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BLACKENED CANTEEN CEREMONY

How 2 Japanese men remembered locals, 23 US airmen killed in WWII air raid

BY GARY MEYERS,
STRIPES JAPAN



Dr. Hiroya Sugano pours a tribute onto the American monument at Mt. Shizuoka. Photo by A1C Sean Martin, USAF



Fukumatsu Itoh at the B-29 monument. Photo provided by Dr. Hiroya Sugano

Nestled in view of the verdant, southwestern slopes of Mt. Fuji where the mountains descend to the sea lies the bustling city of Shizuoka, the tea capital of Japan. Overlooking the city near its center is Mt. Shizuoka. A well-worn trail winds upward from its base within the Sen-gen Shinto shrine complex through a sylvan wilderness to its 561-foot summit. In a clearing at the summit stand two imposing monuments each with large kanji characters incised deeply into their faces. Anchored in the shadows of these monuments rests a large bronze plaque inscribed with the names of 23 American airmen. It is a placid scene that greets hikers today.

But there is a tragic “rest of the story” here, a wartime story that gains added impact with each re-telling. It is a story of one Japanese man’s courage and compassion when caught up in the hellish aftermath of fiery death and destruction from above. It is also the story of another Japanese man, then a young boy trapped with his family in the same Dantesque inferno. This boy survived the night and the war to eventually become a renowned kidney specialist, returning to his hometown to save lives where before he had faced death and human suffering on an unimaginable scale. It was a life-altering experience that would remain etched in his memory. As a result, he would pour his energy into promoting international peace and reconciliation among former enemies. This is the story of two remarkable individuals and their connection to a

small yet powerfully symbolic wartime memento. In the evening of June 19-20, 1945, two of a large group of Army Air Forces’ B-29 Superfortresses from the 314th Bombardment Wing on Guam, assigned to a firebombing mission over Shizuoka, collided and crashed. Twenty-three American airmen were killed; nearly 2,000 Shizuoka citizens also perished and approximately 12,000 were wounded.

At the center of the devastation, Mr. Fukumatsu Itoh, a Shizuoka councilman and merchant attempted to rescue from the wreckage two of the gravely injured airmen. However, both died shortly thereafter. Amidst the smoking rubble, Mr. Itoh also found and retrieved a blackened and heat-distorted canteen. Eerily, the canteen appeared to bear the imprint of its former owner’s hand.



Itoh participates in the memorial service. Photo provided by Dr. Hiroya Sugano

Being a devout Buddhist who believed that all life is precious, and that all dead deserve respect, Mr. Itoh assisted in giving the airmen a proper burial alongside the Japanese who had also died in the bombing. For this selfless act, Mr. Itoh was roundly condemned by the local townspeople.

[Readers might imagine themselves in a similar situation. Your hometown is destroyed by enemy aircraft. Friends and neighbors, perhaps family members and relatives, are killed or grievously wounded. Some of the aircraft crash. Someone perhaps you know treats the dead enemy with care and respect and even helps bury them. How many of us could think kindly about or accept such a seemingly traitorous act?] Mr. Itoh bore the hatred silently. But it didn’t end there.



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Photo by Somers Steelman, USN



Blackened canteen encircled by a lei. Photo courtesy of Pearl Harbor Aviation Museum

On each anniversary of the bombing, Mr. Itoh conducted a simple private ceremony to remember those who had paid the ultimate price that was exact. He would utter a muted prayer and, using the blackened canteen, pour an offering to the spirits of the fallen, both Japanese and American. Eventually, Mr. Itoh erected the two monuments atop Mt. Shizuhata to memorialize the 1945 tragedy, one dedicated to the Japanese who had died in the firebombing, the other dedicated to the dead American airmen.

Fast forward to 1971. While on a weekend outing on Mt. Shizuhata, Dr. Hiroya Sugano came upon Mr. Itoh's monuments. He learned of the story from workers at the site that day. Having lived through the horrors of that terrible night and having seen the B-29 wreckage, Dr. Sugano was so fascinated by the account that he was compelled to seek out Mr. Itoh; a friendship instantly formed. Before his death in 1972, Mr. Itoh passed the blackened canteen to Dr. Sugano after his assurance that he would carry on the tradition that Mr. Itoh had originated.

Since 1972, on the Saturday closest to June 19th each year, Dr. Sugano has personally hosted and funded the annual ceremony atop Mt. Shizuhata. The public is welcomed. Each year, the numbers have increased as more learn of the ceremony through word of mouth and the Internet. Townspeople and dignitaries, both civilian and military, attend. In past years, US Forces have been represented by officers and enlisted personnel from the 374th Airlift Wing at Yokota Air Base and soldiers from Camp Zama. The Japan Self Defense Forces are represented by the regional commander and troops. On occasion, the American ambassador to Japan has sent a personal note to be read at the ceremony. Attendees are invited to participate in the ceremony by offering silent prayers before a simple altar. Then, using the Blackened Canteen, each pours a measure of bourbon over the American monument as an offering to the spirits of the fallen airmen. Japanese guests are invited to perform a similar ritual pouring sake over the Japanese monument.

The annual ceremony in Shizuoka might have remained localized had not Dr. Sugano brought the Blackened Canteen to Hawaii on the 50th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack in 1991. In explaining his motivation, he said that he wanted to initiate personal friendship and reconciliation ties with Americans who might, even 50 years later, still view him and other Japanese with bitterness or worse. By sharing the Blackened Canteen story, he felt those outside Japan might be more understanding if they learned that even in war, one can find goodness and compassion where one least expects it.

Not certain how his overture would be received, Dr. Sugano chose to conduct a private ceremony at Pearl Harbor surrounded only by a few close friends. In following years, he had the good fortune to meet influential, like-minded individuals who became friends. These included the late Admiral Ronald J. Hays, former Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, Daniel Martinez, National Park Service chief historian at the USS Arizona Memorial, and John DeVirgilio, an Asian scholar and author. With their and others' understanding and support, including the U.S. Navy, National Park Service, and the Pearl Harbor Aviation Museum, the Blackened Canteen ceremony was eventually integrated into the December commemoration events' list.

Clearly, the most moving and thought-provoking part of the Blackened Canteen ceremony at Pearl Harbor is when Japanese and American WWII veterans join with Dr. Sugano and, holding the canteen together, they pour a tribute to the lost souls of both countries. The ceremony ends with guests strewing plumeria blossoms onto the waters. It is a poignant and solemn scene never to be forgotten.

This Blackened Canteen, which rose from the ashes of a wartime tragedy, has since become an inspiration for peace and reconciliation. Its blackness and battered shape represent the inevitabilities of conflict. Yet its presence represents eternal hope for a future of peaceful understanding. It is a powerful symbol of the light that can emerge from darkness.

Gary Meyers is a retired Marine Corps officer living in Honolulu who volunteers at the Pearl Harbor Aviation Museum.

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Photo by Joshua C. Millage, U.S. Navy



File photo

Bon Odori 2021

Japanese summer tradition moves online amid pandemic

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

Summer in Japan can't go on without Bon Odori! Had it not been for COVID-19, this would be about the time you'd see many people sporting their summer kimonos around the city

and at festivals. The tradition is part of Bon Odori, which run from July to the end of August.

Bon Odori festivals, which are usually held on shrine, temple or public square grounds, are important events that bring communities together. Although today's Bon Odori festivals only last a few hours, when they first started hundreds of years ago, they were overnight events held to entertain

ancestors' souls which were believed to be staying with their family for Bon period. Back then, the festivals were held July 15-16 following the lunar calendar. According to the lunar calendar, the 15th of each month there is a full moon, which allowed people dance overnight under the bright moon light.

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com



File photo



Photo courtesy of Ikegami Honmonji Temple

What is Bon?

Bon is a traditional festive period to honor and entertain ancestors' souls. As the current solar calendar is about a month behind the lunar calendar, today, Bon is observed Aug. 13-15 in most regions.

Japanese usually set up shoryo-dana (festival altar for souls) and clean up family tombs to prepare for Bon. When the Bon period begins on Aug. 13, families light up their lanterns or make a small bonfire, called mukaebi (welcoming fire) at the entrance of their homes to guide and welcome ancestor's souls.

The Bon period is a family-oriented time where children return to their parent's home to celebrate. On Aug. 16 or couple of days later, another bonfire, called okuri-bi, is made to see off one's ancestors.

Shoryo-dana and Shoryo-uma

During Bon, you may see a square altar displayed in Japanese homes. This is Shoryo-dana (festival altar for souls), also known as Bon-dana and is used to place pictures and other items of the deceased, as well as an incense burner.

Also, some families make a small horse out of a cucumber and a small cow out of an eggplant. The legs are made of chopsticks or matchsticks. These are called Shoryo-uma (horse for souls). Usually they are placed with an incense burner outside of the entrance of a home on the first day of Bon to welcome that ancestors' souls.

It is believed that the souls come back home quickly on a cucumber horse, tracing the trail of incense, and leave later slowly on an eggplant cow. The horse and cow are placed on altar on the second day.

People will display lanterns, flowers and food items around the altar.



Photo courtesy of Aya Carlson





File photo

→ Yukata

To enjoy the festival atmosphere, why don't you try wearing yukata, a casual summer kimono usually made of cotton, linen or synthetic fabric. If you don't want to spend a lot of money on a yukata, you can find inexpensive ones at most department stores or your base exchange. You won't regret wearing a yukata, especially on a hot summer day. It's also a great souvenir for family and friends. Usually yukata are worn at Japanese traditional outdoor summer events, such as a natsumatsuri (summer festival) and hanabi (fireworks) festivals.

Rethinking Bon Odori in 2021

Nowadays, Bon Odori festivals are held throughout July and August, depending on each community's schedule.

Usually, this period means big parties with lots of food, traditional dances and other performance, festival games like kingyo-sukui (goldfish scooping) and shateki (a shooting game), and lots and lots of people. The events are set up early in the day and by sunset, paper lanterns are illuminated and taiko drums reverberate in many neighborhoods and districts around the country.

However, like last year, with the COVID-19 pandemic causing state of emergencies across Japan, most bon odori events have been canceled for 2021.

Some communities, however, are trying to keep the summer event alive with online events. The Jiyugaoka district launched a special Bon Odori website that will be live until Aug. 8. Online events will include instructors dressed in summer kimono demonstrating Bon Odori dances at the vacant festival sites, which will be lit up by traditional chochin lanterns.

On Aug. 14-15, from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., the Nakano Station Square Bon Odori will invite a limited number of participants the festival site to enjoy dancing, various stage performances, along with food and game booths. They will be live streaming the event on both days.

The Sapporo Tourist Association will host its online bon odori festival between Aug. 8, 5 p.m. – Aug. 16, 10 p.m., while Matsuyama City hosts its traditional Matsuyama Festival online Aug. 11-12.



Photo courtesy of Okinawa Zento Eisa Festival committee

Eisa

The people of Okinawa also have their own form of Bon Odori called "Eisa." Like Bon Odori on mainland Japan, this festival is held during the Bon period to see off ancestors' souls.

At Eisa festivals, young male and female dancers in colorful and exotic Okinawan traditional attire with hand drums and sankin (Okinawan banjo), parade around the village, dancing, singing and chanting. Unlike Bon Odori festivals, spectators do not participate in the dancing.

Popular Eisa festivals include Okinawa Zento Eisa Matsuri (Okinawa City), Senbaru Eisa (Kadena), Yakena Eisa (Uruma), Kyan Eisa (Itoman), Eguchi Eisa (Chatan).

Online Bon Odori Festival

- **Jiyugaoka (Tokyo) Until Aug. 8**
<https://www.jiyugaoka-abc.com/special/2021/2021bondance/index.html>
- **Nakano Station Square (Tokyo) Aug. 14-15, 10 a.m. – 9 p.m.**
<https://nakabon.jp>
- **Sapporo (Hokkaido Pref.) Aug. 8, 5 p.m. – Aug. 16, 10 p.m.**
<http://sapporo-natsu.com>
- **Matsuyama (Ehime Pref.) Aug. 11-12**
<http://www.m-festa.jp>

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Top 10 features of Japanese trains

STORY AND PHOTOS BY IGNATIUS KOH, JAPANTRAVEL

Japanese trains are marveled all over the world for their speed and efficiency. However, these are only a fraction of the train-related quirks in Japan that many tourists are unaware of. From dedicated pushers to special station chimes, there's more to Japan's trains than meets the eye!



It's no surprise that punctuality is at the top of this list. While it is well-known that trains are on time in Japan, tourists are still amazed when they find themselves exactly where they need to be, on time, when taking the train. To show how serious they are about their job, train companies hand out train delay certificates to commuters affected by delays as a legitimate excuse for being late.



Japan's infamous rush hour is a sight to behold — people packed in trains like sardines with hardly any breathing space, and even more commuters

waiting on the platform. To fit the incredible number of people into the trains, stations employ “pushers” to physically push people into trains to allow the doors to close. This Japanese phenomenon is not to be missed during peak periods.



You might expect a fair amount of chaos while taking the train in Japan, with the country boasting some of the busiest train stations in the world. While that might be true, the bustle in the stations is momentarily left behind between each stop as each train car is silent even when filled to the brim with passengers. There are rules that require mobile phones to be on silent mode and loud talking is also prohibited. And with most passengers compliant to the rules, you can enjoy a peaceful ride on the train.



Some of the busiest stations in Japan have underground labyrinths that span across a huge

area. Many major malls such as Shibuya 109 and Takashimaya have basement floors that are strategically linked to these stations' exits to allow easy access for commuters. This design comes in handy on days with inclement weather as you will be sheltered throughout your journey.



While you may have seen Hello Kitty and Pokemon plastered over Japanese airplanes in recent years, these eye-catching designs have not been limited to just planes. From the Anpanman train in Shikoku, to Kumamon train in Kyushu, there are several regular trains across Japan that have special designs depending on the region. For those hoping to catch a faster ride, a sleek Neon Genesis Evangelion-designed shinkansen (bullet train) is in service from Hakata station to Shin-Osaka station until spring 2018.



A strange but hilarious sight

if you're lucky enough to see it, these helpers pop their heads out from a small opening beside ticket machines to assist confused commuters who press the “Help” button.



Feeling thirsty but out of money? Now, on the platform, you can use your IC card to pay for drinks at vending machines equipped with a scanner for contactless payment. In fact, there are convenience shops on the platforms of certain stations if you want to get a quick bite.



To facilitate movement during rush hour, Japan's ticket barriers are open by default to ensure a smooth flow of passengers in and out of the station. This is also part of Japan's effort to allow quick evacuation in case of an earthquake. However, these barriers will close if you don't scan your IC card or slot in your ticket so make sure you don't forget to do so, or else you will cause a jam behind.



An often missed highlight in Japan's train stations is the unique chimes each station has that signal an incoming train. This quirk sometimes allows people to know which station they are at without looking at the signs — Takadanobaba Station in Tokyo is famous for its Astro Boy (an anime robot character born there) theme song. While not all stations have a special chime, many other stations have more generic sounds such as birds chirping or nature sounds to create a pleasant atmosphere.



With impressive speeds and beautiful scenery along the way, Japan's shinkansen is a popular means of transport across the country for many. To make the ride even more comfortable, cleaning crews at Tokyo Station perform the “seven-minute miracle” — a quick but comprehensive cleaning of the shinkansen cars within seven minutes to prepare for the next ride. You'll see these housekeepers dressed sharply and getting to work in the blink of an eye, and before you know it, the train is sparkling clean again.



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Speakin' Japanese

Taxi talk

Sooner or later you're going to have a take a taxi in Japan. And, yes, they are as clean as people say. And they are safe. So flag one over and hop in.



"Kyanpu Zama made onegai shimasu." = Could you take me to Camp Zama, please?

("kyanpu Zama" = Camp Zama, "onegai shimasu" = Could you ... please?, "made" = to)

"Moyori no eki made onegai shimasu." = Could you take me to the nearest station, please?

("moyori" = nearest, "eki" = station)

"Roppongi 7-23-17 made onegai shimasu." = Could you take me to the address of Roppongi 7-23-17.

"ku-ji no densha ni maniai masu ka?" = Can I make the 9 o'clock train?

("ku-ji" = 9 o'clock, "ichi-ji" = 1 o'clock, "ni-ji" = 2 o'clock, "san-ji" (3..), "yo-ji" (4..), "go-ji" (5..), "roku-ji" (6..), "shichi-ji" (7..), "hachi-ji" (8..), "juu-ji" (10..), "juuichi-ji" (11..), "juuni-ji" (12..), "gozen" = a.m., "gogo" = p.m.)

"Donokurai kakari masu ka?" = How long does it take?

("donokurai" = how long/much/many)
"Ikura desu ka?" = How much is it?
 ("ikura" = how much (money))
"Nimotsu ga aru node toranku wo akete moraemasu ka?" = I have a baggage, could you open the trunk, please?
 ("nimotsu" = baggage, "node" = because of, "toranku" = trunk)

"Massugu desu." = Go straight ahead, please.
 ("Massugu" = straight)

"Hidari/migi ni magatte kudasai." = Turn to the left/right, please.
 ("hirdari" = left, "migi" = right, "magatte" = turn)

"Koko de tomete kudasai." = Stop here, please.
 ("koko" = here, "tomete" = stop)

Pronunciation key: "A" is short (like "ah"); "E" is short (like "get"); "I" is short (like "it"); "O" is long (like "old"); "U" is long (like "tube"); and "Al" is a long "l" (like "hike"). Most words are pronounced with equal emphasis on each syllable, but "OU" is a long "O" with emphasis on that syllable.

Bus banter

The convenience of Japan's "densha" (trains) and "chikatetsu" (subways) are legendary. However, riding a city bus is not quite as easy for non-Japanese speakers since there are not many signs in English. Here're some useful phrases you can use as you catch the bus.



(PSMO and SUICA are rechargeable IC cards used to ride trains, subways and some buses.)

"Untenshu-san" = Mr. driver
 ("San" is used show respect for the driver.)

("Jikokuhyou" = timetable, "Jyoushaken" = ticket)

"Tsugi tomarimasu" = We will stop at the next (bus) stop.

("tsugi" = next, "tomarimasu" = stop)

(You will hear the recorded announcement, "tsugi tomarimasu" when you press the button to let driver know you want to get off at next stop.)

"Orimasu." = I am getting off

"Sumimasen, Shinjyuku wa mada desuka?" = Excuse me, is this (are we in) Shinjyuku yet?"

("sumimasen" = excuse me, "... wa mada desuka?" = Is ... yet?)

-Takahiro Takiguchi, Stripes Japan

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Beat the Heat

EXPLORE Plan



1 The Sapporo Snow Festival

The Sapporo Snow Festival has something for the whole family and prior to Covid was becoming an international tourism drawcard, and dare we say almost a victim of its own success in that accommodation was becoming very hard to find.

The Sapporo Snow Festival first started in 1950, when local middle and high school students created six snow sculptures in Odori Park. By 1959 over 15,000 participants were involved in the construction of ice and snow sculptures and it started to attract hundreds of thousands of guests.

By 2020 over two million tourists walked the main strip of city and enjoyed the festival.

Early February each year the main street from Odori Park to Susukino are transformed by 300 ice and snow sculptures that literally now takes an army (Japanese Self Defense Force) to prepare and model.

But it's not just the sculptures, there's traditional street food, great music and wonderful shopping. Plus, you can watch snowboarding demonstrations! The festival also has lots of things for kids to do, making it very family friendly.

Sadly, due to Covid the 2020 and 2021 Sapporo Snow Festivals were canceled but in some news the 72nd Sapporo Snow Festival scheduled for 2022 has been confirmed and will occur in Odori Park and Susukino from Feb. 5-12 (subject to Covid conditions).

We recommend you start your experience in the afternoon and go through into the evening so you can see the transition from day to night and witness the amazing light shows. Remember to be really warm, on a cold night in Sapporo it's almost impossible to have too many clothes (particularly for kids) - take your down jackets, balaclavas, thick gloves!

Entry to the festival site is free and it's either a short walk or subway from Sapporo Central Station. Directions are well marked and easy to follow during the festival times.

For more information on the Sapporo Snow Festival there is a great official English website <https://www.snowfes.com/english/>



STRIPES JAPAN

Stars and Stripes was able to chat to Brent Verco from Niseko Military Leave, who is currently setting up tours for U.S. servicemembers in Japan to experience Hokkaido.

Q. So what is Niseko Military Leave and how did it get started?

A. Well, it's a bit of a funny story. Niseko Military Leave was started by accident. I grew up in Sydney Australia and moved to Japan three years ago to spend some time in my wife's motherland and experience the Japanese culture. We looked at a few options but decided to make our home in Niseko, a ski resort located in Japan's northern island of Hokkaido.

Although I had a background in medical tourism, my main businesses in Japan was in healthcare (chiropractic) doing injury management for international tourists through the resort town of Niseko.

When Covid hit my entire business was turned upside down, going back to Australia was an impossibility and to be honest, I was feeling a little low so I came down to Okinawa to clear my head and explore the possibility of working remotely.

To my surprise I found great demand for my services in Okinawa and to even greater surprise, I learned that US servicemembers are aware of what Hokkaido has to offer as a travel destination but are a bit unsure of how to organize travel in the middle of a pandemic where green and red zones change like traffic lights. I also

learned about the strict rules that U.S. forces operate under in regard to leave and travel liberties and the idea of a specific service for the needs of SOFA members began to take hold.

I started to discuss this with my local tourism suppliers, and they were really supportive and understanding in giving a 'covid money back guarantee' for SOFA status members should the travel situation change again.

A chance encounter led to some meetings at Camp Foster on the island of Okinawa with the United States Marine Corps and further close relationships were formed.

Q. Can you tell us more about Hokkaido?

A. Sure. It's my wife's home and we spent several years visiting and were always blown away by the natural beauty. Hokkaido really is setting itself up to be the adventure capital of Asia and whilst everybody knows about its great snow, I think the summer activities have not yet received the attention they deserve.

Here are 10 things Niseko Military Leave recommends you try and see when you get up to Hokkaido. Some are well known and others could still be considered 'secret spots' from a tourism point of view. The following are in no particular order and we have attempted to strike a balance between summer and winter activities.



E HOKKAIDO ahead and set up a tour



2

White water rafting in Niseko

White water rafting has been a Niseko icon with summer sport lovers for generations and there is no shortage of qualified guides to navigate you safely down the rapids of the Sheribetsu River.

This river is fed from the snow melt of the mighty Mount Yotei and other large ranges and it spans 126 kilometers and it moves about 72 cubic meters of water each second.

The river's proximity to Niseko means it's a great option to combine with a Niseko family holiday and take advantage of the cheaper prices on offer.

In mid spring around late April its peak flow is considered a grade 3-4 rapid making it suitable for adrenaline junkies seeking a real thrill whilst it summer and autumn it mellows out to a grade 1-2, giving good options for families to take advantage of the breathtaking views whilst not giving the kiddies PTSD.

Our recommended providers for this experience are Lion Adventures (<https://hokkaido.lion-adventure.com/>) and NAC. Both are Niseko industry leaders and have an excellent safety record.



3

Skiing Rusutsu

Rusutsu is less famous than its sibling Niseko but there are some very good reasons why you should consider some time at Rusutsu (just 40 minutes drive away).

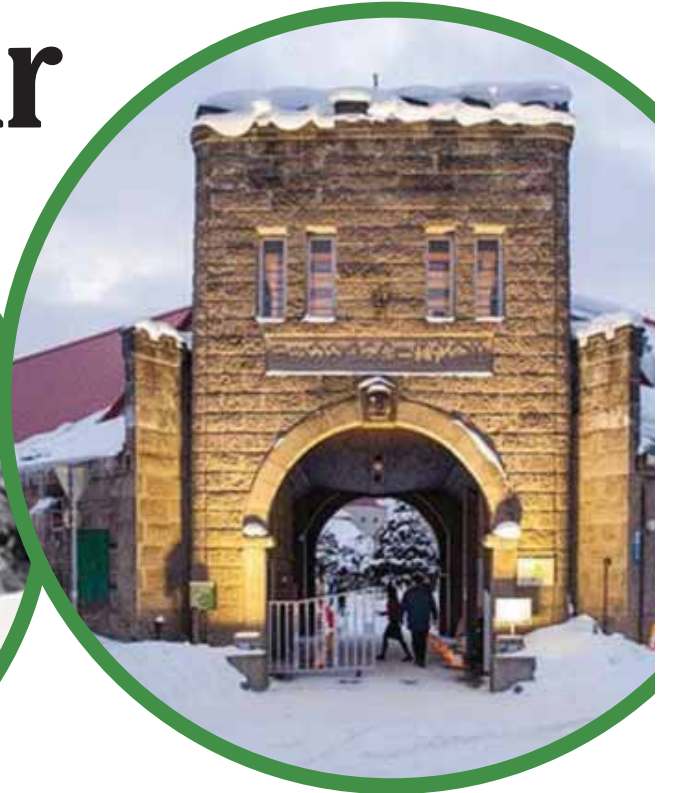
Built back in the boom of the 'Mercedes 80s' in Japan, no expense was spared in the construction of the Rusutsu resort with its own theme park, indoor kids' rides and slightly creepy trumpet playing robots.

But really the reason you want to consider Rusutsu is the quality of the snow when you consider the crowd factor.

With Niseko bathing in its international glory, powder hounds were finding empty runs and untracked backcountry well into the afternoon at Rusutsu. If snow skiing or boarding is your thing you may be tempted to give Niseko a miss in the busy years and head straight to Rusutsu.

Another great option is to add a trip to Rusutsu before or after your trip to Niseko.

For more information: <https://rusutsu.com/en/>



4

Nikka Whiskey Distillery in Yoichi

The story of Nikka Whiskey is as interesting as the whiskey itself.

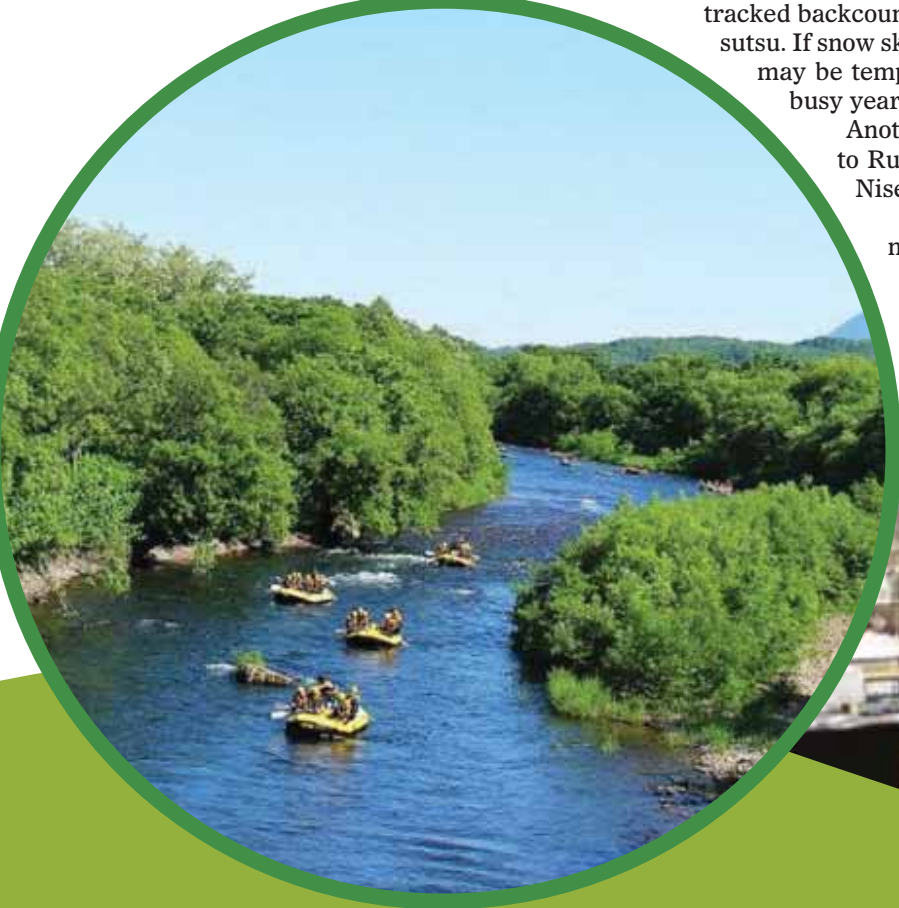
It started with a man named Masataka Taketsuru who was born into family of sake brewers. After trying Scottish Whiskey, he became obsessed with trying to recreate the complex flavors of peated whiskey and traveled to Scotland where he became an apprentice at James Calder and even enrolled at the University of Glasgow to study chemistry.

All these things would be unremarkable if the year was not 1918. Travel between Japan and the West at this point was still rare, and it's hard to imagine the hardships he would have endured. Not to mention he decided to Marry a Scottish lass and bring her back to Japan right through the middle of World War Two.

But what is truly remarkable is the Yoichi Whiskey itself.

Blending Japanese attention to detail and respect for tradition with Scottish know-how developed over centuries has led to whiskey that continues to win awards to this day. Nikka won 'World's best blended malt' at the International Spirits Challenge in 2019. To this day, 'Yoichi Single Malt' remains my favorite entry level whiskey that drinks better than many other whiskeys twice the price or even higher.

The great thing about the Yoichi distillery is you can taste the great whiskeys yourself at the purpose built whiskey tasting bar.



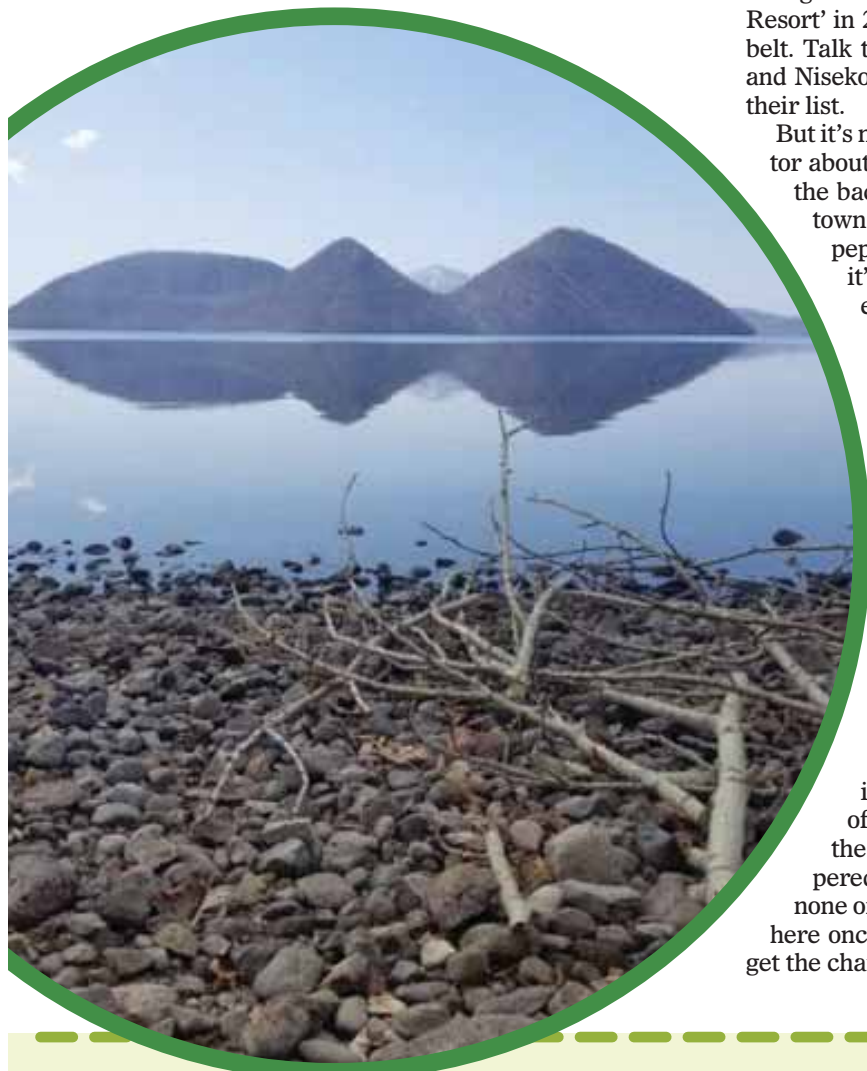
HOKKAIDO: Lots to do



5 Lake Toya

Lake Toya is only a 45-minute drive from Niseko and it's spectacular both through summer and winter.

Formed out of the remnants of an old volcano and surrounded by one that's still a little active, you quickly realise you are in a very special space.



6 Ski Niseko

This one is dear to our hearts.

You never forget your first love and for many including myself the reason for coming to Hokkaido in the first place was to ski Niseko.

With over 48km of ski runs there is always something to discover even for us locals who have been riding here for years. Niseko won 'Japan's Best Ski Resort' in 2014 and also has many awards under its belt. Talk to anybody serious about the snowsports and Niseko is going to be very near or at the top of their list.

But it's more than the snow. There is also an X factor about Niseko. Maybe it's the Onsens, the food, the backdrop of Mount Yotei hovering over the town or the vibe of a ski village in full swing, peppered with the rich and famous. Maybe it's none of those but we still feel a unique energy here once winter comes alive and we hope you get the chance to too.

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7 Climbing Mount Yotei

Mount Yotei is the undisputed king of the Niseko landscape and was regarded highly by the traditional Ainu people of the area. It's still classified as an 'active' volcano but has not seen an eruption since over 1000 BC. Towering at over 1800 meters it's Hokkaido's answer to Mount Fuji and you will no doubt spend countless hours staring up at it.

But for others that's not enough.

Only a summit will really be enough for their Yotei experience and they will be rewarded with a bird's eye view of the crater on its top, taking in 360 degrees view of the area.

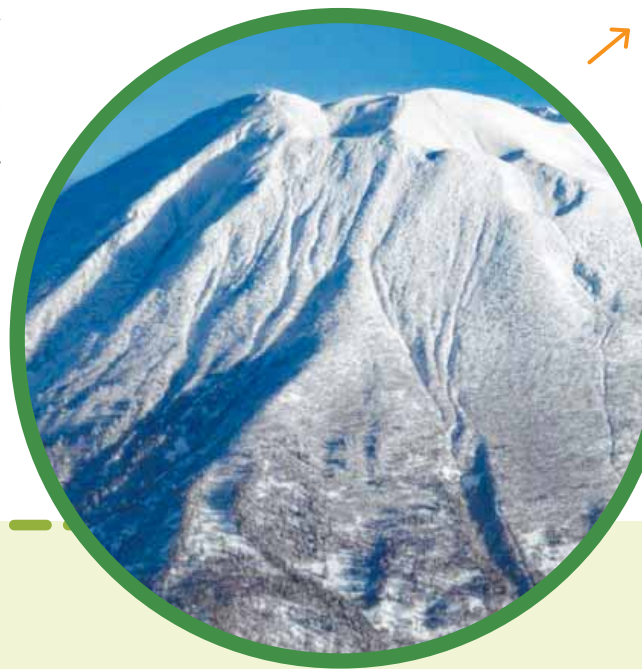
In summer it is a demanding but manageable 8 hour return hike and in winter it transforms to a serious backcountry adventure where you can ski or snowboard back down to the base - but you do need the safety gear and backcountry training to navigate your way back down in one piece.

There is also an option to stay in a hut near the summit for a small reasonable fee. (Currently closed due to Covid).

Whatever your season, make sure you research the local weather conditions and ideally use a guide or at least take an experienced local up there with you. When the weather turns ugly at the top of Yotei it can turn real ugly!

A trusted and recommended resource for both summer and winter routes up Mount Yotei is the Hokkaido Wilds website:

- [Yotei Zan Hiking Hirafu Kutchan Route:](https://hokkaidowilds.org/hiking/yotei-zan-hiking-hirafu-kutchan-route)
- [Mt. Yotei Backcountry Ski Routes:](https://hokkaidowilds.org/mt-yotei-backcountry-ski-routes)



What about when to travel to Hokkaido. When is the best time?

We think the easiest way to think about this question is to divide your plans into 'Winter travel' and as the locals up here call it 'Green Season' - which is essentially travel anytime from April to late November.

Winter travel

The Niseko ski resort typically opens around the last week of November to the first week of December and runs through to early June.

Based on the previous 10 years of data you can be pretty much guaranteed Early Season top to bottom snow from the December 4-18.

Niseko's Peak season is usually deemed to start December 18 and run through to March 20. Spring skiing runs from December 20 to around May 5.

Further information can be found on the Niseko United website: <https://www.niseko.ne.jp/en/>.

It's also important to remember that Peak Season attracts a higher lift price as well as higher accommodation costs due to increased visitor demand.

Of course, it's also classed as Peak Season for a reason as these are the dates where you are almost guaranteed to experience the epic powder and snowfalls that make Niseko famous. For more advanced riders the backcountry gates usually open around January 1 and offer amazing access into the unpatrolled wilderness of the backside of the mountain.

If you are traveling with younger children, we strongly recommend you consider early spring skiing too. Spring skiing for kids has some advantages. It's cheaper than Peak Season and the days are often a little




more sunny and warmer, making it much more comfortable to be out the slopes.

So, in a nutshell, we are blessed with a relatively long winter season up here in Niseko but our hot tip is to try for anytime from the December 10-18 to get the best value, Peak Season for the very best soft powder snow, or consider early spring for families on a budget.

Green Season

Here things get a little more exciting.

It's our opinion that Green Season travel in Hokkaido is still one of the world's best kept secrets in how much fun can be had up here. We think Niseko in particular is well on its way to becoming the 'New Zealand' 



8 Yukichichibu Onsen

→ Yukichichibu is Niseko Military Leaves recommendation for a traditional Onsen experience in Hokkaido although there are many amazing Onsens to choose from.

Located high above Niseko it can be a little dodgy to get up there during the heavy snowfalls of the winter months but those who brave the journey are rewarded with a truly remarkable Onsen experience.

Yukichichibu features a mud bath for ladies and is located near a natural volcanic pond with the strong sulphuric scent that reminds you that this is a very special place.

The water here has a very high mineral content such that the water here matches its ramen - thick, soupy and rich.

The average 40-degree temperatures are the perfect combination to relieve tired stressed and sometimes cold bodies and I'm sure you will agree any story told in an Onsen becomes infinitely more interesting.

Unfortunately, tattoos are still forbidden in traditional Onsens such as Yukichichibu so if you have anything other than a very small one you may want to give this experience a miss.

9 The Blue Pond

The blue pond is located a few hours' drive north of the city of Sapporo and somewhat of a distance to most of the other must-sees on this list. It's also a bit of an interesting story.

The blue pond was never meant to be a tourist attraction. It started its journey as a man-made overflow reserve designed to take the pressure of the river should there be an eruption. However natural minerals from the rock leached into the water and with the now dead forest now poking up through the crystal blue water making it a shutter bugs dream.

Further information can be found on the Shirogane visitors center on the link: <https://www.biei-hokkaido.jp/en/sightseeing/shirogane-blue-pond/>.



10 The Niseko Food Festival

The first Niseko Food Festival was launched in 2017 and it has been growing rapidly ever since.

A brainchild of the Niseko Tourism Board it involves all of Niseko's hospitality and entertainment community coming together right on harvest season so it's 'Hokkaido fresh'.

About fifteen of Niseko's most famous restaurants and bars will showcase their special dishes for the festival using the freshest autumn harvest produce. Different live performances every day from local musicians also make it a great festival for letting your hair down and seeing the local culture in full bloom.

You can choose between wood-fired pizzas, authentic Indian curries or go for more of the modern Japanese fusion coming out of Niseko. There are also a number of local beer breweries also ready to strut their stuff as well as ginger beer and other non-alcoholic options.



→ Queenstown of Asia' with its focus on adventure tourism.

Summer here in Niseko really kicks off from mid-June. The days are warm without the humidity that can plague Okinawa and Tokyo over this time.

White water rafting is our top pick here in early Summer with the peak flow around late May to early June. You can raft here all Green Season but it becomes more of a scenic family outing more suitable for children from July onwards. There is also great swimming to be had in some of the large freshwater lakes. Due to some thermal heating, Lake Toya is often a more comfortable swim than its colder cousin Lake Shikotsu. The alpine hiking is also world class and mostly bear free.

The fly fishing and golf is also great from early summer onwards and is certainly a more comfortable experience.

For those wishing to see Autumn in Hokkaido, late October is amazing. Early Autumn is also harvest season

so the food is all fresh from the farm.

We are of the opinion that the colour of the autumn leaves in the forests up here is far more pretty than the cherry blossoms of May and certainly worth finding a nice Onsen hotel in the mountains to watch the colors transform. Autumn temperatures are also the most pleasant in Hokkaido with warm days and crisp evenings but not so cold that being outdoors becomes uncomfortable.

Spring can be very nice in its own way and you will certainly have a great time in Hokkaido then but it's not our first recommendation to see Hokkaido if it's your first trip.

Melting snow can be muddy and brown the striking greens which really don't come out until early May. Not that it sucks here by any means, it's just that there are other more spectacular times to visit if your schedule allows.

Getting to Hokkaido

Hokkaido is serviced by its main airport The New Chitose Airport.

Okinawa Peach Airlines offers a direct daily service and there are many other services if you are travelling from Honshu.

From the airport it's about a 40-minute fast train into Sapporo city and two hours' drive or bus to the resort town of Niseko. During the winter months a direct bus services the Niseko area.

Where can our readers find further information? You can check out our website or feel free to send us email any time at info@nisekoml.com. We are also just happy to have a chat about what can do and see in Hokkaido even if we can't assist with your booking.

A link to our upcoming Autumn Food Festival guided tour on 16th-20th September can be seen here: <https://nisekoml.com/itinerary/nisekoautumnfoodfestival/>.





STORY AND PHOTOS BY LUCY SELIGMAN, STRIPES JAPAN

Book details easy Japanese recipes to cook up at home

Appetizers

Japanese hors d'oeuvres are fun and quick to make. They take the form of small, taster-sized servings, attractively served and a delight to behold and consume. They can be prepared in advance and served cold or at room temperature, or thrown together quickly as your guests arrive, using whatever you have on hand.



Fried wonton salad

- Square Wonton wraps (aka skins), cut into triangles
- Seedless cucumbers (such as Japanese, Persian, hothouse, or European), thinly sliced
- Salt as needed
- Neutral oil for frying
- Peeled fresh ginger, cut into thin matchsticks

Dressing:

- 1/2 cup rice vinegar
- 1-1/2 tablespoons white sugar
- 1 tablespoon light-colored soy sauce, or to taste
- 1/4 teaspoon salt

Garnish:

- Toasted white sesame seeds (readily available at Asian markets or online)

Fry wontons until golden-brown. Drain on paper towels. Sprinkle cucumbers lightly with salt. Let sit until you are ready to use. Rinse lightly to remove excess salt prior to adding to dish, and drain. Combine all dressing ingredients and stir to combine.

Combine ginger and cucumber slices. Then add in the wonton wraps and dressing as needed to make a salad. Gently mix. Sprinkle with toasted white sesame seeds. Serve immediately.

Tip: Keep any left-over dressing refrigerated and use again with your favorite salad mixture.



Grilled Japanese eggplant with grated ginger

- 8 small Japanese eggplants, washed and dried with stems trimmed

Garnish:

- 4 tablespoons freshly grated peeled ginger with juice
- Katsuobushi (dried bonito shavings)
- Soy sauce to taste

Grill eggplants over high heat, turning frequently, for about 10-15 minutes. The skin will wrinkle and become charred.

Peel and discard skin only. It will look like a grilled potato after peeling the skin.

Place 2 grilled eggplants on a dish, with both stems facing in the same direction. Drizzle generously with soy sauce and place a small mound of grated ginger in the center. Sprinkle with dried bonito shavings and serve.

I convinced my Mother to let me go to Japan by myself when I was 15 because I told her, "Mom, I can use chopsticks and love Japanese food!" What a brave woman! And who knew that it would change and enrich my life in so many ways ever since. I have been in love with Japan ever since that fateful first visit, and can't wait to return, hopefully in 2022, with my daughter for another visit.

I cook Japanese food weekly and most often, daily, especially when I am testing recipes for a book or my blog, Thanks for the Meal. The question I am most asked is, "What can I cook if I am in a rush, don't especially like raw fish, am not a super-skilled home cook and want to wow my family or friends?" My newest book, Easy Japanese Recipes for the Home Cook, was written as a result of these questions.

Here's a sampling from that latest cookbook, so you too can create an easy 3-course Japanese dinner that's sure to wow friends and family.

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STARS AND STRIPES



Ishikari-Nabe

Serves 4

- 2lb. fresh salmon with bones and skin, cut into 1/2-in. slices
- 1lb. Chinese cabbage, cut crosswise into 2-in. strips
- 7-8 oz. chrysanthemum leaves (shungiku), stems trimmed and cut into 2-in. lengths
- 6 oz. daikon radish, peeled and cut into half-moon slices
- 5 oz. fresh shiitake mushrooms, wiped and stemmed (and halved if large)
- 6 oz. negi (spring onion), cut diagonally into 2-in. lengths
- 10-12 oz. shirataki (devil's tongue noodles), parboiled and cut in half
- 1 medium potato, peeled and cut into 1/2 inch half moons, optional
- 4 cups dashi (fish stock)
- 1 tablespoon white miso paste, or to taste
- 1 tablespoon red miso paste, or to taste
- 1 teaspoon soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon sake
- 1 teaspoon mirin (sweet sake)
- 1 cup whole milk
- 1 blocks momen tofu, drained and cut into cubes
- 1 to 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 4 mochi (pounded rice cakes), toasted, or 10 oz. udon noodles, cooked al dente

Garnish:

- Sansho (ground Japanese pepper)

Prepare the vegetables and shirataki as directed. Bring the dashi stock to a boil and flavor it with the two types of miso, soy sauce, sake, and mirin. Taste for seasoning and adjust if needed.

Add the milk and immediately bring the nabe or pot to the table and start cooking the vegetables and shirataki. Add the salmon and tofu a few minutes later, as they don't need as long to cook.

When the first batch is cooked, add some butter to the center of the pot and let everyone help themselves to the fish, tofu and vegetables as well as the broth, then add a second batch to cook.

The pepper should be passed separately. When everyone has had enough fish and vegetables, add the toasted mochi or udon to the pot and heat through, then serve with the remaining broth.

How to make homemade Dashi Stock:

Take a 6-inch piece of kelp (kombu), wipe lightly with a damp cloth and put into a pot with 6 cups water.

Bring it just to a boil and remove kelp. Add a generous 3/4 cup of dried bonito shavings (katsuobushi) and boil for one minute.

Turn off heat and after 2 minutes, strain.

Main Course - Nabemono

One pot or hot pot cooking, is one of Japanese most versatile and crowd-pleasing styles of seasonal cookery. Simple to make, and easy on your budget. It is served at the table with everyone helping to cook, just like fondue. It is fun, and very easy to make. The following recipe, for Ishikari-nabe, from Hokkaido, has salmon as its main ingredient, but also uses milk and butter, and even potato if desired—all local ingredients to the region. Ishikari is both an area name and name of this regional recipe. The use of sansho (ground Japanese pepper) packs a subtle spicy wallop to the dish and the aroma is delectable!

Dessert- Shiratama Dango with Silken Tofu

I love chewy, soft, pliable and smooth dango (Japanese dumplings). This dango uses only 2 main ingredients. Easy, quick to make, and always a crowd pleaser! Keep the ingredients on hand in your pantry to whip up a bunch for family or friends. I like to have fun having a variety of toppings to offer guests.

Tip: These taste best freshly made.

- 1/2 cup Silken Tofu (Kinugoshi)
- 1/2 cup Shiratamako coarsely ground flour (made from glutinous rice flour (mochigome), also called sweet rice flour or may replace with Mochiko (also a glutinous rice flour, more commonly found in the US)
- 3/4 tablespoon white sugar

Bring water to a boil in a pan. Into a bowl, place tofu, flour and sugar. Mix together with a rubber spatula until it combines. If needed, knead with your hand. If it is too watery, add in more flour. If it is too hard, add in more tofu (or some cold water). When the flour is mixed well and all the lumps have dissolved, form into small balls. I like to indent the middle of the dumpling with my thumb, which helps with cooking the dango evenly.

Carefully place the dumplings into the gently boiling water. After the dumplings start to float up to the surface, continue boiling for a few more minutes.

Then carefully scoop the dumplings out with a slotted spoon and put them into ice water to cool down.

Serve them with your favorite toppings.



Mochiko

Shiratamako



Dessert

I love Japanese desserts and am always trying out new recipes. We are big fans of dango (Japanese dumplings) at our house, so this is always popular and often requested.

Some Topping Suggestions:

- Anko (red bean paste, either smooth or chunky)
- Kinako (soybean flour), mixed with brown sugar to taste and a dash of salt
- Crushed black sesame seeds
- Matcha powder
- Kuromitsu (black sugar syrup)
- Ice Cream, such as vanilla, black sesame, matcha or red bean flavors
- Blueberry jam & ice cream



The Setouchi Lemon and Citrus Frappuccino has a soft pink color that promotes peace and love, according to the Starbucks Japan website.

Photo by Jonathan Snyder, Stars and Stripes

The Kanagawa Summer Blue Cream Frappuccino from Starbucks in Japan represents the Pacific Ocean and the region's many trading ports.

Photo by Daniel Betancourt, Stars and Stripes

The Okinawa Chinsuko Vanilla Caramel Frappuccino includes a traditional shortbread-like cookie, called a chinsuko, that's popular in the southern island prefecture.

Photo by Matthew M. Burke, Stars and Stripes

Starbucks pays homage to Japan's prefectures with 47 local Frappuccino flavors

BY ERICA EARL, STARS AND STRIPES
Published: July 8, 2021

To celebrate its 25th anniversary in Japan, coffee giant Starbucks has released 47 new "jimoto," or local, Frappuccino flavors that pay homage to every one of the country's prefectures.

Each of these sweet, coffee-based blended drinks will be available only in the prefecture they represent, so you'll have to travel around the country to try all 47. They cost 669 yen, or about \$6, for a 12-ounce portion, and will be available until Aug. 3.

The beverages feature ingredients special to their prefectures. For example, Starbucks shops in Hokkaido are offering the Creamy Corn Frappuccino.

People in the nation's capital, including those stationed at Yokota Air Base in the prefecture's western suburbs, can try the Tokyo Coffee Jelly and Caramel Frappuccino. Jelly or tapioca pearls are popular additions to coffees and teas in Japan and other Asian countries.

The coffee jelly is the center of this drink, with nearly every sip containing some. I think it's an enjoyable sensation, like eating and drinking a treat simultaneously, but it can be a bit of an acquired taste to people who are not already a fan of jelly drinks or boba teas.

The flavor for nearby Kanagawa

prefecture — home to several U.S. military bases — is the photogenic Kanagawa Summer Blue Cream Frappuccino. Its bright blue colors represent the Pacific Ocean and the region's many trading ports.

Stars and Stripes reporter Daniel Betancourt, who works out of Yokosuka Naval Base, said it takes some vigorous mixing to blend the citrus drizzle into this vanilla-flavored beverage, but the taste is rewarding once everything is combined. It also contains a butterfly pea tea syrup that adds to the citrus flavor.

Yamaguchi prefecture, home to Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, is offering the Sesame Matcha Frappuccino, and uses black sesame and green tea to somehow represent the way the prefecture connects Honshu and Kyushu islands.

The drink for nearby Hiroshima prefecture, dubbed the Setouchi Lemon and Citrus Frappuccino, has a soft pink color that promotes peace and love, according to the Starbucks Japan website, which suggest people sip on it while visiting the Atomic Bomb Dome or the Hiroshima Peace Memorial.

Hiroshima is famous for lemons, and other ingredients include passion fruit

tea and sweet whipped honey. Reporter Jonathan Snyder, based at MCAS Iwakuni, said the drink is a refreshing choice for the summer heat that boasts a pleasant balance of sweet and tangy flavors.

Shops in Nagasaki prefecture, home to Sasebo Naval Base, are offering the Castella Coffee and Cream Frappuccino. Castella is a popular cake introduced by Portuguese traders during the Edo period. This drink also uses white chocolate, milk and honey.

People in Aomori prefecture, home to Misawa Air Base, can try the Buzzing Apple Strawberry Frappuccino, which pays homage to the prefecture being the country's No. 1 apple producer.

The Okinawa Chinsuko Vanilla Caramel Frappuccino includes a traditional shortbread-like cookie, called a chinsuko, that's popular in the southern island prefecture.

This sweet and salty treat uses a vanilla base and caramel sauce, with chinsuko is blended into the beverage. It's topped with whipped cream and crumbled chinsuko. Reporter Matthew M. Burke, based out of Camp Foster, said it has a nice cookie-dough taste and is very filling.

Japan's first Starbucks opened in Tokyo's fashionable Ginza district in 1996. Since then, it has expanded to over 1,000 locations across the country, including a reserve roastery in Tokyo and an Edo-style storefront in the historic city of Kawagoe.

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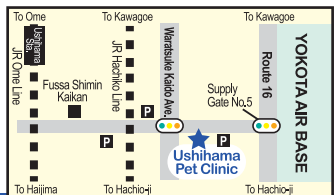
URL: www.starbucks.co.jp/cafe/jimoto_frappuccino



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Upon returning to the National League, this outfielder's career featured a surge in power, going from 26 to 31 and then 57 homeruns during a three-year stretch. Oddly enough, the biggest hit of his career wasn't a homer, but a blooper off one of the game's great closers to win the World Series. Who was player who shared a nickname with a Muppets character?

Answer

Luis Gonzalez

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DID YOU KNOW?

One of Japan's World Heritage sites, Mount Fuji is actually an active volcano. While it repeatedly has small-scale eruptions, those of the large scale have occurred most recently in 864 and 1707. Some volcanologists say this symbol of Japan may erupt sometime soon. So, if you're planning to climb the 12,388-foot mountain this summer, you better sleep on it and maybe try to avoid the day it erupts.

Kanji of the week

赤

Aka/seki (red)

Language Lesson

No onions, please.

Onion nukide onegai shimasu.

The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

- Mountain goat's perch
- Something to debate
- Anagram for "beat"
- Circle overhead?
- La Scala offering
- Blacken on the grill
- Emanation
- Timothy Bottoms plays a law student in this 1973 film (with "The")
- Pine or cedar
- Talkative
- Mournful chime
- Monotony
- Once around the track
- The element carbon, e.g.
- Deli meat
- Bit of baby talk
- Gaming cubes
- Lunch hour
- Blow up, in a way
- West ender?
- Water-filled ditch
- Balloon filler
- Wiped the slate clean
- Carried out, as laws
- Fishing equipment
- Tree-covered
- Western wear
- Tear into
- Most desirable
- Snake oil salesmen, e.g.
- Went horseback
- Player's cards
- Long-extinct birds
- "You bet!"
- Breakfast staple
- To the left, at sea

DOWN

- Wheel stopper
- Harmful household gas
- "___ Again (Naturally)" (1972 #1 hit)
- Silverback, for one
- Hit the bottle
- Dizzying designs
- Gusto
- Steamed state
- Cancer-causing substance
- Red-faced
- Rhythmical accent
- Magi's origin
- Deuce taker
- Some fish bait
- Love interest
- Fencing words
- Armoire feature
- Coconut flavored cocktail
- Office neckwear

- One to grow on?
- Give for a bit
- "___ Like It Hot"
- Before long
- It's out on a limb
- Fudged the facts
- Put up
- Facing
- Eager, long ago
- Muddy
- Blood giver
- Stevie Wonder's "My Cherie ___"
- San Diego slugger
- Smooth and glossy
- Masseur's target
- Kind of carpet
- Told all here!"
- "Hey...over here!"
- Pinnacle
- Bustle

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Answers to Last Week's Crossword:

L	A	S	T	B	E	T	A	F	R	A	T
E	L	L	I	S	A	V	O	N	L	E	G
T	A	I	N	T	S	E	N	D	O	M	E
O	N	T	H	E	W	I	N	G	P	R	U
				O	R	A	L	S	T	A	I
S	P	A	R	E	R	I	B	A	R	D	E
C	U	T	N	O	I	C	E	B	E	A	R
A	P	T	N	A	V	A	L	A	X	E	
M	I	R	A	G	E	E	M	E	R	I	T
P	L	A	C	E	S	L	A	T	E	N	E
				C	R	A	S	S	R	O	P
A	C	T	O	R	C	H	A	P	A	R	R
C	A	I	N	M	O	O	N	S	T	O	L
E	N	V	I	G	R	O	T	T	I	M	E
S	T	E	M	M	E	T	H	A	P	E	S

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Easy

7		9				1	8	
6	5		7			4		
	9	4				2		
1	8	2			6	5	9	
			4		8	9	6	
3		7						

HOW TO SOLVE:
Each row must contain the numbers 1 to 9; each column must contain the numbers 1 to 9; and each set of 3 by 3 boxes must contain the numbers 1 to 9.

Answers to Last Week's Sudoku:

9	6	8	4	1	2	7	3	5
2	7	4	8	3	5	9	6	1
1	5	3	7	6	9	4	8	2
4	3	6	1	9	8	2	5	7
5	2	7	6	4	3	8	1	9
8	9	1	5	2	7	6	4	3
6	1	9	2	5	4	3	7	8
3	8	5	9	7	6	1	2	4
7	4	2	3	8	1	5	9	6

Edited by Margie E. Burke

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Okinawa's favorite pork dish Rafute

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHOJI KUDAKA,
STRIPES JAPAN

If you have traveled to Okinawa, you may have stumbled across a dish fit for kings. It's true, rafute, or braised pork belly, was served as a staple to Okinawan royalty.

Today, it is a dish enjoyed by all as a side at dinner, or a snack that pairs well with liquor. Its well-seasoned savory and sweet taste is loved on the island and on the mainland.

There are many ways to prepare this delicious dish, and at times, people can spend hours preparing and cooking it. You can reduce the cook time significantly by using a pressure cooker as I did in the recipe below.

Give it a try and you, too, will feel like royalty with this delicious Okinawan dish!

kudaka.shoji@stripes.com



Watch this video!!



Ingredients

- Pork belly (750g)
- Water (Enough to soak and boil pork belly in a pot and another 1,400 cc to make the soup stock)
- Sugar (200cc)
- Soy sauce (133cc)
- Awamori liquor (200cc)

Recipe

1. Sear or grill the pork belly on the stove or with an open flame until the skin starts to brown a bit.
2. After, run the pork belly under water for a quick rinse, then it goes into a pot of boiling water for 30 minutes.
3. Once the pork belly turns pale in color, remove from heat and water. Once the meat has cooled, cut it into 1.6 to 2-inch cubes.
4. Pour water (1,400cc) and bonito flakes in a pot and heat until the water begins to boil. Remove the bonito flakes and your stoup stock is ready.
5. Place the pork belly, sugar and awamori liquor into the pressure cooker. Pour the soup stock over the ingredients. Close the pressure cooker and let the pork belly cook for 20 minutes over high heat.



6. Turn off the heat and release the accumulated vapor through the piston. Once the pressure is fully released, open the lid. Pour and mix in soy sauce. Secure the lid once more and resume the heat for another 20 minutes.
7. Once again, turn the heat off and release the accumulated vapor through the piston and then open your pressure cooker once the pressure stops coming out. Cook the pork belly for another 20 minutes over high heat without the lid. The pork belly should be tender and the skin and fat glossy.
8. Plate the pork pieces and pour some of the cooking liquid from inside the pressure cooker over it.
9. Pair this as a side or with your favorite awamori liquor and enjoy. Bon appetite!



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