



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

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

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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 02 – 15, 2026 • Tour Managers: Dean & Annette Mizumura

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.

VISIT: Tokyo • Niigata • Sado Island • Minakami

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS: Plum Blossom Festival at Yushima Tenjin Shrine • Tokyo Skytree
Ginza Area • Shinkansen Bullet Train Ride • Minato Marche Pier Bandai • Jet Foil Ride to Sado Island
Kirarium Sado • Sado Gold Mine • Kitazawa Flotation Field • Tarai-bune Boat Ride • Shukunegi
Japanese Crested Ibis Conservation Centre • Jet Foil Ride to Niigata Port • AEON MALL
"Sake No Jin" Festival • Northern Culture Museum • Niigata Furusato Village
Miso and Shoyu Factory • Michi-no-Eki Nagaoka Hanabikan • Knife Factory at Tsubame-Sanjo
Takumi no Sato • Toyosu Senkyaku Banrai • Ameyoko Shopping

HANDS-ON EXPERIENCES: Soba Noodle Making • Obata Sake Brewery Tour and Tasting
Mochi Pounding • Senbei (Rice Cracker) Making • Asahi Shuzo Sake Brewery with Tasting
Kite Making • Fruit Picking • Paint an Omen (Mask) • Edo Kiriko Edging • Sushi Making Class

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Day 1: Mon, Mar 02 – HONOLULU. Depart Honolulu via Japan Airlines flt #73 at 11:55 am.

Day 2: Tue, Mar 03 – TOKYO. Arrive at the Haneda International Airport at 3:55 pm. After entry formalities, transfer by coach to your hotel. Enjoy a Welcome Buffet Dinner at the hotel. KEIO PLAZA HOTEL TOKYO (2 Nights) (D)

Day 3: Wed, Mar 04 – 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. 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)

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

Day 4: Thur, Mar 05 – TOKYO – NIIGATA – SADO ISLAND. After a sumptuous breakfast buffet at hotel, transfer to the Tokyo Station by coach. Transfer to Niigata by **JR Super Express Train**. Upon arrival in Niigata, explore **Minato Marche Pier Bandai**, a food market that offers a multitude of food options, including fish caught in the Sea of Japan, to vegetables and fruit directly delivered from farms, Niigata-produced Koshihikari Rice, a variety of high-quality brand sake from across the prefecture, and all kinds of Niigata's specialties relating to food are here. After lunch, transfer to the Niigata Port. **Take a jet foil to Sado Island**. Arrive in Sado Island and transfer to hotel in Sado. Enjoy a traditional multi-course **Kaiseki Dinner**, featuring ingredients unique to Sado Island. During dinner, watch a **Oni Daiko (Demon Drums) Performance**. Don't miss forget to try out the **onsen hot springs** – which are divided for men and women. The high-quality service and facilities are sure to become some of your fondest memories of your visit to Japan. HOTEL YAHATAKAN (2 Nights) (B, L, D)

Day 5: Fri, Mar 06 – 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. 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 **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. 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 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 6: Sat, Mar 07 – SADO ISLAND – NIIGATA. After breakfast, 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. After lunch, transfer to Ryotsu Port. **Take a jet foil to Niigata Port**. En route to the hotel stop at an **AEON MALL**, with free time for shopping and dining (on your own). HOTEL NIKKO NIIGATA (4 Nights) (B, L)

Day 7: Sun, Mar 08 – 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 8: Mon, Mar 09 – 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**. The **Niigata Furusato Village** is a culture and tourism facility providing tourist information related to Niigata prefecture and introducing various local products. The facility provides tourist information, and it also sells specialty products of Niigata, including local sake, rice, and fresh fish. 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 9: Tue, Mar 10 – NIIGATA. After breakfast, learning about, and shop for, two ingredients essential to Japanese cuisine at a **miso and 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 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 a 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 it's founding, Asahi Shuzo has continued to brew sake under the "quality first" principle, using 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 10: Wed, Mar 11 – NIIGATA – MINAKAMI. After breakfast, depart the hotel for Minakami. Stop at the Cave D'occi Winery for lunch. After lunch, **learn how to make a kite**. What a great souvenir of this trip! Next, visit a **knife factory** at **Tsubame-Sanjo**. 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. Arrive in Minakami and transfer to the hotel for dinner. MINAKAMI HOTEL JURAKU (2 Nights) (B, L, D)

Day 11: Thur, Mar 12 – MINAKAMI. After a breakfast, depart the hotel for a full day of activities in Minakami. Start the day by **picking some fruit** at the peak of freshness. Enjoy the "fruits of your labor" as a sweet mid-morning snack. A special lunch has been planned at Tatsumikan. 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. The spread at Tatsumikan 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. After lunch, stop at **Takumi no Sato**, an arts and crafts village of more than two dozen workshops and stores, where you will 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, devil, ghosts, and animals. The various characters portrayed by the masks are: hyottoko – the 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 ghost) with long nose and red face. There will be free time to explore the area around Takumi no Sato once you are finished painting your mask. Return to the hotel for a buffet dinner. (B, L, D)

Day 12: Fri, Mar 13 – MINAKAMI – TOKYO. After breakfast, transfer to the Jomo-Kogen Station and depart on a **Shinkansen Bullet Train** 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 (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 Sastuma kiriko (another glass cutting technique) uses glass that is typically two to three millimeters thick, Edo kiriko uses glass that is only one millimeter. 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 13: Sat, Mar 14 – 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: Sun, Mar 15 – 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 #72 at 9:55 pm and arrive in Honolulu at 9:55 am the same day. Aloha and welcome home! (B, L)

* Fares are per person, USD based on double occupancy and include all airline taxes and fees. Airline fuel supplements, taxes and fees are subject to change and tour member is responsible for any increases. Some airline-imposed personal charges, including but not limited to baggage, priority boarding and special seating, may apply. For details visit www.tripadvisor.com/AirlineFees. After initial deposit, a \$75 per person Non-Stop Travel (NST) Cancellation Fee will apply. Group departures may be cancelled, if there are less than 24 tour members. Final payment to NST for "non-cruise" Air and Land Package must be made by money order or personal check. NST does not guarantee that all tour members will fly together with Tour Manager. Tour Manager assignments, number of meals offered on tour, tour price, discount, and the "final" cruise or tour itinerary are subject to change without notice. **NST reserves the right to correct errors or omissions including but not limited to, fares, fees, and surcharges at any time.** Deposit: \$500 per person. Final Payment Due: 10/23/25. NST at its discretion, may use group and individual photos on its website, print, television, and various social media. † Early booking discount is per person. Purchase of NST's complete Air and Land Package is required. ‡ Earn rewards every time you refer a friend. For each "new-to-NST" customer you refer, both you and your referral can receive a \$25 discount off your next NST escorted group. **Special Assistance:** You must notify NST, at time of reservation, of any disability requiring special attention. NST reserves the right to cancel your booking or terminate your vacation if your special needs or disabilities are not suitable for the vacation or if you are not traveling with a companion who will provide all the assistance you require. **Wheelchair and electric scooter access outside of the USA is severely restricted.** 061125

