



Off the Beaten Path: A Different Side of Japan

2027 NIIGATA SAKE NO JIN ANNUAL SAKE FESTIVAL

Plus Tokyo, Minakami & Sado Island

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12 Nights / 14 Days • 29 Meals (12 Breakfasts, 8 Lunches, 9 Dinners)
Escorted from Honolulu • Includes an English-Speaking Local Guide
March 05 – 18, 2027 • Tour Manager: Cora Kinney

VISIT: Tokyo, Minakami, Nagaoka, Niigata & Sado Island

OVERVIEW: The Niigata Sake No Jin festival was originally held in 2004 as a 50th Anniversary Celebration of the Niigata Sake Brewers Association. They studied the biggest beer festival, the Oktoberfest of Germany, and used it as a reference. Their goal is for people of Niigata prefecture and people from outside of Niigata and abroad to enjoy Niigata sake and local foods. Held over two days, the Niigata Sake No Jin, is one of Japan's biggest celebrations of sake. Although attendance is limited to just four sessions (three hours each) during this two-day event, the festival still attracts thousands of visitors each year. Attendees can sample over 500 varieties of sake from about 90 brewers, along with a wide selection of local cuisine that pairs perfectly with each tasting. As the home to more breweries than any other prefecture in Japan, it's easy to see why Niigata is known as the "Kingdom of Sake."

COMPLETE PACKAGES!
Includes Roundtrip Airfare from Honolulu, 12 Nights Hotel, 29 Meals, Tips for Local Tour Guides and Motorcoach Drivers, All Taxes & Fees

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Day 1: Fri, Mar 05 – HONOLULU – Depart Honolulu via Japan Airlines flt #73 at 12:05 pm.

Day 2: Sat, Mar 06 – HANEDA – TOKYO. Arrive at the Haneda International Airport at 4:05 pm. After entry formalities, transfer by coach to your hotel. Enjoy a Welcome Dinner at the hotel. GRAND NIKKO TOKYO DAIBA (2 Nights) (D)

Day 3: Sun, Mar 07 – TOKYO. After a delicious breakfast buffet, depart the hotel for a full day of sightseeing and activities. Explore an oasis of relative calm at the **Hama-rikyu Gardens**, located in the heart of bustling downtown Tokyo. These scenic gardens were once reserved for imperial use only, and were opened to the public in 1946. A few interesting sites to be on the lookout for while strolling the parks, is a 300-year-old pine tree near one of the entrances to the parks, the memorial built to commemorate and console the spirits of the ducks that were killed on the property, and the garden's central pond that is filled with seawater from Tokyo Bay and uses sluice gates to regulate the water levels throughout the day (based on the Bay's tides). Next, take in the view of the surrounding city from the observation deck of the **Tokyo Skytree**. At just over 2,000-ft-tall, it is the tallest tower in Tokyo. Rising 350m above the ground, the Tokyo Skytree Tembo Deck offers a 360° panoramic view of Tokyo. Enjoy lunch (on your own) at Tokyo Skytree or TOKYO Solomachi – located at the base of the Tokyo Skytree – where a variety of restaurant and food choices are available. After lunch, get ready to **shop in Ginza!** The Ginza landscape of traditional department stores has undergone an energizing facelift in recent years with the advent of GINZA SIX, a soaring complex of fashion houses and restaurants catering to the global consumer, and Tokyu Plaza Ginza. Japanese businesses are also joining the development rush, putting their considerable resources into the plush shopping and restaurant idyll of GINZA PLACE and the renewal of a Ginza stalwart, the Sony Building. But don't forget to visit the long-established department stores, such as Ginza Mitsukoshi, Matsuya Ginza, and Wako. Tonight, enjoy dinner at a local restaurant. After dinner, return to the hotel. (B, D)

Day 4: Mon, Mar 08 – TOKYO – MINAKAMI. After a delicious breakfast buffet, transfer to Tokyo Station by coach. An ekiben (train bento box) will be passed out while you wait, to enjoy on the train ride. Transfer to the Jomo-Kogen Station by **Shinkansen Bullet Train**. Make a stop at **Michi-no-Eki Minakami**, a popular Gunma michi-no-eki (roadside station) offering local produce, souvenirs, and food, along with stunning scenic views of the Minakami area. Not only do these roadside stations provide a clean and convenient rest stop, but you will find an array of farmer-direct merchandise along with other omiyage items. Next, you'll have the opportunity to **paint an omen (mask)**. In Japan, there are rich traditions of wearing masks that goes back to the earliest days of its recorded history. Japanese masks are used traditionally in theater, festivals or rituals. They are connected to folk myths and tales. Masks represent people, creatures, devils, ghosts, and animals. The various characters portrayed by the masks are: hyottoko (funny male face with a bent mouth); okame (funny female face with round face and button nose); oni (Japanese demon with horns and fangs who frighten people); and tengu (Japanese god or supernatural creature with a long nose and red face). Arrive at the hotel. You may want to relax in front of the fireplace in the hotel lobby, get a complimentary drink in the lounge, or soak in one of the hotel's baths before or after dinner. The **onsen hot springs**, which are divided for men and women, are sure to become some of your fondest memories of your visit to Japan. MINAKAMI HOTEL JURAKU (2 Nights) (B, L, D)

Day 5: Tue, Mar 09 – MINAKAMI. After a breakfast, depart the hotel for a full day of activities in Minakami. Start the day by **picking some strawberries** at the peak of freshness. Enjoy the "fruits of your labor" as a sweet mid-morning snack. A special lunch has been planned at Tatumikan. The main draw is cooking around a sunken hearth, which is a typical cooking style in the countryside regions with heavy snow. The hearth known as an irori was the center of the home during the long winters and a gathering place for the family, as well as the source of warmth. This style of cooking is said to have its roots in the samurai grilling food over the fire on their swords while on the road. The spread at Tatumikan involves many courses and lots of local ingredients which are slowly cooked over a very special charcoal that takes a week of constant attention to make. "Taiko" simply means "drum" in Japanese, but the art form is a dynamic performance art combining music, dance, and athletics. **Mikuni Taiko** refers to the traditional, powerful Japanese drumming art form, specifically linked to the historic Mikuni Festival in Japan's Hokuriku region, combining powerful beats with cultural elements like giant warrior dolls and floats, evolving from ancient battlefield signals and

religious rites into a vibrant performance art known for its energy, unity, and cultural expression. After watching several powerful Mikuni Taiko performances, you'll **learn how to drum** from the experts. Talk about a workout! Return to the hotel for a buffet dinner. (B, L, D)

Day 6: Wed, Mar 10 – MINAKAMI – NAGAOKA – NIIGATA. After breakfast, learn about and shop for two ingredients essential to Japanese cuisine at a **miso factory** and a **shoyu factory**. Next visit the **Michi-no-Eki Nagaoka Hanabikan**, a completely new type of next-generation roadside station that provides a diverse array of services. It functions as a place of rest and recuperation, and a place that shows off the wonder of Nagaoka. The biggest attraction is the Fireworks Theater, where visitors can watch a 30-minute fireworks show and view displays of life-size firework shells and casings. Enjoy lunch while here. After, visit the **Asahi Shuzo Sake Brewery**, which was founded in 1830 in Niigata, the region with the second largest number of breweries in Japan. Since its founding, Asahi Shuzo has continued to brew sake under the "quality first" principle, using soft water soft water drawn from pure underground streams that flow under the brewery, as well top quality rice from local farmers. Asahi Shuzo's passion for using only Niigata-grown ingredients has earned them numerous awards in Japan and abroad. Take a **tour of the facilities**, learn how their sake is made, then enjoy a **sake tasting** afterward. Next, dine at the on-site restaurant, where you'll enjoy dishes made with the seasonal flavors of Niigata in mind. After dinner, transfer to the hotel. HOTEL NIKKO NIIGATA (4 Nights) (B, L, D)

Day 7: Thur, Mar 11 – NIIGATA. This morning visit the **Northern Culture Museum**, where you'll have a special **hagama set lunch** (rice cooked in traditional cast iron pot) and **learn how to pound mochi**. Originally serving as a mansion of Ito Bunkichi, who lived in the Edo period (1603–1868) and was one of the greatest landowners in Japan, nowadays, the museum houses calligraphy and ceramics, lacquer ware, and documents related to Ito's family history. You can also visit the "walking" garden, with its large pond. After lunch, **learn how to make a kite**. What a great souvenir of this trip! Then, enjoy a **senbei (rice cracker) making** experience. Take a picture of your creation to remember it by, as you may be tempted to eat your "art work" before the trip is over. Tonight, we're all in for treat!! Be entertained during dinner by an **authentic Geiko**, with dancing, singing and playing fun games. A Geiko is a highly trained entertainer, specifically in Kyoto, who performs in the area of singing, dancing, and music. Outside of Kyoto, these entertainers are more commonly known as Geisha. After dinner, return to the hotel. (B, L, D)

Day 8: Fri, Mar 12 – NIIGATA. After breakfast, visit the **Niigata Furusato Village**, a culture and tourism facility that provides tourist information, and also sells specialty products of Niigata, including local sake, rice, and fresh fish. Stop at the **Cave D'occi Winery** for lunch. Next, visit a **knife factory at Tsubame-Sanjo**. Tsubame-Sanjo is a combination of the names Tsubame City and Sanjo City, which were both famous from metal products since the Edo period (1603–1868). Tsubame-Sanjo is known all over the country as the top maker of kitchen goods, and in particular kitchen knives. What makes Japanese knives so famous around the world? The knife blades give a sharper and more precise cut. This is your chance to own one of these skillfully honed knives for yourself. Before returning to the hotel, stop at an **AEON MALL**, with free time for shopping and dining (on your own). (B, L)

Day 9: Sat, Mar 13 – NIIGATA. After breakfast at the hotel, walk over to the TOKI MESSE: Niigata Convention Center, conveniently connected to the hotel, and enjoy **three hours of sake tasting** at the **NIIGATA SAKE NO JIN** festival. After entering the venue, you will receive an ochoko (small tasting cup), which you'll take with you as you explore the festival. As you walk around the venue, you can taste each brewery's signature sakes – which you are free to sample as many varieties as you like, as often as you like. Breweries often offer limited-edition bottles that are not found in stores, newly unveiled labels, or special tasting exclusives at the festival, which makes this event even more special for sake enthusiasts. Niigata specialty foods, which pair well with the sakes offered, are also available for purchase. After three hours, carefully walk back to the hotel for some leisure time before dinner. (B, D)

*Baggage will be sent from Niigata to Tokyo, skipping Sado Island. Prepare an overnight bag for two nights.



Day 10: Sun, Mar 14 – NIIGATA – SADO ISLAND. After breakfast at hotel, walk to the nearby Niigata Port. Take a **jet foil to Sado Island**. Upon arrival in Sado Island, enjoy lunch at a local restaurant. After lunch, learn about the toki (crested ibis), a national icon that once became extinct in Japan, but now once again inhabits Sado Island. The **Sado Japanese Crested Ibis Conservation Center**, is a conservation park and museum where visitors can see the endangered crested ibis and learn more about the efforts to increase their population. From the Meiji period (1868–1912), the bird suffered overhunting, habitat loss, and a reduction of food sources caused by chemicals used in agriculture. **Kirarium Sado** is the Sado Gold and Silver Mine Welcome Center, where you can learn everything you wanted to know about Sado Island’s gold and silver mining history. In the theaters, you can view videos of the mines from its start in 1601 when full-scale mining began to 1989 when mining stopped. One of Tokugawa Ieyasu’s first acts after becoming shogun, was to place Sado Island under the direct control of the shogunate. Gold and silver from the mines was a key source of funding for Tokugawa and his successors. The koban, a Japanese oval gold coin, was casted in Sado Island on the order of the Tokugawa Shogunate. A flotation plant is a site where the final stages of gold mining take place. It’s where the valuable minerals that get extracted from the mine are separated from all the other things that get dug out, such as waste materials and other by-products. Built during the first half of the 1900s, the **Kitazawa Flotation Plant** was once the biggest producers of ore in East Asia. As the activities at the mine started to dwindle in the 1950s, the activities at the flotation plant scaled down considerably. Since then, the site has mostly remained idle and to a large extent also untouched, leading to the entire structure being overgrown with plants and vines. Take a drive by the massive ruins, before transferring to the hotel. Tonight, enjoy a traditional multi-course **Kaiseki Dinner**, featuring ingredients unique to Sado Island. During dinner, watch a **Oni Daiko (Demon Drums) Performance**. The Japanese word “oni” roughly translates to “demon” or “ogre” in English, making Westerners think of an evil entity for religious reasons. However, that doesn’t do the notion of oni on Sado Island justice. On Sado Island, they are seen as friendly deities that would ward off evil by dancing and playing the taiko drum. This is called Oni Daiko (Demon Drums), or “Ondeko” in the local dialect. While it is unknown when the tradition of Oni Daiko started on Sado Island, the oldest known record of Oni Daiko is an illustration of the Aikawa Festival that dates back to around 1744. Don’t forget to try out the **onsen hot springs** at this hotel! It’s a wonderful way to unwind at the end of a day of touring, before bed. HOTEL YAHATAKAN (2 Nights) (B, L, D)

Day 11: Mon, Mar 15 – SADO ISLAND. Full day sightseeing of Sado Island by coach, starting with a visit to the **Obata Sake Brewery**, the brewer of *Manotsuru*. Established in 1892, this brewery has won the gold prize a total of ten times at the nation’s most respected *National New Sake Awards*. It was also honored three times with a prestigious gold medal, in the sake category, at the world’s largest wine competition held in London, the *International Wine Challenge* (in 2004, 2007, and 2015). This is your chance to purchase some of these prize winning sakes for your own collection. **Learn how to make soba noodles** from scratch! Enjoy your delicious creation for lunch. After lunch, explore the **Sado Nishimikawa Gold Park** and learn about Sado Island’s history as a gold-producing region. Through detailed models, video displays, gold replicas, and mining tools, Sado Island’s gold past comes to life. Next, take a traditional **tarai-bune boat ride**. The tarai-bune tub boats floating along the Ogi coastline are considered the symbol of Ogi. These boats are constructed



out of cedar wrapped with bamboo on the outside, with a diameter of about 150cm. Developed and used during Edo and Meiji periods, the tarai-bune tub boats, mainly operated by women, were ideal for tight turn and stability amidst the abundant reefs and coves along the Ogi Peninsula. These boats were originally used for collecting shellfish and seaweed from around the coast. Then, visit the charming fishing village of **Shukunegi**, which is designated as a National Historic Site. Take a stroll along the narrow streets of Shukunegi Village to feel the history and experience the living conditions of people living during the Edo period. As this area was previously a trading port for ships going to Edo (Tokyo) and Osaka, many who lived here were ship carpenters and sailors. Here, you will be able to find the popular sankaku-ya which is a triangle-shaped house, built to fit the shape of the land available at that period of time. Enjoy dinner at local restaurant before returning to the hotel. (B, L, D)

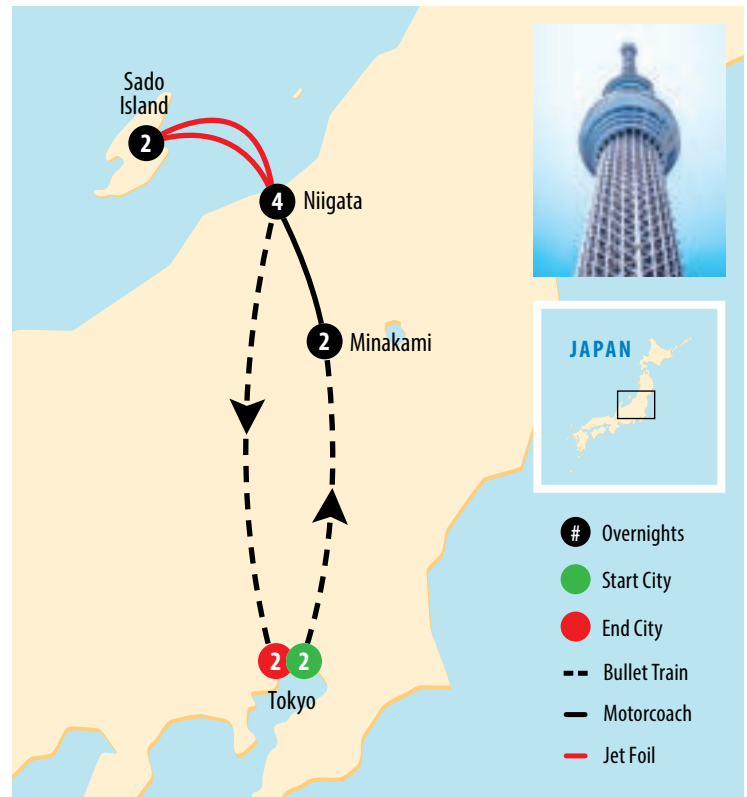
Day 12: Tue, Mar 16 – SADO ISLAND – TOKYO. After breakfast, transfer to Ryotsu Port. Take a **jet foil to Niigata Port**. Transfer to the Niigata Train Station and depart on a **Shinkansen Bullet Train** to Tokyo. Finally, transfer to the hotel, in the center of Shinjuku, the hub of shopping and restaurants in Tokyo. The remainder of the day is at your leisure. KEIO PLAZA HOTEL TOKYO (2 Nights) (B)

Day 13: Wed, Mar 17 – TOKYO. Enjoy a full day at leisure. Enjoy shopping and dining in the bustling Shinjuku area. Your Local Guide will be available to assist as needed. (B)

Day 14: Thur, Mar 18 – TOKYO – HANEDA – HONOLULU. Start the day **learning the art of Edo kiriko edging**, a traditional form of cut glass manufacturing that was developed in the late-Edo period (in the early 19th century) in Tokyo. Edo kiriko is characterized by its beautiful, intricate patterning and a bold contrast between colored and non-colored elements. What sets Edo kiriko apart from other glass cutting techniques are the 20 intricate patterns traditionally used to decorate the glass and its incredible thinness. While Satsuma kiriko (another glass cutting technique) uses glass that is typically 2–3mm thick, Edo kiriko uses glass that is only 1mm thick. And when you gently flick the glass, it makes an almost metallic sound. Today’s highlight will be a hands-on **sushi making session**, which will yield your delicious lunch. After lunch visit **Ameyoko**, a busy market street along the Yamanote Line tracks between Okachimachi and Ueno Stations. The name “Ameyoko” is a short form for “Ameya Yokocho” (candy store alley), as candies were traditionally sold there. Alternatively, “Ame” also stands for “America,” because a lot of American products used to be available there when the street was the site of a black market in the years following WWII. Today, various products such as clothes, bags, cosmetics, fresh fish, dried food, and spices are sold along Ameyoko. Transfer to the Haneda International Airport for the flight home. Depart Tokyo on Japan Airlines flt #74 at 9:00 pm and arrive in Honolulu at 9:00 am the same day. Aloha and welcome home! (B, L)

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS: Hama-rikyu Gardens, Tokyo Skytree, Shopping in the Ginza Area, Shinkansen Bullet Train Ride, Michi-no-Eki Minakami, Miso Factory, Shoyu Factory, Michi-no-Eki Nagaoka Hanabikan, Northern Culture Museum, Hagama Set Lunch, Dinner with an Authentic Geiko, Niigata Furusato Village, Cave D'occi Winery, Knife Factory at Tsubame-Sanjo, AEON MALL, Niigata Sake No Jin, Jet Foil Ride to Sado Island, Sado Japanese Crested Ibis Conservation Center, Kirarium Sado, Kitazawa Flotation Plant, Dinner with an Oni Daiko Performance, Sado Nishimikawa Gold Park, Tarai-bune Boat Ride, Shukunegi, Jet Foil Ride to Niigata Port & Ameyoko

HANDS-ON EXPERIENCES: Omen (Mask) Painting, Strawberry Picking, Mikuni Taiko, Asahi Shuzo Sake Brewery Tour and Tasting, Mochi Pounding, Kite Making, Senbei (Rice Cracker) Making, Obata Sake Brewery with Tasting, Soba Noodle Making, Edo Kiriko Edging & Sushi Making Class



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WITH ONI DAIKO PERFORMERS

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