Tuesdays. Puroland is a short walk from Tama Center Station.

Palatte City, located in Tokyo's newly developed **Odaiba** waterfront region, just opened in 1999. It claims the world's second tallest Ferris Wheel (was the tallest but has just been surpassed by a Ferris Wheel in England). Its most popular attraction is MEGA WEB, Toyota's high-tech/supersonic car simulation ride/experience.

Also in Tokyo is gigantic **Yomiuriland**, with roller- and ice-skating, water sports, an aquarium, and state-of-the-art rides. It's opened 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekends; closed Tuesdays. Near Keio Yomiuriland Station on the Keio Sagami-hara Line.

Tokyo **Summerland** has a great wave pool with artificial surf and rain inside a dome. Located near Hachioji Station, Tokyo. Call 0425/58-6511.

Toshimaen, near Tokyo's Toshimaen Station on the Seibu Ikebukuro Line, is the oldest amusement park in Japan. Rides, haunted houses, live entertainment, fireworks in the summer. 9 to 5 daily; mid-November to mid-March it's closed Tuesdays. All-inclusive tickets are 3300 yen for kids, 3900 for adults.

Two to 2 1/2 hours from Tokyo by train is the **Fujiwara** area, and near one of its hot springs resorts, **Kinugawa Onsen**, is the unique **Nikko Edomura Village**. Live authentic ninja shows and other recreations of life in the Edo Period, enough to take up most of a day. Admission is 2,300 yen for kids, 3,500 for adults, and the park is open daily 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Call 0288/77-1777 for information.

Also in the Fujiwara area, nestled in the northern foothills of Mt. Fuji, about 1 1/2 hours outside of Tokyo is Fuji-Q-Highland. The highlight of its 30 world class attractions are the roller coasters. MOONSAULT SCRAMBLE, imposes the world's stiffest vertical force and features 4 full front spins, 4 lateral spins and mid-air flips. FUJIYAMA was the world's tallest roller-coaster, at 249 ft. above the ground and a with a vertical drop of 230 ft., but it lost its title August 1, 2000 to the STEEL DRAGON at **Nagashima Spaland** in **Nagashima Spa** (45 minutes west of Nagoya). The new four minute ride at Nagashima Spaland towers 320 feet with a 68 degree slope. It was inaugurated with a grand ceremony attended by representatives from the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

Other Tokyo area Theme Parks:

Arakawa Amusement Park; tel. 03/3893-6003 (Tokyo)

Akasakusa Hanyashiki; tel. 03/3842-4646 (Tokyo)

Korakuen Amusement Park; tel. 03/3811-2111 (Tokyo)

Sesame Place; tel. 0425/96-5811 (Akikawa/Tokyo area)

Kansai Area:

Nijo Jija, in Kyoto, is in the central part of the city. Built (and still owned by) the Ogawa family in feudal times, this rambling structure is a ninja's dream house, with secret escape passages, trapdoors, and sealed rooms – the original occupants evidently wanted to ensure their own safety at any cost! Call 075/841-0972 for more information and reservations.

There are 60-minute tours, at 10 a.m., 11 a.m., 2 p.m. and 3 p.m., by reservation only. These are highly educational as well as fun.

Also in Kyoto, **Movie Village** or **Toei Uzumasa Eigamura**, is very popular with Japanese children. There is a fairly-complete mockup of a samurai-era Japanese town, and an ongoing show of clips from past Japanese hit films. Open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., winter 9:30 to 4; closes proximately Christmas to New Years. In the same **Arishayama** neighborhood as the canyon boat trip.

Other Parts of Honshu:

Takayama, in the mountains, 2 1/2 hours north of Nagoya, has a wonderful living history museum called **Hida Folklore Village** or **Hida Minzoku Mura**. Ten minutes by bike or five minutes by local bus from the station, it's a marvelous recreation of a traditional 18th century village. Like Colonial Williamsburg, you can sometimes catch a glimpse of local artisans demonstrating crafts and skills of Japan's by-gone days. Open 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, tel. 0577/33-4714. Also in Takayama is the **Toy Museum** or **Kyodo Gangan** (open 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily), which smaller children especially will love.

For total immersion in OLD JAPAN, visit **Shirakawago**, 5 1/2 hours from **Nagoya** by Teitetsu or JR Express Bus or 1 1/2 half-hours by bus northwest of Takayama. This is an entire village of preserved and restored thatch-roofed farmhouses and workshops two centuries old. Even more authentic than **Hida Minzoku Mura**, these buildings, known as **gassho-zukuri** or "hands clasped in prayer" because of their steep angle to prevent winter snow accumulation, are world heritage sites and you can actually stay overnight in those that are today, humble guesthouses called **minshuku**. You'll eat traditional meals like trout and wild greens. The cost is about \$65 per person including breakfast and dinner. Call the tourist information office in Japanese only at 05769/6-1013 or 05769/6-1751, Thursday – Tuesday, 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. to arrange. Kids will find it utterly fascinating.

Zoos

Here are some popular zoos in major metropolitan areas.

In and Near Tokyo:

Ueno Zoological Park in Tokyo, near Ueno Station, includes three giant pandas in its menagerie. Open 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., except Monday.

Children's Zoological and Natural Park, near Tokyo in Iwadono, Higashi-Matsuyama-shi; tel/0493-35-1234. Open every day but Monday 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. March – November, 9:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. the rest of the year.

Chiba-shi Dobutsu-Koen, which boasts 165 species of animals, is also near Tokyo. Take the Monorail from JR Chiba Station to Dobutsu-Koen Station. Open 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily, except Monday.

Nasu Safari Park, also in the Tokyo area, is a half-hour by bus from Kuroiso Station on JR Tohoku Line, is open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily; tel. 0287/78-0838.

Fuji Safari Park, Aza Fujiwara, Suyama, Susono-chi, is 1/2 hour by bus from **Gotemba** Station, Greater Tokyo area. Open daily at 9 a.m., closing times vary by season.

Gunma Safari Park, also in Greater Tokyo, is open daily except Wednesday, 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; closes at 4 p.m. in winter. Near Joshu-Tomioka Station on the Joshin Dentetu Line.

Tokyo's Tama Zoo is open 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., except Monday, tel. 0425/91-1611. During spring and summer holidays, it's accessible by direct train in 40 minutes from Shinjuku Station on the Keio Line.

Also in Tokyo, **Inokashira Shizen Bunkaen Park** combines an aquarium, small zoo and sculpture garden. It's open 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., except Monday and is a 5-minute walk from Kishijoji Station.

Yokohama City Kanazawa Zoo is open 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., except Monday and is a 12-minute bus ride from Kanazawa Bunko Station, tel. 045/783-5060.

Zoorasia, also in Yokohama, is open 9:30 to 4:30, except Tuesday. Call 045/959-1000 for directions.

Other Parts of Honshu:

Izu Bio Park is 10 minutes by bus from the Izu Kyoku Line's Izu-Inatori Station, between **Ito City** and **Shimoda City** on the **Izu Peninsula**. Open daily all year round.

Oji Zoo, in **Kobe**, combines a small but nice zoo with an amusement park with rides. Open 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. every day but Wednesday, and within walking distance of Hankyu Oji Koen Station, and very inexpensive.

AQUARIUMS

Japan is overflowing (pardon the pun) with aquariums, as befits an island-nation that for millennia has lived off the seas. The best:

Tokyo area:

Tokyo's gigantic **Tokyo Sea Life Park** is famous for its huge schools of tuna and other exotic marine life. Open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. except Monday and New Year's Holiday (December 29 – January 3). Located on the JR Keiyo Line, Nishi Kasai Station.

Enoshima Aquarium, Marineland and Marine Zoo is located on the beach in Fujisawa. The complex features an aquarium, a marine land with a dolphin show and a marine zoo with a sea lion show. About an hour from Tokyo on the Odakyu Line to **Enoshima**, then a 10 minute walk. Open 9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. daily.

Kansai:

Osaka Aquarium is the biggest in Japan, and features tanks large enough so visitors can watch penguins and other Pacific Rim sealife swimming underwater. A 5-10 minute walk from Osaka Station on the Chuo Line, it's open 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Also, just opened to much fan fare on July 15, 2000 is the new **Osaka Maritime Museum** adjacent to the **Osaka Convention Center**. Both these sites are not far from the immense, stone **Osaka Castle** towering 175 above the city, is a favorite tour for young people.

Suma Aquarium Park in Kobe has a big-wave tank and over 20,000 marine animals.

Elsewhere on Honshu:

The new **Toba Aquarium** in **Toba, Mie Prefecture**, is one of Japan's most sophisticated aquariums. It features rare porpoise, displays of "Living Fossils", and many exotic creatures. Located next to **Pearl Island**, it's opened from 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m. (until 6 p.m. in August), tel. 0599/25-2555.

Marinepia Nihonkai in **Niigata** has marine life from the Shigano River, the Japan Sea, and around the world.

WHAT ELSE?

This itinerary provides just a small sampling of the many activities to do and places to visit with children in Japan. If you would like further information, JNTO can answer specific questions. Please also see JNTO's **Samurai Culture Itinerary**, with its suggestions for youngsters particularly interested in Japan's warrior history, which by the way, had a very big influence on the producers of the movie **Star Wars**.

RESOURCES

Books

Kid's Trips in Tokyo: A Family Guide to One Day Outings,
by Ivy Maeda Paperback Kodansha Intl. (June 1998), 364 pages

Japan for Kids : The Ultimate Guide for Parents and Their Children,
by Jeanne Huey Erickson, Diane Wiltshire Kanagawa, Jeanne Huey (Contributor)
Kodansha Intl. (August 1992), 320 pages

Little Adventures in Tokyo: 39 Thrills for the Urban Explorer,
by Rick Kennedy, Stone Bridge Press (July 1998) Updated edition, 176 pages

Website

<http://www.smith.edu/fcceas/japan/jc.htm>

Curriculum for teaching children of all ages about Japanese culture, from festivals to adventures. Also educational hands-on kits.