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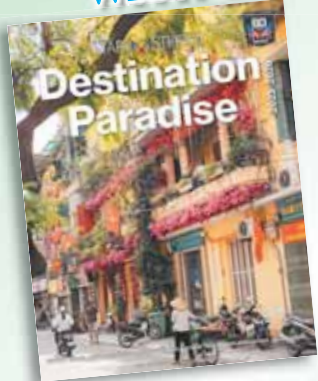
VOLUME 13 NO. 6

JUNE 26 – JULY 2, 2026

FREE

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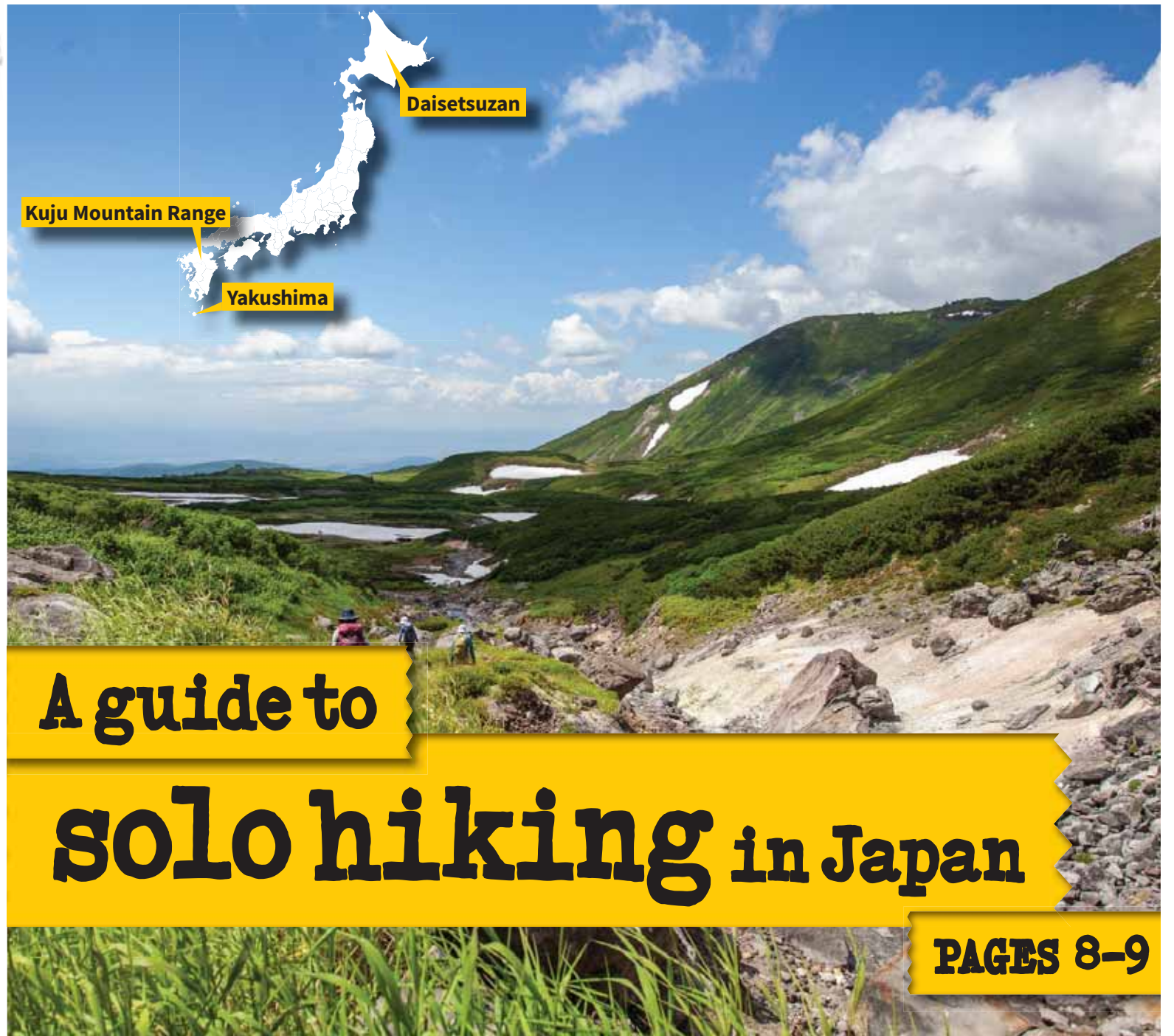
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Yokota troops, families have new temp housing option

BY SETH ROBSON
AND MARC CASTANEDA,
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: June 12, 2026

YOKOTA AIR BASE — Families arriving at the home of U.S. Forces Japan once again have access to apartment-style temporary lodging following the opening of a 32-unit tower complex.

Air Force leaders, including 374th Airlift Wing commander Col. Richard McElhaney, marked the June 4 reopening with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the facility in a housing area east of Yokota's runway.

The facility, in Building 4304, opened in conjunction with a new fitness annex in a ground-floor space vacated by the Yokota Aero Club.

"It's a huge enhancement to our community to be able to have a TLF," McElhaney told those gathered for the ceremony. "We can put the family in one family unit instead of having two different rooms ... you have your pets, your children, and all that stuff all together."

The tower will accommodate visitors as well as service members and civilian workers coming to the base for tours of duty.

McElhaney said the apartment-style accommodations complement the 126 units already available at the Kanto Lodge, Yokota's on-base hotel.

The base shuttered its previous

"We can put the family in one family unit instead of having two different rooms ... you have your pets, your children, and all that stuff all together."

- Col. Richard McElhaney

east-side temporary lodging facility in February 2024. It featured three-bedroom units that could accommodate up to six people.

At the time, officials said some Kanto Lodge rooms would be converted to temporary lodging and pet-friendly accommodations.

McElhaney, who previously served at Yokota before returning as wing commander, recalled staying in temporary lodging with his family before departing the base in 2019.

As part of the new arrangement, Kanto Lodge staff will drive arriving families to the east-side apartments, he said.

The Kanto Lodge charges \$98 a night for single or family rooms, according to the 374th Force Support Squadron website.

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Col. Richard McElhaney, 374th AW commander, tours the reopened temporary lodging facility at Yokota. Photos courtesy of Kayla Karelas, U.S. Air Force



Leaders of the 374th Airlift Wing tour the reopened temporary lodging facility.



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Hachioji geishas teach military children how to play tosenkyo, a traditional parlor game, during the Geisha Showing and Community Expo at the Taiyo Community Center on Yokota Air Base.

Geisha expo bridges cultures at Yokota

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MARC CASTANEDA,
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: June 10, 2026

YOKOTA AIR BASE — Traditional geisha performances, Japanese music and cultural activities drew hundreds of visitors to this airlift hub in western Tokyo for the first geisha exposition on base in recent memory.

Organizers said the Geisha Showing and Community Expo offered military families a rare opportunity to experience a centuries-old Japanese tradition while performers from the Hachioji area engaged directly with the American community.

“For a lot of families, they don’t have the opportunity to go see the geishas,” Chris Burns, staff adviser for the Japanese Cultural Engagement Club, told Stars and Stripes during the event. “The idea is, can we bring it into a place and a space where it’s a lot more accessible for them?”

The three-hour event at the Taiyo Community Center featured traditional Japanese dance performances, “ohayashi” festival music, geisha parlor games, cultural presentations and a Q&A session about geisha traditions.

For instance, a higher hair style indicates a younger geisha.

Geisha are professional entertainers who attend to guests during meals, banquets and other occasions, according to Japan-Guide.com. They are trained in traditional Japanese dance and music and the art of communication. They first appeared about 300 years ago.

At Yokota, expo guests had opportunities to take photos with the 10 geisha performers and browse booths offering handmade arts and crafts, miniature 3D-printed figures and other items from local vendors.

The event, three months in planning, attracted about 300 people, according to its organizers.

The idea originated with Yokota’s

Japanese Cultural Engagement Club, which spent the past year connecting military members with local cultural experiences, said Bob Thomas, one of the group’s advisers.

Thomas said the club developed ties with the Hachioji geisha community through a Japanese language instructor who helped facilitate introductions. Since then, club members have organized several off-base geisha events before working to bring the performers to Yokota.

“This is the first time that it’s the other way, where they came here to us,” Thomas said.

The event required funding, base access and the logistics associated with hosting a traditional cultural performance on a military base. Many of the volunteers were students at Yokota High School.

Thomas said many of the performers had long hoped to engage more directly with the U.S. military community.

Musician Kenji Kinoshita, chairman of the Hachioji Matsuri Bayashi Rengokai, said performing “ohayashi,” or

traditional Japanese festival music, for an American audience was a first in his 55-year career.

“We are very much hoping to come and perform again,” he said.

For Burns, a memorable part of the event was watching the cultural exchange extend beyond the stage.

“It was just as exciting to them to see these parts and facets of American culture as it is for the people at the booths,” he said, recalling geisha performers stopping to take photos and interact with vendors throughout the expo.

Megumi, a Hachioji geisha who has performed for 42 years, said one of her favorite parts of the event was teaching children traditional geisha games and interacting with military families.

“We had so much fun. Today was a very special day,” she said through a translator. “This opportunity to perform for such a unique audience is very rare.”

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The racks at Hitodenashi, an unmanned thrift shop in Yokosuka, are packed with an eclectic mix. Levi's jeans, Gap hoodies, American Eagle polos and a bunch of Japanese vintage gems.



UNUSUAL THRIFT STORE NEAR YOKOSUKA NB 'FOR HONEST CUSTOMERS' ONLY

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MARC CASTANEDA,
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: June 11, 2026

There's an unusual thrift store near Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, that operates entirely on trust. Hitodenashi has no cashiers, checkout counters or employees to keep watch. Instead, shoppers browse at their own pace, add up their purchases and drop the correct amount of cash into an honesty box before leaving with their finds.

A sign outside sums up the concept perfectly: "For honest customers."

Inside, the atmosphere feels more like an art space than a retail store. A colorful chandelier hangs above racks of secondhand clothing, while concrete walls are covered with anime-style murals, retro posters and playful signs. One reads, "If you can read this, I can see you."

During a recent visit, I had the store to myself for nearly 30 minutes before another customer quietly stepped inside, selected an item and left after making a purchase.

The racks are packed with an eclectic mix of clothing, from Levi's jeans, Gap hoodies and American Eagle polos to vintage Japanese pieces.

Prices start at 500 yen. The most expensive item I spotted — a weathered leather jacket full of character — was marked at 8,000 yen, or about \$50.

Part of the appeal of thrift shopping is finding clothing with a story. Denim softened by years of wear, jackets molded to previous owners and the satisfaction of discovering something unexpected all add to the experience.

I left with a pair of no-brand indigo carpenter pants and a couple of vintage Japanese T-shirts for about 2,000 yen.

After browsing, shoppers can grab a bowl of tempura at nearby restaurant or walk up a hill to a Starbucks overlooking one of Yokosuka's busiest streets. Both are only a few minutes away by foot.

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HITODENASHI

DIRECTIONS: It's a short walk from Yokosuka-Chuo Station to the shop at 3-9, 1F, Wakamatsucho, Yokosuka, Kanagawa 238-0007

DATES: Open daily, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

COST: Most items start at 500 yen.

PHONE: 046-8769-987

OTHER INFO: You'll find several dining options in the surrounding neighborhood.



There are no cashiers or checkout counters at Hitodenashi. Shoppers tally up their items and slip the payment into an honesty box.



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Crazy Japanese bathrooms that shock foreigners



BY YUU SATO, LIVE JAPAN

Naturally, different countries have different cultures! One of the things related to culture is the “toilet situation.” You may ask, “Isn’t a restroom always the same in every country?” What about it?

We asked Australian men, American men, and Italian women visiting Japan, how they felt as foreigners when it came to Japanese toilets, especially those that they had never seen before coming to Japan. We also asked about the difference from their home country.

(The following reflects the opinion of the interviewees only)

I don’t know how to use a Japanese-style toilet

The older Japanese-style toilets are less common, and not too familiar even to Japanese people. You may think that there are almost none left in the country. However, according to a survey conducted by the Japan Tourism Agency in 2016, 10,181 units, or 42% of the 24,525 toilets in Japan’s major tourist attractions are of the so called “Japanese-style.”

Surprisingly, it’s many more than one would expect! What did foreigners think when they first saw this kind of toilet?

“I’ve been to China before, so when I saw a Japanese-style toilet in Japan, I was already used to it. But I was a little surprised! I don’t really want to have to use a Japanese-style toilet for a long time, because my knees would hurt. If I can choose between a Japanese-style toilet and a Western-style one, I would choose the western one.” (Australian man)

“I have never used a Japanese-style toilet.” (American man)

“I never used Japanese-style toilets, but so far I have never had any issue with bathrooms in Japan.” (Italian woman)

It seems that many foreigners don’t know how to use a Japanese-style toilet when they first see one. If you are used only to Western toilets it may be hard to picture how to use the Japanese ones.

The Japanese toilet is also called “squat toilet” by foreigners. The reason why this name is used, it’s probably because of the position, and the stress on the thighs, when using it, making it similar to the homonymous legs exercise.

The first time I used a warm water jet toilet seat, I was so surprised I jumped!

Toilet seats with hot water bidets incorporated in them are common in Japanese Western-style toilets. Did you know that these TOTO bidets, and other warm-water jet toilet seats are actually not very popular overseas? I asked foreigners if they use hot water jet toilet seats in their country!

“There is no warm water toilet seat in Australia. I’ve never seen it. I wonder if it’s considered too weird...” (Australian man)

“In the United States, warm water toilet seats are not common. Most people use ordinary common toilets. If you want to use a warm water toilet seat, you are going to have to build or order a custom one.” (American man)

“I was surprised when I used it at first, because in Italy we do not have automatic hot water jet toilets like in Japan! Many Italians have a similar experience to mine when it comes to hot water toilets, and it’s a popular topic. Hot water bidet toilets have been introduced in Italy about three years ago, but they are not as popular as they are in Japan.” (Italian woman)

I think there are many things that surprise foreigners when they come to Japan. However, it seems that Japanese warm-water toilet seats are one of the most surprising things. Press the right button to wash yourself with moderately warm water. This warm water bidet toilet has conquered the hearts of many foreigners.

This may be hard to understand for Japanese people, since in Japan people are used to this kind of toilets not only at home, but also in public toilets.

However, these seats are rarely used overseas, and many foreigners don’t know, or have never used hot water jet toilets. Many foreigners have tried these seats for the first time when they came to Japan, and it seems they were surprised by how wonderful they are.

There are accounts of foreigners who initially were not really convinced about these toilet seats, but overtime got so used to them that they could not be without them anymore. In this interview, an Australian man told us that he had a bit of resistance at first, but once you experience it, your idea may change.

Japanese public toilets are as clean as the ones at home!

“Japanese public toilets are really nice and clean. They are not like the Australian ones!” (Australian man)

“Japanese public toilets are cleaner than the ones in America! However, the ones in crowded stations like Shinjuku or Shibuya are an exception.

“Japanese public toilets are very clean and I love them! Some toilets have a nice smell, which is really wonderful. If I had only one complain, it would be that soap sometimes is nowhere to be found. I don’t like not washing my hands properly after using the bathroom.” (Italian woman)

One of the things that surprises foreigners, is the cleanliness of Japanese public bathrooms. The reason why toilets are so clean may be because we have been used to “cleaning toilets” since childhood. In schools abroad, unlike Japan, children rarely clean the school and the bathrooms, as the cleaning is assigned to cleaning companies.

In the Japanese customer-service industry, toilets are thoroughly cleaned. This is because many managers think that the cleanliness of the restrooms reflects the service and attention the business has for the customers. For this reason, toilet-cleaning happens several times a day, and the bathrooms are always kept clean.

This Japanese way of thinking is probably what leads to Japanese public restroom being clean.



Are there pay-to-use toilets? What are they like elsewhere?

“In Australia there are ‘eco toilets’ in national parks. An eco-toilet is an eco-friendly toilet with a recycling function that readapts waste into the soil.” (Australian man)

“In Italy, most station bathrooms charge 70 cents to 1 Euro to use. Public toilets in famous tourist destinations like Rome and Venice are also pay-to-use. When you use the bathroom in a café or a bar, you need to buy something. In Italy, the cheapest item you can get in a café is an ‘espresso’, so if you want to use the bathroom, make sure you buy coffee and then use it.” (Italian woman)

Pay-to-use toilets, are bathrooms that require you to pay to use them. This is not for the toilet itself, but it’s for toilet paper, soap, water, and drier. Free-to-use toilets are common in Japan, but there are more pay-to-use toilets overseas. There are also places where you are expected to tip after using the bathroom, even though the bathroom itself may be free-to-use.

One of the reasons why there are so many pay-to-use toilets overseas, is to maintain public services. In addition, it helps prevent crimes from being committed behind the closed doors of the toilets, which will open only upon paying.

Wrapping Up

The Japanese government has been working to increase the number of Western-style toilets, especially in tourist areas. The thinking was that traditional Japanese-style toilets might feel inconvenient—or even stressful—for many foreign travelers, and that in the future they would likely prefer Western-style facilities instead.

Today, Japan’s modern toilets enjoy an excellent reputation among international visitors, and they’ve become one more way for the country to showcase its spirit of hospitality.



A SKATER'S GUIDE TO THE BEST SKATEPARKS ACROSS TOKYO

STORY AND PHOTOS BY PAUL PARK,
METROPOLIS MAGAZINE



When I searched online for skateparks, the articles I read were either outdated or didn't give a helpful description. I wanted to find spacious spots to cruise around, practice flatground tricks and also connect with the local skate scene.

Every skatepark has different rules and opening and closing times. For first-time visitors and tourists, being surprised by an entrance fee or being told registration is required can ruin the session before it even begins. Some parks allow BMX and inline skates and require a helmet. Some require an entrance fee, others don't. The list is for all skill levels, with all important details to give you a feel of what to expect.



KOMAZAWA SKATE PARK

The historic skate park inside Setagaya's Komazawa Olympic Park has offered free admission since it opened in 1964 for the Olympic Games, making it popular with families, locals and visitors. In 2016, the park was renovated to update the aging manual pads, mini ramps and half-pipes, ideal for both street and transition. The open, spacious flat ground makes it comfortable to skate without getting in others' way.

On weekends and late afternoons, the park is crowded with kids and adults. Go on weekdays to avoid the crowds. The park closing times vary by the month, but it opens at 10 a.m. every day. Check the sign on the front of the gate as it varies and there's no official site.

LOCATION: Komazawa Olympic Park

RENTAL: No rental gear available; bring your own gear

HOURS: 10 a.m. – 6:30 p.m. every day, closing time varies

ENTRANCE FEE: None

REGISTRATION: Not required

RULES: Inline skates and BMX bikes are allowed



SHINYOKOHAMA SKATEBOARD PARK

ShinYokohama Skateboard Park is regarded as one of the best public skateparks in the Greater Tokyo area. A 30-minute train ride from Shibuya, situated beneath Nissan Stadium complex, the expressway above protects the ramps and transition section. The flat ground area itself is without cover. Still, making it possible to skate all year round and during the evening when the lights turn on. The layout includes everything, and for every skill level: quarter pipes, banks, manny pads, rails, ledges and a huge open flat ground.

Surrounded by athletic fields, running paths and open green spaces, it feels more like a dedicated action-sports facility than a simple neighborhood skatepark. Shin-Yokohama Attracting riders from across Yokohama, Kawasaki and Tokyo, the park is crowded on weekends and holidays. It's recommended to visit during weekday mornings or afternoons if you prefer more space.

ADDRESS: 3300 Kozukuecho, Kohoku Ward, Yokohama, Kanagawa 222-0036

RENTAL: Skateboards and helmets available for rent

HOURS: 9 a.m. – 9 p.m.

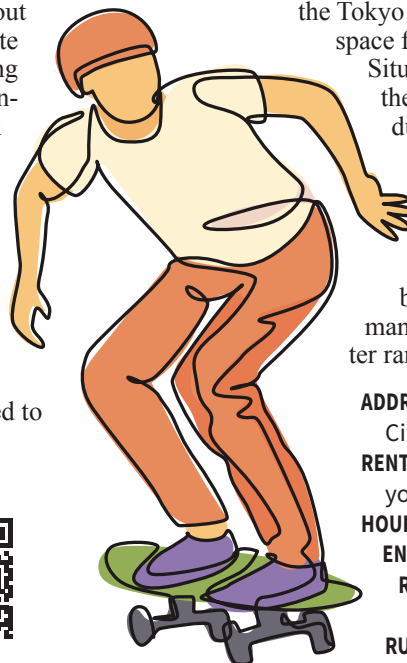
ENTRANCE FEE: None

REGISTRATION: Prior registration at the nearby information booth

RULES: Inline skates, scooters and BMX bikes are allowed. Wristband must be worn at all times



Photo courtesy of ShinYokohama Skateboard Park Official Website



WEBSITE

SUMIDA SKATE BOARD PARK

Opened in 2024, Sumida Skate Board Park is one of Tokyo's newest skateboarding facilities and has quickly become a favorite, especially on rainy days. Located in Mukojima, just north of the Tokyo Skytree area, the park was built to provide a dedicated space for skateboarding in a ward without a proper skatepark.

Situated beneath an elevated expressway, the overhead structure provides shade during Tokyo's intense summer heat and is the go-to spot when it rains.

The layout is divided into beginner and intermediate areas, where beginners feel comfortable practicing pushing, turning, and basic tricks. Advanced skaters use the manual pads, flat rail, curved ledges, quarter ramps and stair sets.

ADDRESS: 5 Chome-9-1 Mukojima, Sumida City, Tokyo 131-0033

RENTAL: No rental gear available; bring your own gear

HOURS: 10 a.m. – 7:30 p.m.

ENTRANCE FEE: None

REGISTRATION: Prior registration is required at the office across from the skatepark

RULES: No inline skates or BMX bikes. Registration wristband must be worn



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YOYOGI URBAN SPORTS PARK

Opened in 2025, conveniently located between Shibuya and Harajuku, the design of the skatepark focuses on street style. The ground is smooth, including a bank and a few ledges. The small, compact size of the skatepark isn't the ideal place to cruise around. During the weekend and late afternoons, the park is busy with kids whizzing about. Head here for a quick session during the week-days to avoid the crowd.



WEBSITE

ADDRESS: 1 Chome-1-1 Jinnan, Shibuya, Tokyo 150-0041
RENTAL: Not available
HOURS: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
ENTRANCE FEE: None
REGISTRATION: None
RULES: Skateboard only



HINA SKYGARDEN SKATEPARK

Skate with a backdrop of Tokyo Bay at the only rooftop skatepark in Tokyo. The park suits all riding levels and styles. It has a mix of street and transition obstacles like ledges, boxes, banks, mini-ramps and open space for practicing flatground tricks. Beginners should head to the learning center first, with lesson prices varying per day and according to skill level. After the session, order tacos and beer at Wahoo's to refuel. The Gundam statue outside the complex retires this year in August. So go before then to catch history in the making.

LOCATION: 7F, DiverCity Tokyo Plaza in Odaiba
RENTAL: Skateboards and helmets available
HOURS: 11 a.m. – 9 p.m.
ENTRANCE FEE: Elementary school students and younger: ¥550/day, Junior high school students: ¥660/day, Ages 16 and over: ¥880/day
REGISTRATION: Not required
RULES: No inline skates or BMX bikes



WEBSITE



Photo courtesy of livedoor URBAN SPORTS PARK Official Website

LIVEDOOR URBAN SPORTS PARK

Built for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, the 3.7 billion yen multifacility park includes bouldering, basketball court, running track, pickleball court and an enormous skatepark. The skatepark was initially going to be demolished after the Olympics. But after skateboarder Yuto Hirogome won gold, the government decided to keep the park and open it to the public.

Designed for both street and transition competition styles, the street course includes stairs, handrails, curbs, ledges and banks. The transition section includes a massively steep bowl. For highly skilled skaters, this is a dream spot.

LOCATION: Ariake Olympic Paralympic Park
RENTAL: Skateboards, helmets and safety gear available for rent
HOURS: Weekdays 1 p.m. – 9 p.m., Weekends 10 a.m. – 9 p.m., Closed third Monday every month
ENTRANCE FEE: Required, prices vary depending on time of day and age
REGISTRATION: Annual membership and daily registration are a must through the website
RULES: Inline skates, scooters and BMX bikes are OK; safety gear is required



WEBSITE

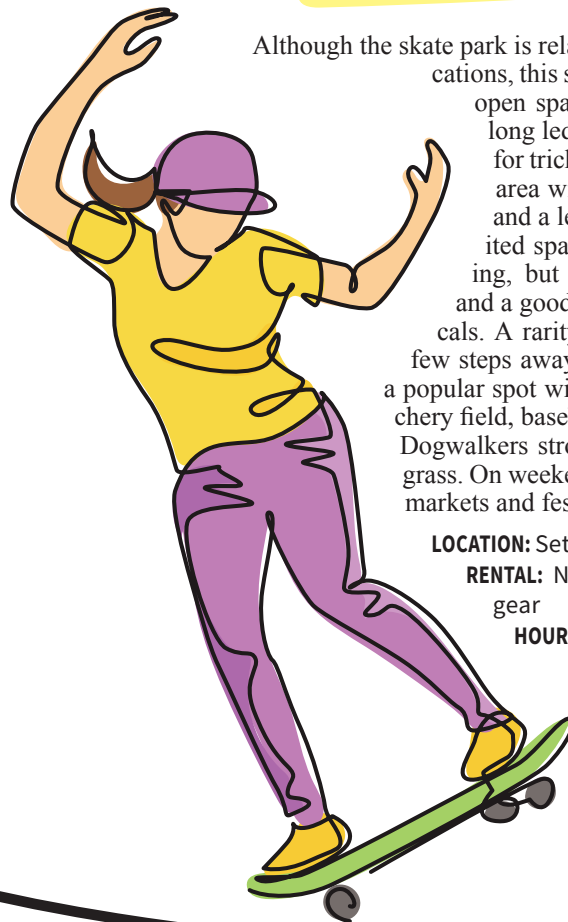
SETAGAYA SKATE PARK

Although the skate park is relatively small compared to other Tokyo locations, this spot is unique because it's split between an open space with a munny pad, a long ledge and a flatground area for tricks. Plus, there is a second area with a quarter pipe, hubba and a ledge for grinds. The limited space is not ideal for cruising, but the atmosphere is chill and a good way to connect with locals. A rarity is the smoking area a few steps away. Setagaya Park itself is a popular spot with a central fountain, archery field, baseball field and family-friendly atmosphere. Dogwalkers stroll around the paths, locals picnic on the grass. On weekends, crowds gather for regular events like markets and festivals.

LOCATION: Setagaya Park
RENTAL: No rental gear available, bring your own gear
HOURS: April – September 9 a.m. – 7 p.m., August – March 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.
ENTRANCE FEE: None
REGISTRATION: Not required



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A guide to solo hiki

Three hiking regions to join Japan's h

BY BURCU BASAR,
METROPOLIS MAGAZINE

I moved to Japan at age 39 – a year after quitting my full-time lawyering job, with no definite job prospects in the country and with no close friends. Unlike most people, it was not the temples, the manga culture, or the delicious Japanese food that drew me to this new home. I was instead fascinated with the often-underrated beauty of Japan's nature and the countless hiking trails that it offered.

During the three years that I have been living in Japan, each hiking experience, often solo, made me feel more connected to the country. I not only found nature's beautiful landscape welcoming but the friendly hiking culture has encouraged me to develop a personal connection with Japan's soil.

Year after year, these are the three destinations in Japan that I always count on. From mesmerizing scenery to easily-formed trail camaraderie, all aspects somehow feel unique to Japan.



File photo



Daisetsuzan National Park Japan's largest national park in Hokkaido

Daisetsuzan, the largest national park in Japan, sits in the middle of the northernmost and wildest island of Hokkaido, occupying a land area of over 2,000 square kilometers. The park is home to numerous trails to explore on day hikes or week-long traverses, pleasing both beginners and advanced hikers alike. Mountain scenery encompasses the active volcano Mount Asahidake, which is also the highest mountain in Hokkaido, flower fields roll endlessly along the mountain-base slopes in summer, and wildlife (including bears) thrives.

It is also a region that attracts hundreds of solo hikers during the peak summer season (late July-August) who are more than eager to keep each other company and look out for each other. During my solo summer trip to the park, it was not my bear bell but the friendly company of other hikers that gave me the comfort to explore the trails occupied by alpine flowers without being discouraged by the wildlife to which the park is home.

When another hiker had warned us about a bear sighting on my solo hike, it took merely a few seconds to share a moment of connection with two fellow hikers. Luckily, we never encountered a bear on the Asahidake and Nakadake loop route but, had a delightful day chatting with one another throughout. On another solo hike, I tagged along with an elderly couple after they had noticed that I was wandering into bear-dense territory. Little did I know that (until I overheard their phone call) the couple changed their plans and extended their hike just for me so that I would not have to hike alone in bear territory.

Despite the delightful sense of remoteness that it passes on to its visitors, Daisetsuzan is easily accessible with a direct bus from Asahikawa Airport. In addition, two cable cars are provided to take trekkers all the way up to the main two trailheads — departing from Asahidake Onsen and Sounkyo Onsen. Both of these are tranquil onsen towns, making excellent bases for visitors to the park.

File photo



Kuju Mountain Range Easy trails, friendly

Kyushu, sitting on the opposite end of the island from Hokkaido, is home to any bears (last sighting reported in 1950). It is a magical island where hiking is less effort but still reward those who visit.

As a fairly popular destination in Japan, Kuju is accessible by an extensive rail network and sightseeing buses. One of the main trailheads on the island, Daisetsuzan, it took me a few years to discover the beauty of the northern part of Aso-Kuju National Park. It has an excellent visitor center, dozens of trails, and a cafe that can only be reached by hiking. Kuju is a beautiful island.

Like Daisetsuzan, Kuju has numerous trails to explore. With easy peaks and easy, flat marshland terrain, Kuju is a great place to hike. With blooming azaleas, Kuju attracts many hikers in June. Hikers can also spend the night in a tent or a cabin, accessible by hiking, where freshly cooked food is served. This is the perfect place to mingle with other hikers and share trail stories, often in the company of a campfire.

During a past May visit to Kuju in search of a hot spring from Niigata prefecture and I might have found a hot spring to celebrate our safe arrival at Hokkaido. We found each other at the trailhead looking for a hot spring, standably empty — trail in a rather perplexing way. We for hours dreadfully negotiated our way through highly "unrecommended" routes in Kuju (the route from Hokkein Onsen via Shirakuchi route) for a hot spring, onsen and cold beer — a feat that would have been impossible for the emotional support that we, as two hikers, provided to each other.



Photo courtesy of Metropolis Magazine

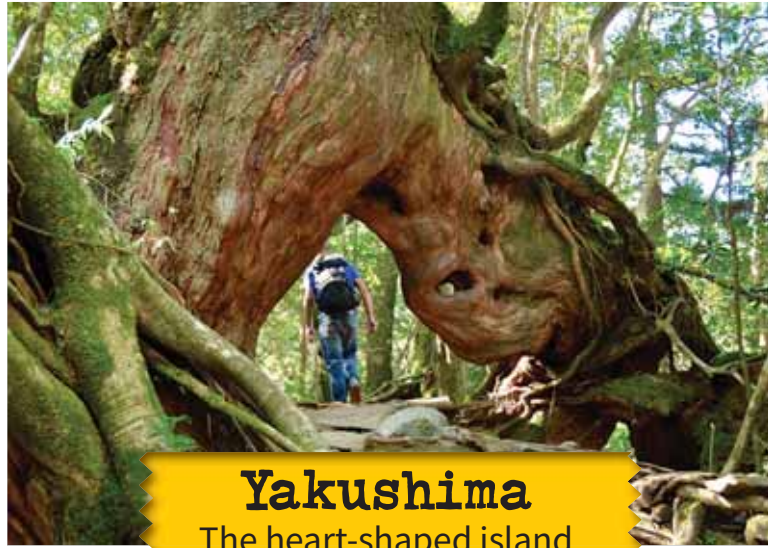
Hiking in Japan

Hiking community



in Range
ly company

File photo



Yakushima
The heart-shaped island

of Japan, is fortunately not home (1987) but is home to many moun- tain trails often demand relatively little to see the graceful scenery.

Japan, Kyushu is well-served both by regular buses that also stop at many popular spots. In spite of numerous visits to Kyushu, the Kuju mountain range, sitting in the heart of the park. With diverse sceneries, an onsens, and a mountain-top onsens that are a hiker's heaven like no other.

ous trails involving challenging hikes. With a Heidiland-like scenery, many hikers in late May and early June visit the Hokkein Onsen, only accessible by road, clean rooms, and an onsens with other hikers and exchange facilities. Cold beer.

Search of the azaleas, a fellow hiker and I have shared an unwise amount of beer at the Hokkein Onsen. Earlier in the day, I was hiking down the steep – and under-estimated state.

one of the most challenging and scenic mountain ranges (Naka-Dake) in Japan. Finally making our way to the hot springs, it likely not be possible if it was not for the two complete strangers, extended

Yakushima Island, located off the coast of Kagoshima in Kyushu, is one of Japan's most renowned hiking regions. Shiratani Unsui-kyo, one of the most popular hiking routes on the island, is believed to have inspired Hayao Mizaki's Princess Mononoke, released in 1997. This put the island on the radar of not only hikers but also Miyazaki fans world- wide.

Yakushima Island, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has managed to preserve its forests for thousands of years, housing Jomon Sugi, Japan's oldest tree. Because the island is home to countless trails, explorers will never get bored enjoying a more off-the-beaten-track experience once they wander off the main tracks.

Another alternative to popular routes – which ended up being one of my most rewarding experiences in Yakushima – is to explore the island with a road walk that circles the entire circumference of this perfectly heart-shaped island.

I did the walk a few years ago in three days. Hiking through the for- ests with a road walk gave me the opportunity to appreciate the local life on the island better and explore often-overlooked communities, such as Kurio or Nagata, where the seaside scenery can easily compete with the majestic beauty of the island's forests.

While I walked alone, I was pleasantly surprised to be greeted by two other visitors to the island, who waved and cheered me at the end of my walk. I found out that they, in the comfort of the bus, saw me multiple times during my three-day walk and thought that I deserved a celebra- tory beer.

These are only three of the many regions of Japan where astonish- ing sceneries and friendly hikers are ready to welcome new ex- plorers. I would recommend to anyone exploring Japan for its culture to branch out and give the lush landscape a chance. You would be surprised by how much you can learn about this country by exploring its mountains.



Daisetsuzan National Park is one of the wildest places in Japan. Photo courtesy of Metropolis Magazine

FAQ

Q Is solo hiking safe in Japan?

Yes, Japan is generally safe for solo hikers on major trails thanks to well-marked trails and a supportive hiking community. However, the weather in the mountains can change quickly. Always check the fore- cast, sign trailhead registers where available, and carry a paper map or an offline GPS in case of poor reception.

Q What about bears?

Hokkaido is home to brown bears (also called Ezo brown bears), and the rest of mainland Japan has Asian black bears. Kyushu no longer has a resident bear population. When hiking in bear country, carry a bear bell or make noise as you walk, keep food sealed and never leave it unattended, and avoid hiking alone at dawn or dusk when bears are more active. If you see a bear, do not run. Back away slowly while facing it, and make yourself appear larger.

Q Do I need permits for these hikes?

Most day hikes don't require permits, but certain multi-day routes, protected zones, or areas with fragile alpine vegetation (for example, some sections in Daisetsuzan) may require registration or advance notice. Always check the local visitor center or official park websites before setting out.

Q When is the best time to hike?

Daisetsuzan: July–September for wildflowers and snow-free trails.
Kuju Range: Late May–early June for azaleas; autumn for crisp weather and clear views.

Yakushima: April–November is most popular, but rain is common year-round—pack waterproof gear.

Q How do I respect nature?

- Stay on marked trails to avoid damaging fragile alpine plants.
- Pack out everything you bring in—don't leave trash or food scraps.
- Avoid loud music or drones that disturb wildlife and other hikers.
- Use designated toilets or carry a portable bag in areas without fa- cilities.
- Do not pick wildflowers or feed wild animals.

Q Can I rely on public transport to reach trailheads?

In some major hiking areas, you can. For example, Daisetsuzan of- fers buses from Asahikawa Airport to the Asahidake and Sounkyo cable cars. Kuju's main trailheads are accessible by train, as well as sightseeing buses. Yakushima's trails connect to local buses. Check timetables in advance, as some services are seasonal.

Q Is English widely spoken on the trails?

Not always. Trail signage is often bilingual in popular areas, but knowing a few Japanese phrases (for greetings and asking directions) helps. Many visitor centers in national parks offer English brochures.

Q How can I stay safe in case of emergencies?

Carry a charged phone with an offline map app, but don't rely on sig- nal in the mountains. Consider renting a satellite messenger or bea- con if you plan multi-day treks. In an emergency, call 110 (police) or 119 (fire/ambulance) if you have service. Read our Guide on What To Do In A Medical Emergency to be prepared.

Q Any good hiking apps?

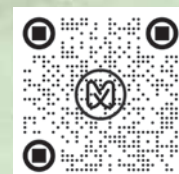
YAMAP (a play on "yama" meaning "mountain" and "map") is Japan's go-to hiking app, with GPS tracking, offline maps, and user-posted trail logs (some inter- face in Japanese, but manageable with practice).



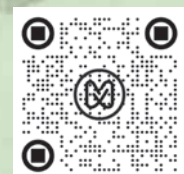
YAMAP

Q Any etiquette tips for hiking with others I meet on the trail?

A simple "**Konnichiwa**" (hello) is common when passing. Yield to up- hill hikers, keep group noise low, and if you join others for a while, respect their pace and plans.



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The sun beginning to set at Zushi Beach.

Fine time for Kanto beaches

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JESSICA A. PAJE,
JAPAN TRAVEL

It's time to make a splash in the ocean, curl up our toes in the sand, and prepare for that perfect tan. Here is a list of 12 beaches located in the Shonan area of Miura Peninsula, Kanagawa prefecture.

Starting from the east side of the peninsula to the west, you could potentially visit all of these beaches in one day if you wanted to. Each destination is accessible by car, train or bus and is located within one hour or less of Yokosuka's Naval Base Japan. Enjoy and have a sun-sational summer!



4. Sarushima Island
Yokosuka

Also known as Monkey Island, Sarushima Island is the only natural island and former military fortress that sits in Tokyo Bay. Popular for barbeques and swimming. Expect large crowds to designate this area for beach parties. Snack pavilion, grill & umbrella rentals, toilets, and rinse stations available onsite. If not there for the beach, take a stroll along the uninhabited hillside to enjoy the lush greenery and wonderful views of Tokyo Bay. Accessible only by ferry, round-trip fees with admission to Sarushima are 2,100 yen (Adults), 1,850 yen (middle schoolers) and 1,050 yen (Children). *50% discounted rate is applied to those who live within the city. Just a 10-minute walk from Yokosuka Naval Base, Womble Gate.



6. Kurihama Seashore at Perry Park
Yokosuka

A large, quiet, soft sandy beach that sits just across from Commodore Matthew C. Perry Park and adjacent to the Tokyo Wan Ferry servicing the Kurihama and Kanaya Ports. Popular for jet skis, children who love to build sand castles and groups that set up tents for grilling. Keep an eye out on the annual Kurihama Perry Fireworks Festival. A 15-minute walk from Keikyu Kurihama or JR Kurihama Station. Convenience stores nearby.



1. Hashirimizu Beach
Yokosuka

Located off of the beaten path, you can enjoy a leisurely swim at Hashirimizu. Popular for shell fishing like clams. Small boat shops and restaurants cooking fresh fish are in the area. Toilet facility is available at the entrance near Seaside Route-16. Recommend access by car. Pay Park lot is available at 210 yen/30 minutes. In the same parking lot, take advantage of filling up your bottles with the spring water on tap for free. By train, take taxi from Marbikaigan Station.

2. Cape Tomyozaki
Yokosuka

Most commonly referred to as the "Secret Beach" among foreigners in the local area, Cape Tomyozaki is home to Tomyodo Lighthouse, a wooden Japanese style lighthouse rebuilt in 1988. This lovely, secluded beach is gaining more popularity with the sea glass and pottery hobbyists. Its lighter, beige-toned sand, occasional tide pools, and rock formations make this location perfect for sunbathers, children who want to explore, swimmers and fisherman. Access by car is highly recommended. Ample parking is available for 250 yen/30 minutes. Or, take taxi from Uraga Station on the Keikyu Line.



5. Kannonzaki Beach
Yokosuka

Also known as Kenritsu Kannonzaki Park, this area boasts a sandy beach, grassy area, unique rock formations, a lighthouse, snack shop and boardwalk that runs just behind Keikyu Kannonzaki Hotel. Beachgoers love to swim out to the tiny pier that sits close to the shore, but far enough to enjoy a nice jump into the cool ocean water. Arrive early to pop up your tent in the grassy area in preparation for a fun-filled day of sunbathing and barbequing! Walk around the bend to find artists painting a portrait of the lighthouse. Located just beyond the Yokosuka Museum of Art at the end of Seaside Route-16, pay 1,000 yen for parking. Bus or taxi from Uraga Station.



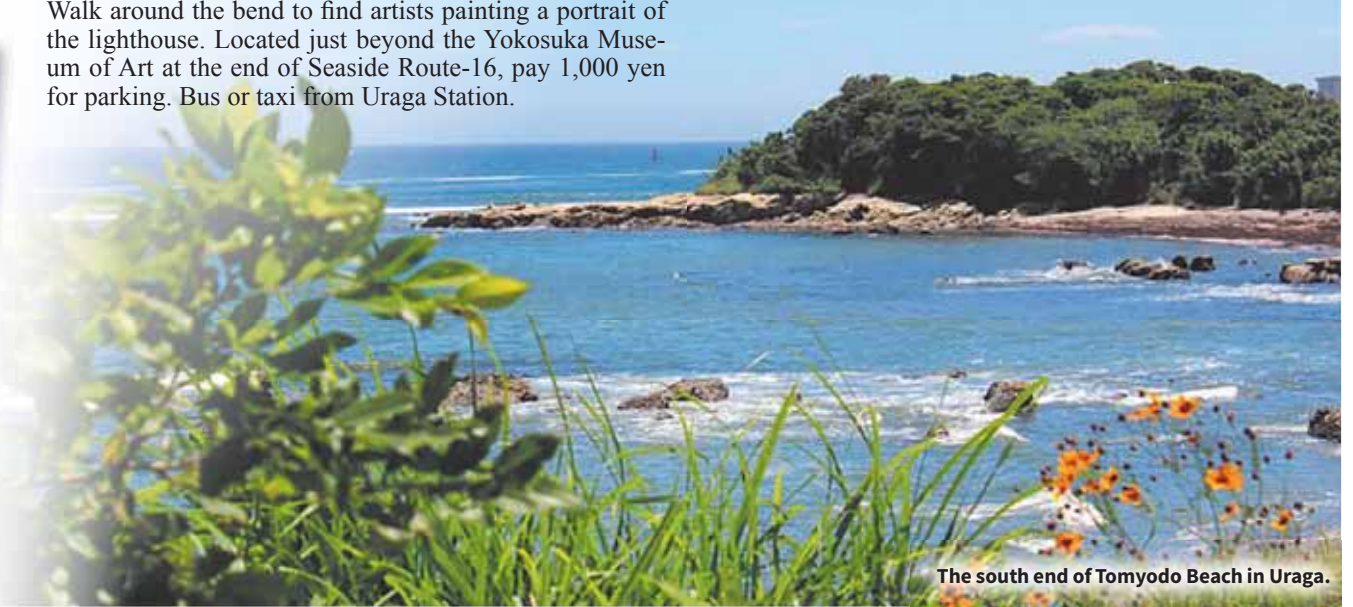
7. Yuigahama Beach
Kamakura

Yuigahama is the most popular of the three coasts in Kamakura (Zaimokuza and Koshigoe are the others). Many beach houses and windsurfers, similar feel to that of Zushi Beach. Signs posted on the shoreline indicate beachgoers should cover tattoos, keep music below 80db, do not drink, do not frighten others, no littering, smoke in designated areas, do not light fires on the beach, keep animals out of the water, and dam one of four train stations; each within 5-10 minutes walking distance (Hase, Yuigahama, Wadazuka or Kamakura Station). Large underground Pay Park available, just beneath Kamakura Seaside Park.



3. Akiya Beach
Yokosuka

Adjacent to unique rock formation at Tateishi Park and Restaurant Don, Akiya beach offers a large sandy area for setting up tent to picnic and listen to sound of the crashing waves. On clear days catch views of Mt. Fuji. Located off of Route 134 on the west side of the peninsula, free parking is available in the Tateishi parking lot. Arrive early to avoid the long line.



The south end of Tomyodo Beach in Uraga.

July 7

Tanabata

Wishing on two lovers legend



BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

One of the most romantic and traditional festivals, Tanabata, also known as the Star Festival, is celebrated every year on the seventh day of the seventh month.

The Star Festival originated from the Chinese legend of two stars, Vega and Altair – lovers who were separated by the Milky Way and allowed to meet only once a year on July 7.

The legend of Star Festival in Japan varies according to the region, and one that I was told in my childhood goes like this:

Vega (a weaver and princess called Orihime in Japanese) was a beautiful daughter of King of the Sky. She always weaved celestial cloth for her father by the bank of the Milky Way. There was also a young herdsman named Altair (called Hikoboshi



in Japanese). One day, the herdsman visited the princess when she was working with her loom and they fell in love at first sight. As Vega met her lover more and more frequently, she began weaving less and less. The king, who was suspicious about his daughter's change, finally saw her meeting with the herdsman. In anger, the king separated the two lovers across the Milky Way and forbade them to meet again. The princess became so desperate and continued weeping until her father finally allowed her to meet with the herdsman once a year on the seventh day of the seventh month.

So, if you look up into the evening sky on July 7 and it is clear, you can see the two stars reunited. But if it is rainy or cloudy, know that they will try to meet again next year.

As part of the Tanabata

celebration, Japanese tie fancy slips of colored paper - blue, red, violet or yellow and white - called tanzaku on bamboo branches. We write our wish on one of the papers and tie it to the bamboo branch, which is also decorated with shiny, metallic decorations, just like a Christmas tree. According to my mother, girls back in the day used to wish that their weaving and sewing skills would improve, like the weaver princess. However, as weaver princess eventually became a guardian of arts in general, many children today wish improve their skills in hand-writing, drawing or singing.

Shopping districts throughout the nation are decorated with colorful bamboo branches. Tanabata is not a national holiday but is a tradition observed by Japanese families. Some regions celebrate this festival on July 7 in accordance with the old lunar calendar, which is Aug. 19 this year.

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com

DID YOU KNOW?

July 7 - Tanabata, one of Japan's most romantic festivals

During one of the most romantic and traditional festivals, Tanabata, aka Star Festival, is celebrated every July 7. As part of the celebration, fancy slips of colored paper called tanzaku are tied to bamboo branches. Wishes are then written on the paper. Some of the wishes include things like "improved handwriting skills, drawing or singing".

- Takahiro Takiguchi, Stripes Japan

Speakin' Japanese

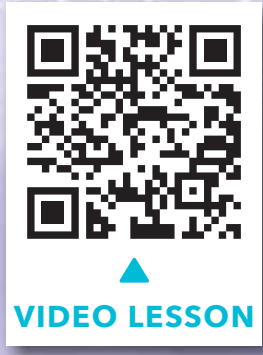
Negai wo kakemasho.
= Let's make a wish.

- negai = wish
- kake = take/make/hang
- masho = let's

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI
AND SHOJI KUDAKA,
STRIPES JAPAN

Tanabata, or Star Festival, is approaching on July 7. According to the legend around Tanabata, two star-crossed lovers will reunite on this night as the Milky Way stretches across the sky. Traditionally, we

celebrate this yearly reconciliation by decorating bamboo branches with ornaments and paper slips where we write our wishes. When you write a wish on a strip of paper and hang it on the branch, your wish is believed to come true. What a romantic legend it is, isn't it? So, today's Japanese phrase is:



Why not celebrate the lovers' annual encounter by making our own wish upon the two-lover stars? Your wish may come true!



An intimate, pet-friendly beach offers silky soft sand beneath your feet. Surfers and swimmers alike flock to this beach as an alternative to the ever-so-popular, Isshiki Beach in Hayama. Visit the makeshift restaurant shacks offering good food and cold drinks. Many Pay Park lots available or access by bus from Zushi or Shin-Zushi Stations.



Chosen as one of the World's Best 100 Beaches (No. 65) by CNN in 2014, Isshiki Beach sits just beyond Hayama's Imperial Villa. Two crescents of sand separated by a small grassy isthmus invite those who like to windsurf, kayak, and swim. Or, those who just want to relax in the grassy area with their pets. Be sure to visit the well-known bamboo shack, Blue Moon, for its ambiance, great food, drinks and concerts on the weekend. Blue Moon celebrates its 29th anniversary in 2026. Due to Isshiki's proximity to the Imperial Villa, beach guests should kindly arrive and leave as quietly and respectfully as possible.



Due to its strong winds and small waves, this beach is popular for windsurfers and stand-up paddle boarding. Sunbathers and families with small children also enjoy this area due to the nice, flat layout of the sand near the surf. Previously deemed as "Foreigner friendly" and home to the annual MTV Zushi Beach Fest, the city of Zushi has imposed restrictions due to an increase in complaints over the last few years. Signs posted require beachgoers to cover tattoos, no loud music, no barbecues and no alcohol. From the south end, Mt. Fuji is visible on a clear day. Beach huts close by 8 p.m. 15-minute walk from Zushi or Shin-Zushi Sta. Pay Park lot on the North end of the beach.



The largest and most accessible on the peninsula attracts high-speed watercraft, windsurfers and sunbathers along the sandy beach. More than 1km long, there are many dining facilities in the surrounding area. Annual fireworks festival is held in August and showcases 3,000 fireworks! Ample parking (some paid, others free) and just a 3-minute walk from Miurakaigan Station.



Japan Drugstore Guide Insect Repellent

Editor's Note: This information is based on interviews with Japanese drugstore employees and available product data as of May 2026. Always read the product packaging and instructions carefully, and consult with a healthcare professional if you have any concerns or questions regarding treatment.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TABITHA WILDERS,
METROPOLIS MAGAZINE



Summer in Japan calls for insect repellent for mosquitoes. Fortunately, the risk of contracting a mosquito-borne disease in Japan is very low. However, it is still important to protect yourself from mosquito bites if you want to avoid being disrupted from your daily outdoor activities.

In this article, we round up a list of the best insect repellents in Japan to protect yourself from those pesky bloodsuckers.



Helpful vocab

- Insect repellent – 虫よけ(むしよけ)
- Mosquito – 蚊(か)
- Tick – ダニ
- Flea – ノミ
- Bed bug – トコジラミ
- Black fly – ブヨ / ユスリカ
- Mite – ダニ
- Leech – ヒル
- Scent / Fragrance – 香り(かおり)
- Unscented – 無香料(むこうりょう)
- Moisturizing – 保湿(ほしつ)
- Water-resistant – 耐水性(たいすいせい)
- Reapply – 塗り直す(ぬりなおす)
- Shake well – よく振ってから使う(ふってからつかう)
- Apply evenly – 均等に塗る(きんとうにぬる)
- Avoid eyes and mouth – 目や口に入らないように注意
- Safe for children – 子供でも使える(こどもでもつかえる)
- Not for infants – 乳児には使用不可(にゅうじにはしようふか)
- Face application – 顔への使用(かおへのしよう)

Earth Chemical Saratekuto Unscented

アース製薬 サラテクト 無香料



A gentle, powder-in insect repellent spray that feels smooth and non-sticky on the skin. Sweat and water-resistant, it offers all-day protection when applied from morning to evening. With 4 moisturizing ingredients- sodium hyaluronate, collagen, ceramide, and vitamin C- it keeps your skin protected and hydrated.

HOW TO USE: Shake the can well before use. Hold the spray about 10–15 cm away from your skin. Spray evenly onto exposed skin or over clothing. Avoid spraying directly onto the face. Instead, spray onto your hands and gently apply to the face, avoiding the eyes and mouth.

PRICE: Varies by pharmacy; approximately ¥660 for 200ml

WHAT PHARMACISTS SAY: Pharmacists recommend this insect repellent spray for its gentle formula, making it suitable for sensitive skin. It's effective against mosquitoes, ticks, black flies, and bed bugs. Reapply often if you sweat or wipe your skin.

Fumakilla Skin Vape Mist

フマキラー スキンベープミスト



This gentle, water-based mosquito repellent is safe for the whole family and protects against mosquitoes, ticks, fleas, black flies, leeches, mites, bedbugs, and more. It contains moisturizing sodium hyaluronate, blends smoothly into the skin, and has a fresh citrus marine scent. Its compact size makes it easy to carry.

HOW TO USE: Shake the plastic spray bottle container well before use. Hold the spray about 10–15 cm away from your skin and apply evenly to areas like the arms, legs, and neck. For the face, spray onto your hands first, then gently apply, avoiding the eyes and mouth. Reapply after sweating, swimming, or wiping the skin with a towel to maintain effectiveness.

PRICE: Varies by pharmacy; approximately ¥550 for 60ml
WHAT PHARMACISTS SAY: Pharmacists say users love this repellent for its long-lasting effect. It's safe for daily use, but not for infants under 6 months. For ages 6 months to 2 years, use once a day; for ages 2 to 12, up to three times a day. Apply sunscreen first, let it dry, then use the repellent.

Insect repellent character sticker Chiikawa

虫よけキャラシールちいかわ

A special shoutout to the Chiikawa bug repellent stickers. Available in 15 cute designs, these stickers are safe for young children and gentle on the skin. Infused with natural lavender oil, they give off a pleasant scent and provide protection for up to 12 hours. Just stick them on your clothes to keep insects away.

HOW TO USE: Carefully peel one sticker from the sheet and apply it to exposed areas of your clothing, such as sleeves, collars, or pant cuffs. Make sure the sticker does not come into direct contact with your skin.

PRICE: Varies by pharmacy; approximately ¥640 for 45 stickers

WHAT PHARMACISTS SAY: Pharmacists say these stickers are popular with children, helping keep them safe from insects while they enjoy the cute Chiikawa designs. They're safe for all ages and convenient for parents to carry, thanks to their lightweight and portable size.



Earth Chemical Hadamamo Mist

アース製薬 はだまも ミスト

Released this year, this gentle insect repellent mist has a mildly acidic pH similar to human skin and contains moisturizing ingredients like sodium hyaluronate, collagen, ceramide, and vitamin C. It effectively protects against mosquitoes, ticks, fleas, and many other pests.

HOW TO USE: Spray an appropriate amount from about 15 cm away onto exposed skin like the arms and legs, as well as on footwear and clothing. For the face and neck, spray into the palm of your hand first, then apply gently to the skin.

PRICE: Varies by pharmacy; approximately ¥660 for 200ml

WHAT PHARMACISTS SAY: Pharmacists recommend applying this gentle yet effective insect repellent in the morning for all-day protection. It's safe for daily use but not for infants under 6 months. Use once daily for ages 6 months to 2 years, and up to three times daily for ages 2 to 12.



Edible impression

Taste Monet, Van Gogh works with spot of tea in Tokyo

BY KIM BERGSTRÖM,
JAPAN TRAVEL

Art lovers in Japan will soon be able to quite literally “eat with their eyes” thanks to a new limited-time afternoon tea experience inspired by two of Europe’s most beloved painters.

Running from July 1st to September 13th, select venues in Tokyo and Nagoya will host The National Gallery London Afternoon Tea ~ Inspired by Monet & Van Gogh, a colorful collaboration themed around the works of Claude Monet and Vincent van Gogh.

Created in partnership with the world-famous National Gallery in London, the afternoon tea transforms iconic paintings such as Monet’s Water Lilies and Van Gogh’s Sunflowers into elegant sweets, savory dishes, and drinks designed to look as artistic as the masterpieces themselves.

The menu leans heavily into the idea of dining as a visual experience. Tea stands are styled like painters’ palettes, layered with vivid greens, yellows, blues, and floral accents that mirror the colors found in the artists’ work. Monet’s tranquil waterside scenes are represented through grape and white wine jelly, pistachio mousse, and matcha-inspired creations, while Van Gogh’s sun-drenched Southern France comes to life through mango desserts, citrus flavors, and sunflower-inspired parfaits.



Photos courtesy of Best Bridal / PR Times



The event also explores a lesser-known connection between the two painters: both Monet and Van Gogh were fascinated by Japan and dreamed of visiting the country someday. Elements of Japonism appear throughout the menu, including shiso-accented tartlets and Japanese-style pork rilletes coated in matcha breadcrumbs.

Guests can also add themed drinks and desserts, including the vivid “Monet Blue” cocktail-inspired beverage or the bright yellow “Passionate Sunflower” mango drink.

The experience will be available at Aoyama St. Grace Cathedral and Shirokane Geihinkan Art Grace Club in Tokyo, along with Strings Hotel Nagoya. Prices start from around 5,800 JPY per person depending on venue and plan.

Things to know

LOCATION: Aoyama St. Grace Cathedral, Shirokane Geihinkan Art Grace Club, Strings Hotel Nagoya
ADDRESS: 3 Chome-9-14 Kita-Aoyama, Minato City, Tokyo
DATES: Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from July 1 - Sept. 11
HOURS: Noon - 2 p.m. or 2:30 - 4:30 p.m.
COST: From 5,800 yen
DRESS: Smart casual



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Yayoi ruin stamps draw visitors to Tottori

BY HIROSHI TACHIBANA,
THE JAPAN NEWS

Visiting ruins from the prehistoric Yayoi period and collecting goshuin stamps there has recently been seeing a quiet rise in popularity.

The Yayoi period started several hundred years before Christ and continued until around 300 A.D., when rice production began in Japan. Archaeological ruins from the period are found all over the country.

To promote the Yayoi period ruins that they manage, museums and other facilities have begun offering original goshuin stamps, which are usually available at temples and shrines for people to commemorate their visit. It seems that the museums' and other facilities' goshuin stamps resonate with archaeology enthusiasts and others not only due to their unique designs but also because they include catchphrases that capture the characteristics of each individual site.

35 locations

The Tottori prefectural government's "Tottori Yayoi Kingdom" promotion department has arranged a scavenger hunt-like activity, in which participants collect goshuin stamps from Yayoi period ruins throughout Japan. Tottori Prefecture is home to such Yayoi period ruins as the Aoya Kamijichi ruins, where many wooden artifacts and other items have been discovered. The prefecture started the project to help increase the number of visitors to these and other ruins.

The rules of the project require facilities related to Yayoi period ruins to come up with their own catchphrases and for the size of the goshuin stamps not to exceed a length of 15.5 centimeters and a width of 9 centimeters. The project started in October 2022 at 19 ruins and 20 facilities around the country. Currently, 35 ruins and 38 facilities in 16 prefectures are participating.

Among the areas involved in the project, Hyogo Prefecture is first in terms of the number of participating sites it has, with six ruins and seven related facilities. Many sites from the Yayoi period exist in the prefecture, and several of them are known for their unique remains, such as an old village, an iron workshop and burial mounds. The Onaka ruins in Harima, the Tano ruins

in Amagasaki and the Gossa-Kaito ruins in Awaji, all in the prefecture, have been participating in the project since it started.

Catchphrases

The catchphrase for the Onaka ruins refers to the site as a Yayoi housing exhibition. About 140 round, hexagonal and other shaped pit dwellings were discovered there and at adjacent ruins. The Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Archaeology and the Harima town history museum are participating in the project in collaboration with the ruins.

"I hope the activity will provide an opportunity for people to get interested in archaeology," an official of the archaeology museum said.

The catchphrase for the Gossa-Kaito ruins references a Yayoi blacksmith workshop, as iron artifacts were discovered in a pit-type building site at the ruins.

Meanwhile, the Kamo ruins in Kawani-shi, which feature the remains of a settlement surrounded by a moat, have a catchphrase meaning "Yayoi hilltop moated settlement."

For the Shingu Miyauchi ruins in the city of Tatsuno, the catchphrase notes that the site houses one of the biggest Yayoi villages in the Harima region, the southwestern

part of Hyogo Prefecture. The catchphrase for the Une ruins in the city of Aiko incorporates an allusion to the burial mounds of powerful leaders that characterize that site. All three of these latter ruins, also in Hyogo Prefecture, joined the project last year.

Outside the prefecture, the catchphrase for the Yoshinogari ruins in Saga Prefecture, where the appearance of a village in the Yayoi period has been re-created, is "Listen to the Yayoi Voice," while the catchphrase for the Toro ruins in Shizuoka Prefecture can be translated to "It all began at the Toro ruins," noting that the ruins of Japan's first rice paddy were discovered at the site.

The designs of each location's goshuin stamps are unique and distinctive.

The Onaka ruins' goshuin stamp includes the kanji characters of its name and a picture of Hottan, the archaeology museum's mascot. The goshuin stamp of the Ikegami-Sone ruins, offered by the Osaka Prefectural Museum of Yayoi Culture in Izumi, Osaka Prefecture, incorporates an illustration of a dragon believed to have been drawn by a person from the Yayoi period. At the Sugu Okamoto ruins in Kasuga, Fukuoka Prefecture, the site's goshuin stamp carries a picture of a bronze mirror, one of the most representative artifacts discovered at those ruins.

Helping attract visitors

A postpandemic travel boom is partly behind the project's ability to draw interest.

According to the Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Archaeology next to the Onaka ruins, visitors come to collect its goshuin stamp not only on weekends but also weekdays.

"We hope people visit ruins across the country and collect unique Yayoi period goshuin stamps," said Hiroshi Nakamura, an official at the museum.

The goshuin stamp of the Onaka ruins, center, in Harima, Hyogo Prefecture. Photo courtesy of The Japan News



Sample of the goshuin stamps. Photos courtesy of Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Archaeology



The goshuin stamp offered at the Gossa-Kaito ruins in Awaji, Hyogo Prefecture. Photo courtesy of The Japan News



The Gossa-Kaito ruins in Awaji, Hyogo Prefecture. File Photo

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The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

- Torah teacher
- Dick Tracy's love
- Charity
- Honda's luxury line
- Israeli airline
- Kind of drop
- Madam or mom
- Scandinavian capital
- Mud deposit
- Enabling
- Load movers
- "Holy cow!"
- Maine college town
- Remnants
- Tasseled cap
- ___ chic
- Churchill's follower
- Expands upon, with "out"
- Contract signing
- Damascus denizen
- Fodder building
- Bleacher bum's shout
- Tops
- Lengthy lock
- Minaj of music
- Acting Ashton
- Expands (on)
- Bus rider's fee
- Had on
- Ascribed (to)
- Tennyson lady
- Numerical suffix
- Had a home-cooked meal
- Places for experiments
- Miscalculates
- Ibsen's "___ Gabler"

DOWN

- Earth-moving machine
- London native, e.g.
- Actor McKellen
- Home-wrecking insects
- Running mates?
- Indian turnover
- Whole bunch
- Romantic ones
- Corrective eye surgery
- Pooh's creator
- Drudges
- Dover's state: Abbr.
- Upper canine
- Lady-killer
- Slays, in slang
- Lean (on)
- Summon
- Artist Magritte
- Emancipated
- Hazzard deputy
- Inflatable things
- Patients' resting places

39 Water storage tanks

41 Talk like Porky

44 Figure eight figure

46 Prove to be false

47 Banister post

48 Massey of old movies

49 Native Trinidadian

51 CBS forensic series

53 Set price

55 Tara of the "Sharknado" films

56 Fashion designer in "The Incredibles"

59 Dickensian cry

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Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

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DID YOU KNOW?

During one of the most romantic and traditional festivals, Tanabata, aka Star Festival, is celebrated every July 7. As part of the celebration, fancy slips of colored paper called tanzaku are tied to bamboo branches. Wishes are then written on the paper. Some of the wishes include things like "improved handwriting skills, drawing or singing".

Kanji of the week

牛

Ushi/gyu [cow/beef]

Language Lesson

Large/big – short/small

Ookii - Chiisai

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Medium

Edited by Margie E. Burke

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.

Answer to Previous Sudoku:

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

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

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Exemptions:

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