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Off the Beaten Path: *A Different Side of Japan*

2026 NIIGATA "SAKE NO JIN" ANNUAL SAKE FESTIVAL Plus Sado Island, Shibata City & Tokyo

Enjoy your choice of Japan Airlines' "Economy," "Premium Economy," or the affordable luxury of "Business" class service. Premium Economy class customers will begin their journey with a relaxing visit to JAL's "Sakura Lounge" and the "Sakura Lounge — Hale" for Business class.

13 Nights / 15 Days • 32 Meals (13 Breakfasts, 9 Lunches, 10 Dinners)
Escorted from Honolulu • Includes an English-Speaking Local Guide
March 03 – 17, 2026 • Tour Manager: Annette Nishikawa

VISIT: Tokyo, Niigata, Sado Island & Shibata City

OVERVIEW: The Niigata "Sake No Jin" was originally held in 2004 as a 50th Anniversary Celebration of the **Niigata Sake Brewers Association**. They studied the biggest beer festival, "Oktoberfest" of Germany and used it as reference. Their goal is for people of Niigata prefecture and people from outside of Niigata and abroad to have fun with Niigata sake and local foods. By holding the event annually, **Sake No Jin** has grown tremendously, and had over 100,000 visitors for the two-day event in 2012. Enjoy over **500 sake from about 90 brewers along with local cuisine**. They also have various stage performances and sake seminars. Compared to other prefectures, **Niigata Sake Brewers** do not hesitate to polish rice. In fact, Niigata has the highest percentage of average rice-milled down ratio in Japan. In order to make Niigata sake, they only use the center core of rice, which contains purer, better starch. Because of this method, the artisanal sake production is small, and they are very particular about their sake quality.

COMPLETE PACKAGE!

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2026 Niigata “Sake No Jin” Annual Sake Festival

Day 1: Tue, Mar 03 — HONOLULU. Depart Honolulu via Japan Airlines flt #73 at 11:55 am.

Day 2: Wed, Mar 04 — TOKYO. Arrive at the Haneda International Airport at 3:55 pm. After entry formalities, transfer by coach to your hotel. Enjoy a Welcome Dinner at the hotel. **KEIO PLAZA HOTEL TOKYO** (2 Nights) (D)

Day 3: Thur, Mar 05 — TOKYO. After a delicious breakfast buffet, depart the hotel for a full day of sightseeing and activities. Begin at the **Yushima Tenjin Shrine**, for one of Tokyo’s most popular late-winter events, the Ume Matsuri, or **Plum Blossom Festival**. Usually taking place from early February to early March, this annual festival showcases the 300+ plum trees — most of them 70 to 80 years old — that grow in the shrine’s orchard. 80% of which produce white plum blossom flowers. Plum blossoms are a symbol of resilience and preference in the face of adversity, because plum blossoms often bloom most vibrantly even amidst the harsh winter snow. Next, take in the view of the surrounding city from the observation deck of the **Tokyo Skytree**. At just over 2,000 feet tall, it is the tallest tower in Tokyo. Rising 350 meters above the ground, the Tokyo Skytree Tembo Deck offers a 360 degree panoramic view of Tokyo. Enjoy lunch (on your own) in Tokyo Skytree or at Tokyo Solamachi — 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. Indulge tonight in a fabulous **A5 Wagyu Steak Dinner**. After dinner, return to the hotel. (B, D)

Day 4: Fri, Mar 06 — TOKYO — NIIGATA. After a delicious breakfast buffet, transfer to Tokyo station by coach. Transfer to Niigata by **Shinkansen Bullet Train** with **reserved seating** in the **Green Car**. Rice is the heart of sake brewing, and Niigata Prefecture, renowned for its rice cultivation, is home to the largest number of sake breweries in Japan. Stop at **Imayo Tsukasa Sake Brewery**, a longstanding producer of sake that started brewing in the mid-Meiji Period (1868–1912). The sake crafted at Imayo Tsukasa boasts a dry yet robust flavor that harmonizes exquisitely with food. You can find some rare sakes, some that are only available in their sake shop. And for those that are not much of a drinker, sweet, creamy, non-alcoholic amazake is available as well. And for the “young at heart” try your luck at a special capsule toy “gacha-gacha” machine here that allows everyone to win real sake or amazake based on the color of the coin that they receive from the machine. En route to the hotel, stop at an **AEON MALL**, with free time for shopping and dining (on your own). Arrive at the hotel for an evening of leisure. **HOTEL NIKKO NIIGATA** (4 Nights) (B, L)

Day 5: Sat, Mar 07 — NIIGATA. After breakfast at the hotel, walk over to the Convention Center conveniently connected to the hotel and enjoy a full day of sake tasting at the **SAKE NO JIN FESTIVAL**. Niigata specialty foods are available for purchase along with sake tasting from the top sake breweries in the country. This evening, dinner will be a short walk away, at the hotel. (B, D)

Day 6: Sun, Mar 08 — NIIGATA. This morning visit the **Northern Culture Museum**, where you’ll have a special hagama (rice cooked in traditional cast iron pot) set lunch 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 garden; it is a “walking” garden with a big pond. After lunch, enjoy a **senbei (rice cracker) making** experience. 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 arena of singing, dancing, and music. Outside of Kyoto, these entertainers are more commonly known as Geisha. (B, L, D)

Day 7: Mon, Mar 09 — NIIGATA. After breakfast, learning about, and shop for, two ingredients essential to Japanese cuisine at a **miso and shoyu factory**. Next visit **Michi-no-Eki Nagaoka Hanabikan** — a completely new type of next-generation roadside station that provides a diverse array of services to

its users. It functions as a place of rest and recuperation for users, and a place that shows the wonder of Nagaoka. The biggest attraction of this rest stop is the Fireworks Theater, where visitors can watch a 30-minute fireworks show and view some displays of life-size firework shells and casings. After lunch at the Michi-no-Eki, 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 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, return to the hotel. (B, L, D)

Day 8: Tue, Mar 10 — NIIGATA — SADO ISLAND. Transfer to Niigata Port. Ride the **jet foil to Sado Island**. Upon arrival in Sado Island, enjoy lunch at a local restaurant. After lunch, transfer to hotel for an afternoon of leisure, for you to explore the hotel and its surroundings. Tonight, enjoy a traditional multi-course **Kaiseki Dinner**, featuring ingredients unique to Sado Island. During dinner, watch an **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, they are seen as friendly deities that would ward off evil by dancing and playing the taiko drum. This is called “oni-daiko” (demon drumming) — 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. Oni-daiko is very often performed at local temple and shrine festivals especially around April (rice planting season) and October (rice harvesting season) to pray for an abundant crop. Though not official events, you may run into an oni-daiko performance during a stroll through the streets “off-season,” as well, when they perform “kadozuke” within their community, going from door to door to cleanse every household from harmful energy. The oni dances to the rhythm of the taiko drum, then enters the house, taking all the bad energy upon himself. When it comes out again, the oni brushes off the bad energy sticking to its hair and body with drum sticks while dancing and drums it into the taiko. Afterwards, the drum needs to be taken to the village’s shrine or temple to have it ritually purified. After dinner, **relax in your private open-air onsen hot spring**, located in your own room. Or try out the public onsen facilities — which are divided for men and women — and allow you to enjoy the onsen hot springs whether indoors or outdoors. The high-quality service and facilities are sure to become some of your fondest memories of your visit to Japan. **HOTEL AZUMA** (3 Nights) (B, L, D)

Day 9: Wed, Mar 11 — SADO ISLAND. Full day sightseeing of Sado Island by coach, including **Kirarium Sado** and the **Sado Gold Mine**. Kirarium Sado is the Sado Gold Mine Welcome Center, where you will learn everything you need to know about the gold mine. At the Sado Gold Mine, learn about the 400+ year history of the largest gold mine in Japan. Full-size dolls and robots provide accurate representation of the historic workings of the mine in the Edo period. In the museum, you can try to lift a pure gold bar, with a value of over 100 million yen, out of a clear box. Many have tried, but few have succeeded. Take a drive by the **Kitazawa Floatation Field**, before learning to **make your own soba noodles** and eat your delicious creation for lunch. After lunch, visit the **Obata Sake Brewery**, the brewer of the *Manotsuru* brand sake. 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. 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 150 centimeters. Developed and used during the Edo and Meiji periods, the tarai-bune tub boats, mainly operated by women, were ideal for tight turns 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**. The entire village 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

Plus Sado Island, Shibata City & Tokyo



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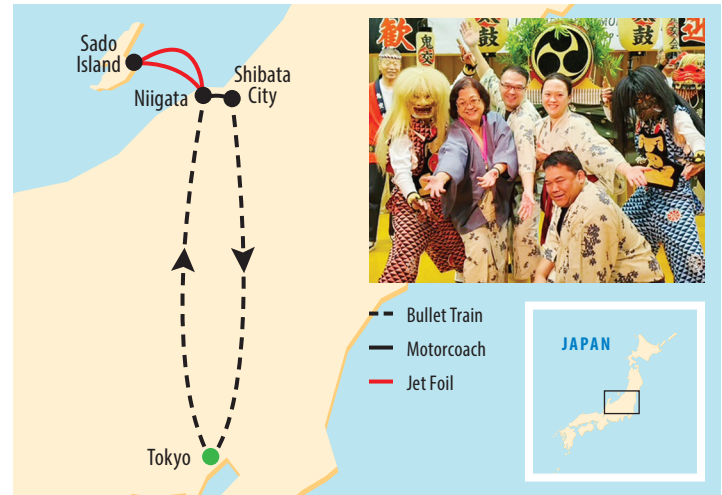


PLUM BLOSSOM FESTIVAL AT YUSHIMA TENJIN SHRINE

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 10: Thur, Mar 12 — SADO ISLAND. What did you think about the oni-daiko drum performance at dinner two nights ago? You'll have your own chance to "ward off evil" in an **oni-daiko drum lesson**. Sado's oni-daiko can be divided into five different styles based on the characteristics of their dancing, drum rhythm, costumes, and props. The most common is the "katagami-style" that is practiced mainly in the centre of the island. This style is thought to have been influenced by Noh, since the tempo is generally slower and the oni dance using "suriashi" (sliding steps), a move distinctive of Noh. Occasionally, "shishi" (Chinese lions) would join in the performance. The "mamemaki-style" is home to Aikawa where the Gold Mine is. Here, an old man dances around the oni, scattering beans, while the oni, carrying a long sword, just remain standing for the most part. Around the middle of the southern coastline, they perform in the "maehama-style." Two oni dance together, sometimes joined by a person clad in yellow directing them. Also, flute play accompanies the drum. The "issoku-style" can be found in Ogi area and is characterized by the oni jumping on one foot while playing the drum. Usually, oni-daiko is performed wearing a mask, but in this style, they sometimes dance bare-faced. The rarest style is the "hanagasa-style," performed only in two villages on the eastern tip of Sado. The oni are one part of a larger performance including a lion dance and a folk song performance. Which style did you learn today? After lunch, learn about the crested ibis (or "Toki" in Japanese), a national icon that once became extinct in Japan, but now once again inhabits Sado Island. The **Sado Japanese Crested Ibis Conservation Centre** 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. In 1981, the last few toki, who lived on Sado Island, were captured for a breeding program that ultimately failed in 2003 when the last native bird died. A new breeding program years later with birds donated from China proved more successful. Enjoy dinner at a local restaurant before returning to the hotel for the evening. (B, L, D)

Day 11: Fri, Mar 13 — SADO ISLAND — NIIGATA — SHIBATA CITY. After breakfast, transfer to the Ryotsu Port to take the **jet foil to Niigata Port**. Upon arrival in Niigata, enjoy lunch at Cave D'occi Winery. After lunch, 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. Then **learn how to make a kite**. What a great souvenir of this trip! Transfer to Shibata City, where you'll enjoy a **Kaiseki Dinner** at the hotel. Don't forget to try out the **#1 best onsen facilities in all of Japan**. You don't want to miss out. SHIRATAMA NO YU KAHU (2 Nights) (B, L, D)



Day 12: Sat, Mar 14 — SHIBATA CITY. After a morning at leisure, depart the hotel for lunch at Tanihei, for a taste of Shibata, as the restaurant uses local ingredients from the area. After lunch, visit **Tonton Ichiba** for a chance to purchase local ingredients from the Shibata area. **Pick some fruit** at the peak of freshness. Enjoy the "fruits of your labor" as a sweet afternoon snack. Take a tour of the **Aumont Sake Brewery** and learn how they have been making quality sake for more than 200 years. Using water from the Kaji River, and only local Niigata rice (gohayaku mangoku and koshianrei), the sakes created here are high in aromatic and feature a subtle sweetness. You're sure to find a sake that matches your palate. Businessman and founder of the Okura Zaibatsu (Okura Financial Group), Kihachiro Okura, was born in Niigata as the son of the head of a big village in the Shibata Clan. He built a guest house in Tokyo which he named **Zoshunkaku**, which was later brought over to Shibata and reassembled. Dinner tonight will be held in this historic building. After dinner, return to the hotel for the evening. (B, L, D)

Day 13: Sun, Mar 15 — SHIBATA CITY — TOKYO. Transfer to the Niigata Train Station and depart on a **Shinkansen Bullet Train** with **reserved seating** in the **Green Car** to Tokyo. Upon arrival in Tokyo, learn the art of **Edo Kiriko Edging** — the traditional form of cut glass manufacturing that was developed in the late-Edo period (in early 19th century) in Tokyo. Edo kiriko is characterized by beautiful, intricate patterning and a bold contrast between colored and non-colored element. 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 two to three mm thick, Edo Kiriko uses glass that is only one mm. And when you gently flick the glass, it makes an almost metallic sound. 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 14: Mon, Mar 16 — 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 15: Tue, Mar 17 — TOKYO — HONOLULU. Start the day at **Toyosu Senkyaku Banrai**, a shopping complex that recreates an Edo period neighborhood. Toyosu Senkyaku Banrai offers fresh food from the neighboring Toyosu Market and serves to showcase the best foods in Tokyo. Enjoy shopping here, exploring the offerings at the numerous stalls. If you get tired, head up to the 8th floor and relax at the foot bath garden — which is free of charge to all visitors. 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 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)

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TOUR HIGHLIGHTS: Plum Blossom Festival at Yushima Tenjin Shrine, Tokyo Skytree, Shinkansen Bullet Train Ride, Sake No Jin Festival, Northern Culture Museum, Jet Foil Ride to Sado Island, Kirarium Sado, Gold Mine, Kitazawa Flotation Field (Drive By), Tarai-Bune Boat Ride, Shukunegi, Sado Japanese Crested Ibis Conservation Centre & Jet Foil Ride to Niigata Port

SHOPPING OPPORTUNITIES: Ginza Area, AEON MALL, Miso Factory, Shoyu Factory, Michi-no-Eki Nagaoka Hanabikan, Knife Factory at Tsubame-Sanjo, Tonton Ichiba, Toyosu Senkyaku Banrai & Ameyoko Shopping

SAKE BREWERY SHOPPING: Imayo Tsukasa Brewery, Asahi Shuzo Sake Brewery, Obata Sake Brewery & Aumont Sake Brewery

HANDS-ON EXPERIENCES: Mochi Pounding, Senbei (Rice Cracker) Making, Soba Noodle Making, Oni-Daiko Drum Lesson, Kite Making, Fruit Picking, Edo Kiriko Edging & Sushi Making

MEAL HIGHLIGHTS: A5 Wagyu Steak Dinner, Dinner with Geiko Entertainer, Dinner with Oni-Daiko Performance, Kaiseki Dinners & Dinner Zoshunkaku

HOTEL ACCOMMODATIONS:



TOKYO — KEIO PLAZA HOTEL TOKYO (2 NIGHTS + 2 NIGHTS = 4 NIGHTS TOTAL):

The Keio Plaza Hotel Tokyo is at the perfect location to explore the delights of the city of Tokyo. Just outside the Tochomae Station and only a five-minute walk from Shinjuku Station, the most popular shopping and entertainment spots, this luxury hotel provides stunning experiences which will linger with guests for a long time. Stay in a **Premier Grand Room** (located on the 35th to 41st floors), with stunning views of the city, where you will have **access to the Club Lounge** on the 45th floor.



**NIIGATA — HOTEL NIKKO NIIGATA
(4 NIGHTS):** Conveniently **connected to the Convention Center** (the location of the Sake No Jin Festival), the comfortable accommodations of Hotel Nikko Niigata are suited for business and leisure travelers. The hotel and structure appears as a luxury liner floating on the Shinano River with hotel rooms that are skillfully designed to be state-of-the-art, restaurants where you can enjoy the beautiful views of the Shinano River and Bandaijima, as well as complete banquet services at the Sky Banquet located on the top floor of the hotel.



SADO ISLAND — HOTEL AZUMA (3 NIGHTS):

Offering **traditional Japanese rooms** with beautiful ocean sunset views, Hotel Azuma is right on Sado Island's rugged western coast. Your room at Hotel Azuma will have tatami (woven-straw) floors and **its own private open-air bath**. Feel like you are a part of nature in the privacy of your own room.



SHIBATA CITY — SHIRATAMA NO YU KAHOU (2 NIGHTS): Relax in your **Japanese-style room** that includes a wide veranda. The hotel's large public bath is equipped with an indoor bath, large sauna, cold water bath, circular open-air bath that includes a cypress bath, a large rock bath, a lying bath, and a sitting bath. The outdoor air bath and cooling space are equipped with infinity chairs. After getting out of the bath, you can enjoy the hotel's special shrimp miso soup and various drinks in the spacious rest area, and at the back of the large bath, there is the dedicated beauty salon and scrubbing space. It's no wonder the facilities are considered **the #1 best onsen hot springs in ALL of Japan**.



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