

thejapantimes

G20 host cities special

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NISEKO MT. RESORT GRAND HIRAFU



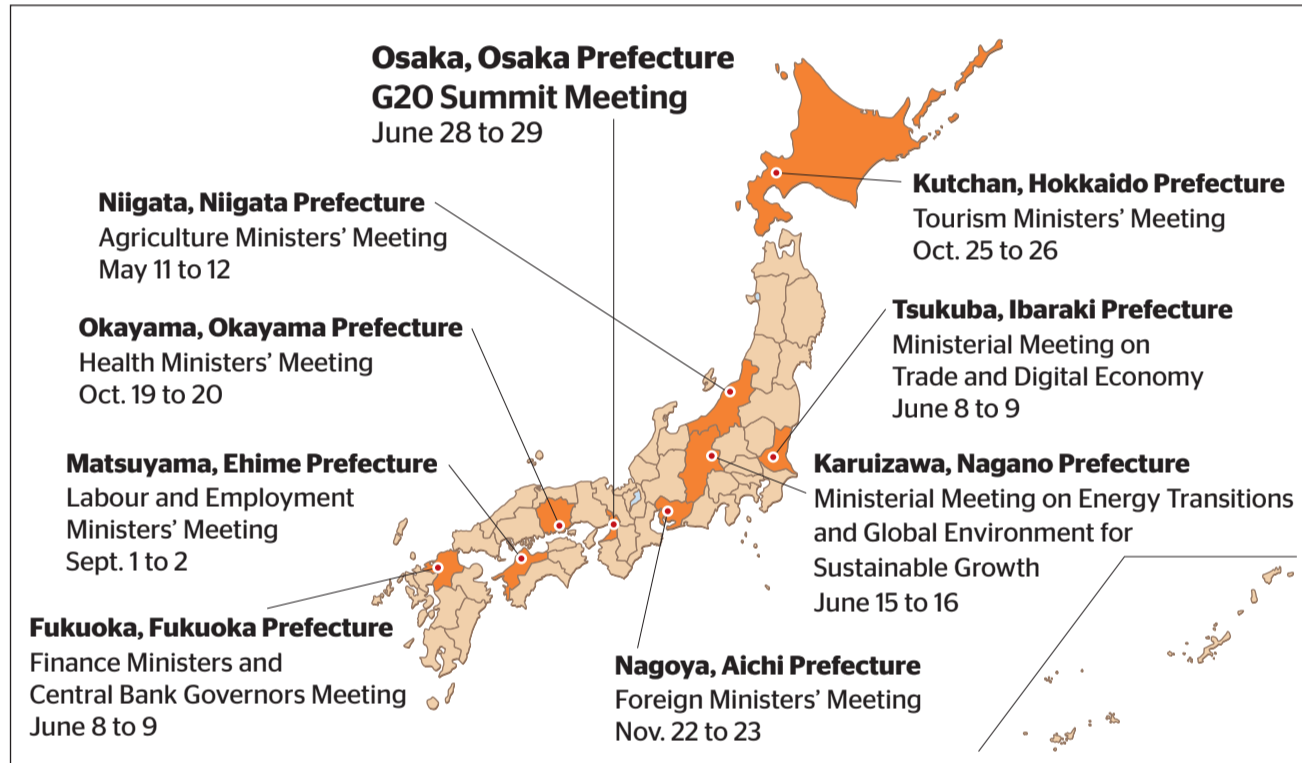
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KARUZAWA TOURIST ASSOCIATION



AICHI PREFECTURE



- 1 Bandai Bridge on the Shinano River.
- 2 Okayama Castle overlooking Korakuen Garden.
- 3 Dogo Onsen Honkan (hot spring).
- 4 Seaside Momochi featuring famed Fukuoka Tower.
- 5 Osaka Castle.
- 6 Mount Yotei.
- 7 Tsukuba, with Mount Tsukuba in the distance.
- 8 Karuzawa Shaw Memorial Church.
- 9 Oasis 21 (bus terminal and commercial facilities) and Nagoya TV Tower.

Timeless hospitality welcomes international guests

Japan is gearing up to host its first-ever G20 Summit on June 28 and 29, as well as eight other ministerial meetings across several months.

While the main event in Osaka represents a broader undertaking, the other meetings are designed to gather experts of specific areas of expertise.

The first meeting will take place in Niigata and other ministerial events will run until November; the schedule is as follows:

- Agriculture Ministers' Meeting on May 11 and 12 in Niigata, Niigata Prefecture
- Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors Meeting on June 8 and 9 in Fukuoka, Fukuoka Prefecture
- Ministerial Meeting on Trade and Digital Economy on June 8 and 9 in Tsukuba, Ibaraki Prefecture
- Ministerial Meeting on Energy Transitions and Global Environment for Sustainable Growth on June 15 and 16 in Karuzawa, Nagano Prefecture
- Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting on Sept. 1 and 2 in Matsuyama, Ehime Prefecture
- Health Ministers' Meeting on Oct. 19 and 20 in Okayama, Okayama Prefecture
- Tourism Ministers' Meeting on Oct. 25 and 26 in Kutchan, Hokkaido Prefecture
- Foreign Ministers' Meeting on Nov. 22 and 23 in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture

Overall, the G20 Summit meeting brings together the heads of member and guest nations as well as representatives of invited global organizations. Traditionally, the

forum concentrates on global economic matters and collaboration, but has also tackled issues in the realm of climate change, among other critical topics.

The current roster of summit members comprises Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the U.K., the U.S. and the European Union — all G7 members — as well as Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, India,

Indonesia, Mexico, South Korea, South Africa, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

This mix of developed and developing nations accounts for around 80 percent of the world's gross domestic product.

Individual guest nations invited to this year's summit are the Netherlands, Spain, Singapore and Vietnam; other leaders who are welcome represent the Association of

Southeast Asian Nations (Thailand), African Union (Egypt), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Chile), the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Senegal) and the United Nations.

Additional entities on the guest list are the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organization, International Labor Organization, Financial Sta-

bility Board, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Asian Development Bank and World Health Organization.

The G20 Summit Meeting was created to remedy the global financial crisis set off when the Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy in 2008, prevent future crises and encourage balanced global growth and new perspectives in governance. With the exception of 2009 and 2010 when two annual meetings were held during both years, this influential gathering typically occurs once a year.

The first summit between world leaders was held in Washington, D.C. in 2008, but the G20 itself was formed prior in the 1990s in response to major economic crises of the time. The domino effect of these disasters showed international leaders the importance of including developing countries in discussions on the international financial system.

G7 finance ministers held the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors meeting in 1999. Later, it was decided that the summit-level discussions involving the same members were necessary, leading to the G20 Summit Meeting as it is known today.

Japan has overseen similar events in the past, but the upcoming gathering of world leaders and experts is among the largest summit meetings the country has ever hosted. It also marks the beginning of a series of international events Japan will host over the next several years — the Rugby World Cup, 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, and the 2025 World Expo in Osaka.

This new chapter in the country's sweeping history sets the stage for visitors to discover the distinct culture and traditions present everywhere from modern cities to historical towns. Each municipality encapsulates a unique side of Japan, be it a manifestation of exquisitely preserved nature, outstanding cuisine or hidden wonders off the beaten path.

Some of these regional charms are the result of local communities cultivating their own diverse traditions, and regardless of whether travelers arrive this year or in the decades to come, the country's hospitality is one enduring trait that will continue to welcome them wherever they choose to roam.

"G20 host cities special" pages are sponsored by the government of Japan.

Prime Minister's message

Japan has finally assumed the G20 presidency for the very first time. Japan will host the G20 Osaka Summit on June 28 and 29. In addition to the G20 member countries, we will also welcome leaders of invited guest countries and head of invited guest international organizations.

Osaka will be the venue for hosting the G20, the "premier forum for international economic cooperation," which gathers and brings together many developed countries and emerging countries with growing presence in the international economy. Osaka has historically prospered as a commercial hub and its unique tradition and culture, including food culture, has recently gained much reputation at home and abroad. Moreover, Osaka has thrived as a merchant city and has constantly sought to take in new ideas. It is a place where the spirit and willingness to take on new chal-

lenges has been nurtured, and was also chosen to host the Osaka-Kansai Expo in 2025.

At the Osaka Summit, Japan is determined to lead global economic growth by promoting free trade and innovation, achieving both economic growth and reduction of disparities, and contributing to the development agenda and other global issues with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at its core. Through these efforts, Japan seeks to realize and promote a free and open, inclusive and sustainable, "human-centered future society."

In addition, we will lead discussions on the supply of global commons for realizing global growth such as quality infrastructure and global health. As the presidency, we will exert strong leadership in discussions aimed toward resolving global issues such as climate change

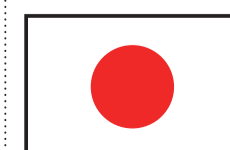
and ocean plastic waste.

Furthermore, we will discuss how to address the digital economy from an institutional perspective and issues that arise from an aging society. We will introduce Japan's efforts, including the productivity revolution amid a "Society 5.0" era, toward achieving a society where all individuals are actively engaged.

We will take this as an opportunity to exhibit Japan's *omotenashi* spirit (hospitality) and introduce the unique aspects and attractiveness of Japan and the host cities to the world.

With great support from you all, I am determined to lead the Osaka Summit toward great success.

The text is an edited excerpt of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's message on the government's G20 website (<https://www.g20.org/en/>).



JAPAN GOV
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G20 host cities special

Osaka, Osaka Prefecture

A vibrant landscape of cultural dynamism

With a history of about 1,400 years and long flourishing as a commercial center, Osaka is never boring, with its mix of traditional and contemporary attractions.

Among them are Osaka Castle, Tsutenkaku Tower and the 300-meter-tall Abeno Harukas, the country's tallest building. These and other landmarks frame the unique food culture of the vibrant metropolis that is also known for its hospitality and friendly locals.

The venue of the June 28 and 29 G20 Summit Meeting is also known as an aqua metropolis. The city's waterways are among its more prominent features, including the Yodo River that flows from Lake Biwa into Osaka Bay. They have historically bolstered the city's prosperity and development into a commercial hub.

There are various types of cruises available day and night, including an amphibious bus enabling passengers to see the castle and the Japan Mint, a boat connecting the bustling Dotonbori area and Nakanoshima, as well as chartered cruises.

On Nakanoshima, a 3-kilometer-long island sandwiched between the Dojima and Tosaborigawa rivers, visitors can find two unique examples of the city's architecture. Built in 1918, the neo-Renaissance Osaka City Central Public Hall is a designated Important Cultural Property. The National Museum of Art, Osaka, located further along the island, has an exterior inspired by "the life force

of bamboo." It is also one of the few museums in the world that is located completely underground, according to the museum.



Osaka resident
Ibai Vinas Amezttoy

There is much to explore in the downtown areas of Osaka, which are split into the Kita (north) and Minami (south) areas, among other districts.

Kita is home to Osaka Station and Japan's longest shopping street—the whooping 2.6-kilometer-long Tenjinbashiuji Shotengai featuring about 600 shops and restaurants.

Additionally, the 173-meter-tall Umeda Sky Building, consisting of two towers connected at the top, features the Kuchu Teien (aerial garden) Observatory.

Minami is home to popular shopping and nightlife districts, and is increasingly becoming a hot spot for younger tourists. Dotonbori, alongside the river of the same name, is one of the city's most renowned photo spots with an array of glittering neon signs.

For food lovers, Osaka is a paradise as it is one of the foremost food meccas in Japan. *Konamon* (flour-based foods) such as



Shinsekai district, with Tsutenkaku Tower in the distance. ©OSAKA CONVENTION & TOURISM BUREAU

okonomiyaki (Japanese savory pancakes), *takoyaki* (octopus dumplings) and *ikayaki* (chopped squid and batter mix cooked on a griddle) should be tried at least once in the city, as well as *kushikatsu* (deep-fried skewered meat and vegetables) and *techiri* (blowfish hot pot). Osaka-style sushi is also recommended such as *hakozushi* (pressed, boxed sushi).

Dotonbori is the district to casually enjoy some of these local delicacies. The bustling Kuromon Ichiba market is another place for foodies to explore. The market is known as "Osaka's kitchen," where there are around

180 wholesalers and retailers.

Performing arts and entertainment are indispensable elements of Osaka. Designated by UNESCO as a World Intangible Cultural Heritage, *bunraku* was established in the city during the 17th century. These puppet dramas are performed at the National Bunraku Theatre. *Noh*, another classical form of Japanese musical drama, can be seen at Otsuki Noh Theatre and Yamamoto Noh Theater.

To appreciate Japanese comic storytelling known as *rakugo*, guests should visit Temma Tenjin Hanjo Tei. It is a permanent theater



A night view of Nakanoshima. AQUA METROPOLIS OSAKA

for this type of entertainment. Additionally, Namba Grand Kagetsu is a theater featuring *manzai* (Japanese stand-up comedy), among other performances.

For families, especially those with children, Universal Studios Japan and Osaka Aquarium Kaiyukan are two popular destinations.

History buffs might want to visit the Mozu-Furuichi Kofun, Ancient Tumulus Clusters. The site, nominated for inscription on UNESCO's World Heritage list, was constructed between the late 4th and 6th centuries, and has many tombs in the unique

shape of keyholes.

Osaka resident Ibai Vinas Amezttoy from Spain said his favorite place is a retro downtown area known as Shinsekai.

"I love its colors and atmosphere. It is for me, the place which best symbolizes what Osaka is and how Osakans are," he said. Amezttoy, who is working in the video game industry, also highlighted his experience living and working in the city. "The best sales point is definitely its people," he said. "Not only are they warm and welcoming, but even in the business sphere, Osakans are really supportive of foreigners like me."

Niigata, Niigata Prefecture

Premium produce, delicious dishes

Niigata, which will host the Agriculture Ministers' Meeting on May 11 and 12, is known for many things, but premier Koshihikari rice is likely the prefecture's most notable product.

The brand is long loved and known as one of the tastiest varieties in Japan, cultivated in nutrient-rich water that runs down from the snowy mountains to the rice paddies. A wide margin in temperature between sowing and harvest is also an important factor contributing to Koshihikari's taste.

Excellent water and rice also make Niigata one of the country's largest sake producers. The climate is optimal for brewing sake; the local sake's crisp dryness is partly thanks to the cold winter temperatures and long-term fermentation process. The city's 15 master brewers have long been polishing their craft and passing their techniques on to future generations.

Visitors to Niigata can enjoy many varieties of authentic *washoku* (Japanese food)

dishes that have been developed in the city's rich cuisine culture. Facing the Sea of Japan, Niigata is blessed with plentiful marine products and can offer excellent sushi, *wappa* rice (rice with seafood and other delicacies on top and boxed in a round wooden container) and other dishes. Tourists can enjoy a wide variety of seasonal *washoku* made using the prefecture's high-quality meat and vegetables.

Of the many Niigata delicacies, Phung Thi Hau, a Niigata resident from Vietnam, who has a sweet tooth, said *sasadango*, a traditional confection with *anko* adzuki bean paste with *mochi* (pounded rice cake) mixed



The Northern Culture Museum was a private residence of Niigata's Ito family during the Meiji Era.



Wappa rice, served in a round wooden container, is one of Niigata's notable dishes.

with *yomogi* (mugwort) leaves and wrapped in bamboo leaves, is her favorite food.

"I love *sasadango*. I'm so impressed by its beautiful green color and the nice aroma of *yomogi*, which is also grown in Vietnam," explained Phung, who is a graduate student in Niigata.

"In addition, I love Le Lectier pears, which are totally different from normal pears because they are soft and tastes very good. We have no fruit like this in Vietnam," she added.

While food is one of the attractions of Niigata, the hospitality shown to foreigners, based on its *minatamachi* (port town) culture, makes tourists feel welcome.

In 1869, Niigata became one of the first five ports in Japan to open to foreign trade. Jan. 1 of this year marked the 150th anniversary of the port's opening.

Thanks to this lengthy contact with foreigners, the city is still abundant with traditional forms of hospitality for visitors such as *ryotei* restaurants serving luxurious Japanese food, and *geisha*.

Phung, who has lived in Niigata for about two years, recommends the Furumachi shopping street as a place for visitors to experience great food, hospitality and deep-rooted history.

"I like the Furumachi shopping street because of the beauty of mixing both traditional culture and modern culture there. I used to visit Nabedyaya (a *ryotei* restaurant) where I could eat traditional cuisine and hear the wonderful music played by *geisha*," she noted.

Furumachi is also well-known as a downtown, urban area with many city facilities, banks, malls, restaurants, temples, hotels and other things, she added. "Even if you are only in Niigata for a short period, you can enjoy almost all of the best things here," she said.

While hospitality is one thing Niigata developed over time, agricultural advancement is another area that has evolved in Niigata as residents learned to work with nature. In the past, rice fields were too muddy to work in and people in Niigata spent a long time installing equipment to drain water from the fields to address the situation. Today, the people of Niigata are proud of the technology they have developed to improve agricultural conditions.

Niigata also went through deregulation, something made possible after being designated a national strategic special zone, to allow farmers to open restaurants, even on land formerly allotted for agriculture, to serve local delicacies made with fresh ingredients. These restaurants have proven popular with not only local residents, but also tourists. The deregulation also made it easy for farmers to partner with companies with innovative information and communication technology to run energy-saving and cost-cutting tests, making Niigata a venue for cutting-edge, smart agriculture. The city also provides support for farmers to broaden their business scope to include food processing and wholesaling.

As a historical and cultural symbol, the Northern Culture Museum, which used to be a private residence of Niigata's wealthy, land-owning Ito family during the Meiji Era (1868–1912), is a standout destination. In 1946, the family turned the home into a museum, displaying traditional furniture and architecture, Chinese and Korean ceramics, as well as old Japanese artworks the family owned.

Fukuoka, Fukuoka Prefecture

Japan's lively 'gateway to Asia'

Fukuoka, the biggest city in Kyushu and considered a gateway to Asia with its historical and geographical background, is a lively metropolis that has both urban and countryside charm with its fantastic shopping, eateries and abundant nature to explore.

The city will be the host of the Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors Meeting on June 8 and 9.

Of the many tourist spots in the city, one thing that travelers don't want to miss is visiting the famous *yatai* (food stalls) that sit along Fukuoka's streets in the evening. These are a staple of the city's food scene with around 100 wooden carts operating in Fukuoka today.

"Eating and drinking in a *yatai* is the quintessential Fukuoka dining experience. Some carts offer specialized dishes, like *yakitori* (grilled chicken skewers), tempura and blowfish; recently, a Frenchman opened a *yatai* serving French cuisine," said Nick Szasz, publisher of Fukuoka Now magazine, who has been a resident since 1990. "Yatai are more about the camaraderie. The space inside is so tight, conversation between patrons is inevitable. It's a great way to meet locals or other travelers."

Known as one of Japan's best food cities, Fukuoka also has a wealth of famous dishes sure to entice gourmets. *Tonkotsu* (pork bone broth) ramen, for example, originated in Fukuoka; the original shops of famous ramen chains operate in the city. *Motsunabe*, hot pot made with cow or pig offal, and *mizutaki* — hot pot consisting of chicken soup, vegetables and tofu — are also Fukuoka specialties.

Szasz, from Canada, also recommends *saba* (mackerel), which can be served grilled, marinated or even as sashimi. "Mackerel is one of the most popular fish enjoyed by locals... served everywhere, especially at *izakaya* (Japanese pubs)," he said. "Saba *mirin* (grilled mackerel marinated with sweet rice wine) is highly recommended as is *goma saba*, raw mackerel dressed with sesame and soy sauce. Saba sandwiches are a modern twist." Szasz also mentioned that *mentaiko* (spicy cod roe) is among Fukuoka's most iconic foods.

Fukuoka is also a perfect shopping destination as most brand-name stores can be found in the city. Apart from the well-known Tenjin downtown area where fashionable brand-name shops and department stores line the streets, the Seaside Momochi area in the western part of the city is also a popular destination for shopping as well as relaxation. The modern waterfront with an artificial beach is home to Fukuoka Tower that, at 234 meters, is Japan's tallest beach tower with a panoramic view of the city from its 3rd-floor observatory.



The Hakata Sennen-no Mon gate at the entrance of the Hakata Old Town area. CITY OF FUKUOKA



Open-air food stalls are a staple of Fukuoka's culinary scene. CITY OF FUKUOKA

Aside from delicious local cuisine and fantastic shops, the vibrant city has many picturesque historical places to explore on foot. Among them is the Hakata Old Town area, which flourished as the biggest port town from the end of the 11th through late 16th centuries. Located within easy walking distance of JR Hakata Station, the impressive four-pillared Hakata Sennen-no Mon gate welcomes visitors to the area and its many Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. The gate, part of which was made from a 1000-year-old camphor tree donated by Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine, was completed in 2014 as a wish for the city's continual prosperity.

Historical cultural assets in the area include Jotenji Temple, built in 1242, that is said to be the birthplace of *udon* (thick wheat noodles) and soba noodles and Tochoji Temple that is home to Japan's largest wooden statue of a seated Buddha. For those curious about Zen, Szasz recommends visiting Shofukuji Temple that can also be found in the area. "The temple is said to be the first Zen tem-

ple in Japan and where green tea culture was first introduced. The buildings are closed to the public, but a stroll through the front garden area is well worth the time, especially for those interested in Zen," Szasz said.

For nature enthusiasts, the city's small islands are great place to immerse oneself in abundant greenery. On Nokonoshima Island and Shikanoshima Island, visitors can take part in leisure activities that include cycling, swimming and hiking.

Above all, Szasz said one of the best things about Fukuoka is that "It's not over-run with tourists."

"It's a more 'normal' Japanese city compared to Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, et cetera. (It) offers better insight into typical urban Japanese life. Morning commuters aren't stuffed onto trains here. Residents enjoy a more balanced lifestyle here," Szasz said. "They spend less time commuting and have more leisure time with more options to enjoy that time."

He added that, "Basically, Fukuoka offers arguably Japan's highest quality of life balance. Even tourists can sense that."

G20 host cities special

Tsukuba, Ibaraki Prefecture

Iconic mountain atop scientific attractions

The city of Tsukuba in Ibaraki Prefecture offers a unique combination of experiences for inbound travelers, capitalizing on its lush nature highlighted by famed Mount Tsukuba and an array of science facilities.

Accessible via a roughly 45-minute train ride from central Tokyo, the city will be the host of the Ministerial Meeting on Trade and Digital Economy on June 8 and 9.

One of the "100 Mountains of Japan," 877-meter Mount Tsukuba in the northern area of the city is referenced in the saying, "Mount Fuji in the west, Mount Tsukuba in the east," as it is sometimes regarded as an equivalent to the country's tallest mountain.

Tsukuba resident Ludovic de Pinho from France said he agrees with both distinctions, adding that the scenery from its twin peaks is among the charms of the popular hiking destination.

"Mount Tsukuba and its surroundings offer many different trails for all levels," the office worker noted. "As it is located in the

middle of the Kanto Plain, the view from each of the two distinctive peaks is simply stunning, with a panoramic view spanning from the mountains of Nikko to the Tokyo skyline, and even Mount Fuji if you're lucky."

De Pinho, who

has lived in the

city for about

six months, also

praises the night-

scape from the

mountain. Indeed,

the Japan Night-

view Heritage

Office designated it as a Japan Night-view

Heritage last year.

Located on the southern mountainside

at about 270 meters is the front shrine of

Mount Tsukuba Shrine, with the object

of worship being the mountain. People



Tsukuba resident Ludovic de Pinho



An icon of Ibaraki Prefecture, Mount Tsukuba is covered with greenery in spring.



The Space Dome at the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency's Tsukuba Space Center. ©JAXA

can enjoy spiritual moments at the shrine, which is believed to date back around 3,000 years.

Seasonal flowers, including dogtooth violets, azaleas and hydrangeas, are other notable elements that tourists cannot miss at the mountain.

In early spring, the renowned Mount Tsukuba Ume (plum) Festival takes place. This year's festival runs through March 21, and visitors will be able to view red and white plum blossoms on about 1,000 trees planted in the 4.5-hectare plum garden there. On weekends in March during the festival, limited bento lunch boxes are available on top of locally produced *umeshu* (plum wine).

Additionally, Tsukuba and other municipalities in central and southern Ibaraki Prefecture — collectively known as the Mount Tsukuba Region — have unique geographical, biological and ecological features, represented by massifs and Lake Kasumigaura (the second-largest lake in Japan).

The region is now home to the Mount Tsukuba Area Geopark, recognized in September 2016 by the Japan Geopark Committee. Local municipalities and various organizations have committed to the preservation and use of its geological heritage and worked toward the sustainable development of the region.

Besides nature, visitors to Tsukuba can get hands-on experiences in scientific and technological fields through a wide range of exhibitions and tours as the 1985 International Exposition host boasts relevant institutions and museums that are open to the public.

With a life-size H-II rocket model as its landmark, Tsukuba Expo Center in the city's downtown area is a science facility where children and adults can get in touch with both the latest and familiar technology. It also houses a popular planetarium.

For those who want to learn more about the latest in space development, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency's (JAXA) Tsukuba Space Center is a must. The facility serving Japan's space projects features the exhibition hall Space Dome, enabling visitors to see real rocket engines and a full-scale model of Kibo, the Japanese experiment module for the International Space Station, among a variety of other exhibits.

Earth science displays are showcased at the Geological Museum, featuring over 150,000 registered specimens, including rocks, minerals and fossils, while the Tsukuba Botanical Garden is home to about 3,000 examples of domestic and exotic plants.

To get around the facilities in the city, the Tsukuba Science Tour Bus is recommended. It operates on weekends and national holidays, departing from the bus terminal near Tsukuba Station.

In terms of gastronomy, Tsukuba's rich environment has produced high-quality agricultural products, including famed Hojo-mai rice, blueberries and Fukure Mikan brand oranges.

Last but not least, one of the possibly lesser-known facts of Tsukuba is that it is a hub for ramen, boasting about 90 ramen shops. Furthermore, the city has recently attracted attention for being "the city of bread."

"We have a lot of bakeries, including French and German ones. There's almost one on every corner and they offer many kinds of bread and pastries," de Pinho said.

Karuizawa, Nagano Prefecture

Resort town links East with West

Karuizawa, just an hour away by shinkansen from central Tokyo, is a longtime vacation destination for international residents living in the metropolitan area, whether it's to get away from the city's summer heat or experience its beautiful nature in milder seasons.

The Nagano Prefecture town will be the host of the Ministerial Meeting on Energy Transitions and Global Environment for Sustainable Growth on June 15 and 16.

The origins of Karuizawa's enduring fame as a summer getaway can be traced all the way back to the 19th century after missionary Alexander Croft Shaw of the Anglican Church of Canada visited the town in 1886.

Through word of mouth, Shaw shared the nature and comfortable climate's allure with others, including missionaries and their families. As more learned of the area, they began visiting and relocating, leading to the construction of numerous Western-style buildings and churches as they integrated themselves with the local community. Today, the town continues to serve as a space for friendly exchanges between foreign residents and Japanese from all walks of life.

In tandem with its amiable history, the area's breathtaking nature continues to draw visitors from across Japan — and beyond — to the town, just as it did with Shaw some centuries ago.

"Being from a very flat land makes me admire and appreciate the intense beauty of the mountains. My favorite spot in Karuizawa is, therefore, Mount Asama and its surroundings," said Ann van den Borne, a Dutch physical and outdoor education teacher at UWC ISAK Japan in the town. "I love that you can see the magical volcano from almost anywhere in Karuizawa."

Each season reveals a new side of Karuizawa's enchanting atmosphere. In addition to the charming Mount Asama in the distance, the town is framed by deep green woods blanketed by moss; from the forest's snowcapped serenity in winter, to its vibrant greenery in spring and beyond, residents and visitors are privy to a rare harmony between man-made luxury and the beauty of the wilderness.

Preserving this beauty is also a major focal point for Karuizawa; the picturesque buildings work to complement the scenery and the town enforces regulations to prevent new buildings from disrupting this balance.

Local shops and restaurants make up part of the charm, but Karuizawa also boasts an abundance of unique architecture that ranges from modern to postmodern buildings that include hotels, churches, the A.C. Shaw Memorial House and other structures designed by famous architects.

Those with an eye for the arts may find themselves drawn to the town's many galleries and museums. The plethora of exhibits honors both international and local artists, artisans and authors from past and present day.

For example, the Nakasendo Museum displays ukiyo-e related to the Nakasendo, a route that connected Tokyo and Kyoto during the Edo Period (1603-1868). Gardens, parks, temples, shrines and *onsen* (hot springs) are other classic locales for outdoorsy adventurers looking to relax and delve into the traditional side of Japanese culture.

"I also love visiting *onsen* in Nagano Prefecture. We picked up the book, '100 Onsen of Nagano,' and we have been visiting them one at a time," van den Borne said.

In addition to its reputation as a fantastic summer retreat, the town is known as a sports town throughout the year. To van den Borne, Karuizawa's biggest draw is "the amazing nature and outdoor possibilities."

"There are wonderful hiking spots and waterfalls, and in the winter there is skiing and many other winter sports," she said. "The air here is crisp and fresh, and the stars



Kumoba Pond is known for its scenery across all four seasons. KARUIZAWA TOURIST ASSOCIATION



Shiraito Falls is only 3 meters tall, but spans a 70-meter arch. KARUIZAWA TOURIST ASSOCIATION

are bright and plentiful." While cycling, horseback riding, tennis and golf dominate during the summer, the town has gained popularity as a mecca for winter sports — especially following the Nagano Olympic Games in 1998. In addition to skiing, ice skating, snowboarding and curling are popular pastimes during colder months.

Gourmet culture is another attractive aspect of Karuizawa. Soba — a well-known facet of Japanese cuisine among international tourists — is one of the town's main delicacies. Thanks to clear, pristine water, as well as varied day and nighttime temperatures, the area produces top-quality buckwheat that stands out from the rest of the country.

Foodies will also be pleased to discover a wealth of locally grown ingredients. Not only is the landscape beautiful, its harvests yield an enticing array of culinary staples and indulgences.

"I was thrilled when I found out that Karuizawa has a lot of regional products like jam, honey, beer and other fresh produce," said van den Borne.

Matsuyama, Ehime Prefecture

Onsen and castle grounds steeped in history

Matsuyama, which will host the Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting on Sept. 1 and 2, is the biggest city on the island of Shikoku. The capital of Ehime Prefecture is known for the famous Dogo Onsen, which is regarded as Japan's oldest hot spring with a history dating back around 3,000 years, drawing about six millions of travelers each year.

The picturesque, wooden three-story Dogo Onsen Honkan (main building) was built in 1894 and became the first public bathhouse in Japan to be designated as an Important Cultural Property in 1994. Celebrated writer Natsume Soseki frequented the bathhouse after he was assigned a teaching post at a local junior high school; in honor of the writer, it has preserved a third-floor room where the great literary figure used to relax after baths that is open to the public.

Today, the main building has two bathing areas where visitors can soak in natural simple alkaline hot spring water known for its skin benefits. The hot spring water used in the bathhouse comes directly from the spring, with no heating or additional water used in order to preserve its quality. At present, the building is being renovated, but visitors can still enjoy bathing in the Kami-no-Yu bath on the first floor.

Travelers can also try out Asuka-no-Yu, a newer public bathhouse annex that

opened in December 2017 and has three types of baths, including an outdoor one.

The annex has different types of rooms for visitors to relax after bathing, including private rooms on the second floor where they can lounge in *yukata* (lightweight, casual kimono) while unwinding with some green tea and *wagashi* (traditional Japanese confections).

Matsuyama is also known as a castle town, with the famous Matsuyama Castle nestled in the heart of the city. Standing on top of the 132-meter Mount Katsuyama is the castle, which was built in the early 1600s. Visitors can ascend the hill on foot or take a chairlift or cable car to more easily admire the view from above.

The hilltop offers a superb panoramic view of the entire city and the tranquil Seto Inland Sea stretching toward the west. The premise is also a popular spot for viewing cherry blossoms, with around 200 cherry trees typically reaching full bloom in late March or April.

The impressive feudal castle was originally



Beni Madonna is one of the citrus varieties from Matsuyama. CITY OF MATSUYAMA

built between 1603 and 1627, and boasts 21 structures designated as Important Cultural Properties. The original donjon burned down in a fire triggered by lightning in 1784. However, after many decades of renovation, the version of the castle tower seen today was completed in 1854.

Blessed with a mild climate throughout the year and little rain, the city is also perfect for outdoor activities and cultural exploration, such as cycling the beautiful coast line along the Seto Inland Sea and visiting museums.

Anjenette Lacson, a Matsuyama resident from the Philippines, shared that Mitsu-hama is her favorite place to visit in the city.

"It is a quiet, old port area and is the main port of Matsuyama. I like this place because my heart has a soft spot for quiet, old places. Cycling along its narrow, sleepy streets reminds me of my nonchalant, laid-back town back home," said Lacson, an assistant language teacher who came to Matsuyama in August last year. "I like how the historical buildings were preserved and how they were lovingly refashioned



Matsuyama Castle is located in the heart of the city on top of Mount Katsuyama. CITY OF MATSUYAMA

into restaurants and shops. For me, there's something so tender about how this place merges nostalgia and the pride of survival."

She noted that one of the positive aspects of traveling around Matsuyama is that everything is geographically close. "A few minutes away from the station, you can take a brief uphill walk to a mini bamboo forest, like the one in Kyoto. At the end of the trail, you can get a view of the Seto Inland Sea," Lacson observed.

Matsuyama is also a gourmet oasis known for its delicious fruits, especially the sweet

and juicy citrus varieties such as Setoka and Beni Madonna. Visitors must also try the fresh fish caught in the Seto Inland Sea. Of the many seafood dishes available, *taimeshi* (red sea bream with steamed rice) is one of the popular local delicacies.

Lacson also recommended *mitsuhamayaki*, a pancake-esque dish similar to *okonomiyaki*, which she described as the soul food of the port area.

"I like it better because of its distinct, delicious taste that distinguishes it from your standard *okonomiyaki*," she said.

G20 host cities special

Okayama, Okayama Prefecture

Fruit meets fiction in classic tale's birthplace

Okayama Prefecture in the Chugoku region is a transport hub of western Japan that enjoys a yearlong mild climate thanks to its location on the Seto Inland Sea.

The city of Okayama, the venue of the Health Ministers' Meeting on Oct. 19 and 20, is about a 70-minute flight from Tokyo and about 45 minutes from Osaka via shinkansen.

"Okayama is neither a big city nor a small town. It's not a top tourist destination like Osaka, Tokyo or Kyoto, but there's a lot of rich history and culture here," said Alexandra Sebastiano, an assistant language teacher at Okayama city schools who has lived in the city for a year.

Originally from the U.S., Sebastiano says she finds Okayama a comfortable place, as there aren't "massive crowds like in other metropolitan areas."

In terms of attractions, Okayama Castle is an iconic landmark. It was built by Ukita Hideie, lord of the Okayama area, in 1597. Many merchants and craftsmen were attracted to the castle thanks to its secure location protected by the redirected Asahi River; this paved the way for the development of present-day Okayama.

Under new owners, the castle continued to grow with buildings expanding in each era, making it one of Japan's greatest castles. The outer walls of Okayama Castle's keep are made of boards coated with a black lacquer

as a preservative. The black color is why the castle was nicknamed Ujo (Crow Castle).

Although the tower was designated a national treasure before World War II, the keep was destroyed during the war and rebuilt in 1966. The only original buildings still standing today are the Tsukimi Yagura and the Nishinomaru Nishite Yagura towers.



Okayama resident Alexandra Sebastiano

Okayama is especially known for peaches and grapes. With nearly 3,000 years of grape cultivation, grape producers and researchers consider Okayama as a world-class grape producing area. Many people visit Okayama to learn fruit cultivation techniques. Recently, new pioneer grapes are known to be seedless, but it was in Okayama where seedless techniques were first developed.

The city is known for its fruit parfaits (ice cream, often served in a tall, narrow glass, topped with a generous amount of sliced or whole fruit) and visitors can enjoy delicious parfaits made with fresh, local fruit on the Okayama Castle grounds as well as other locations.



Okayama is known for delicious fruits, especially peaches and grapes.

Sebastiano added that Okayama is also known among Japanese people for *kibidango* (small, sweet *mochi* rice cakes), which make for excellent gifts.

Kibidango appear in the tale of Momotaro, one of Japan's most famous classic tales from Okayama. The well-known story tells of an elderly couple raising a boy born from a large peach the wife brought home after plucking it from a river. Momotaro, which translates to "peach boy," later befriends three animals and shares *kibidango* with them before venturing off to fight demons plaguing the land.

Many shrines and other locations around Kibitsu Shrine are named after Kibitsuuhiko-no-Mikoto, the legendary prince who rid the area of the demon Ura. This figure is considered the model for Momotaro.

Additionally, the city is home to Kibitsu Shrine, which is believed to have been the prince's mansion at one point. These two shrines are popular destinations for locals as well as tourists.

Behind this rich historical and cultural background, "Okayama, the Birthplace of the Legend of Momotaro — Ancient Kibi Heritage Conveying Tales of Demon Slaying" was



Kibitsu Shrine's roughly 400-meter-long corridor is one of the most famous tourist spots in the city.

recognized in May last year as a Japan Heritage site by the Agency for Cultural Affairs.

Okayama Korakuen Garden is also highly recommended, and is considered one of the Three Great Gardens of Japan along with Kenrokuen in Kanazawa, Ishikawa Prefecture, and Kairakuen in Mito, Ibaraki Prefecture. The garden was completed about 300 years ago after 14 years of construction by the daimyo Ikeda Tsunamasa — the feudal lord of the Okayama clan at that time — as a place of peace. Covering some 14 hectares, Korakuen Garden includes wide lawns and Enyo-tei House (built as living quarters), as

well as hills, flowers, trees, rice fields and a tea house. Beautiful trees and flowers can be found throughout the park, offering visitors unique scenes that change with the seasons, from cherry blossoms in spring to the brilliant colors of autumn foliage.

"Korakuen is beautiful year-round and hosts interesting, seasonal events," said Sebastiano. She added that she enjoys Korakuen so much that she purchased a yearly pass.

With such an elegant expanse of nature and cultural elements, the garden and Okayama overall are enriching stops for any visitor.

Kutchan, Hokkaido Prefecture

Picturesque nature on and off the slopes

Breathtaking scenery, world-class ski resorts and thrilling seasonal activities have made Kutchan, Hokkaido Prefecture, a top destination for travelers. It's thus fitting that from Oct. 25 to 26, Kutchan will host the Tourism Ministers' Meeting.

With this year's meeting placing Kutchan in the spotlight, there's no better time to highlight the town's many sights and activities.

Kutchan is well-known for its close proximity to Niseko, a mountain setting where high-quality snow has made it a world-renowned mecca for skiers and snowboarders. The town is home to two notable ski areas, Grand Hirafu and Hanazono, both attracting throngs of travelers from around the world.

Grand Hirafu, the largest resort area in Niseko, has a wide array of slopes for skiers and snowboarders of all levels to choose from. Off the slopes, visitors can unwind at the international resort at the base of the mountain and explore restaurants, bars

and shops while mingling with other travelers from around the world.

Kutchan's other stand-out resort, Hanazono, will delight winter sports enthusiasts with its extra dry snow. The resort has off-piste areas, tree runs and terrain parks, in addition to a variety of slopes for all. Those looking for adventure can book backcountry guides and snowmobile tours at Hanazono 308, the resort's ski center, and relax at the center's large restaurant and cafe. Hanazono offers lessons for people of all ages, making it a great place for families to spend time together.

Tessa Stomski, an Australian living in Kutchan, adores Hanazono. "My child and



Kutchan resident Tessa Stomski



Grand Hirafu is Niseko's largest resort area. NISEKO MT. RESORT GRAND HIRAFU



Rafting on the Shiribetsu River is a popular summertime activity. NAC NISEKO ADVENTURE CENTRE

I spend most weekends there and we usually finish the day by listening to acoustic music at the ski center," the founder and managing director of Niseko Gourmet said.

With world-class resorts and high-quality snow, it's no mystery why travelers around the world laud Kutchan as a skier's paradise. But travelers shouldn't miss out on the region's other offerings. As the seasons change, Kutchan's snow gives way to lush vegetation, pristine lakes and beautiful hiking trails begging to be explored.

One way to experience Kutchan's natural splendor is the hiking trails surrounding Mount Yotei. Nicknamed Ezo Fuji for its resemblance to Mount Fuji, Mount Yotei has an awe-inspiring oval crater approximately 2 kilometers in circumference at its peak. Along the trails, hikers can visit the mountain's gorgeous alpine zone, a designated national treasure with 100 varieties of alpine flowers, where trekkers may come across red foxes, Russian flying squirrels, mountain hares and other wildlife.

For a leisurely stroll through nature, look no further than the area surrounding Lake Hangetsu. A designated national monument situated in Shikotsu-Toya National Park, the picturesque Lake Hangetsu captivates year-round, changing with the seasons to accentuate the region's natural beauty. Filled with seasonal flora and fauna, the area is an ideal place to watch the leaves change in autumn and a popular swimming spot in the summer.

Kutchan's abundant camping sites, hiking trails and seasonal activities make it a spectacular place to spend the summer and appreciate Hokkaido's nature. Running through Kutchan is Japan's clearest waterway, the Shiribetsu River, which becomes a hotbed for seasonal activities such as kayaking and dynamic river rafting in the summer.

For a more leisurely time on the water, visitors can enjoy relaxed canoeing and rafting while treating their eyes to scenic views of Mount Yotei. Cycling is another popular activity in the summer, and the lush green rice fields, clear blue sky and quaint Japanese homes across Kutchan's farmland give visitors the chance to appreciate Hokkaido's countryside scenery.

Kutchan has made great efforts to ensure visitors have access to high-quality amenities and accommodation, including condominiums ideal for extended stays. Kutchan's foreign language services at its general hospital, guidance signs and enhanced Wi-Fi coverage further exemplify the town's hospitality. Dining options are also diverse and include handmade *udon* (thick wheat noodles), *yakitori* (grilled chicken on skewers), scrumptious confections and dishes prepared with potatoes and root vegetables raised in the region's fertile, nutrient-rich soil. All of this makes it clear why Kutchan captivates visitors and continues to attract international investment.

Kutchan will likely continue to prosper and share its wonders with travelers from across the globe.

"Kutchan offers the perfect mix of nature, recreation, design and relaxed tradition. While the colder months offer its famed champagne winter, summer is also spectacular, with the milder days offering perfect conditions for hiking, cycling (and other activities)," said Stomski.

Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture

Journey to the 'heart of Japan'

Situated between Tokyo and Osaka, Aichi Prefecture has been a bustling hub for traffic and trade throughout Japanese history, and the region is often referred to as "the heart of Japan" because of its rich culture and flourishing industries.

International delegates will meet in the prefectural capital of Nagoya from Nov. 22 to 23 for the Foreign Ministers' Meeting. The birthplace of hybrid vehicles and home to industrial heavyweights such as Toyota Motor Corp., Aichi's vast array of sights and activities should earn it a spot on any traveler's itinerary.

Some of Japan's most prominent samurai leaders hailed from Aichi, and thus, it comes as no surprise that the region boasts a treasure trove of castles and other architectural gems. Aichi's capital features Nagoya Castle, which was built under the watch of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the samurai leader responsible for uniting Japan and ushering in the Edo Period (1603-1868). In addition to the impressive Hommaru Palace, towers and moats, the castle has a surrounding park that is excellent for viewing cherry blossoms in spring.

A short drive away from Nagoya is one of Japan's oldest surviving castles, Inuyama Castle, which is scenically situated on a small hill overlooking the Kiso River and has a beautifully preserved interior and main keep. Other historical treasures include Jo-an, a 17th-century tea house encircled by beautiful gardens, and Meiji Mura, an open-air museum featuring stunning architecture from the Meiji Era (1868-1912).

No trip to Nagoya is complete without a taste of its local dishes known as "Nagoya Meshi." The city and the wider neighboring areas have been historically associated with the strong flavor of miso, and Nagoya Meshi is said to have evolved to match this. Popular fare includes tantalizingly delicious *hitosumabushi* (grilled eel and rice), *miso katsu* (a pork cutlet with thick miso sauce) and *tebasaki* (Nagoya-style chicken wings), among other delicacies such as sweets and lighter food.

Longtime Nagoya resident Zhang Bin from China, who is an *erhu* (Chinese violin) player, recommends "morning service" served at local cafes. "If you order a coffee, it is usually accompanied by toast and a boiled egg, and so on. This is something that is unique and a good deal," he said. Meanwhile, those interested in Japanese traditional arts should stop by the majestic Nagoya Noh Theater, where classical Japanese musical dramas are performed. Active since the 14th century and one of the world's oldest regularly performed theater arts, noh plays retell Japanese stories from classical literature through otherworldly music and dance.

Aichi ranks fourth in Japan in terms of



The Hommaru Palace and the Nagoya Castle donjon. NAGOYA CASTLE GENERAL ADMINISTRATION OFFICE



Hitsumabushi (grilled eel and rice) is one of the Nagoya's famous delicacies. AICHI PREFECTURE

population and is one of the country's most prominent industrial centers. Major industries of the prefecture include automobiles, airplanes and robotics, spearheaded by companies such as Toyota and Mitsubishi Aircraft Corp.

In addition to being a hub for cutting-edge research, the city offers many opportunities for visitors to learn about its rich industrial history. At the Toyota Commemorative Museum of Industry and Technology, visitors can learn about Toyota's beginnings as a textile manufacturer and its development into a global industrial titan. With many looms and automobile manufacturing machines on display, including one that dates back to 1890, the museum allows visitors to experience the rapid technological progress that spurred Japan to become one of the world's largest economies.

Aichi Prefecture is also renowned for its culture of craftsmanship, including Noritake Co. — a tableware manufacturer established in Nagoya in 1904 — which is globally known today. At Noritake's museum and craft center,

visitors can paint their own chinaware and watch how Noritake makes bone china.

Mechanical puppets known as *karakuri ningyō* further demonstrate Aichi's craftsmanship. Manipulated using springs and clockwork, the puppets have been made in Aichi for over 300 years. They are a staple of Aichi festivals and are said to have influenced the region's robotics research.

Nagoya's wide range of attractions have long intrigued Zhang and are a major reason behind why he has lived there for such a substantial length of time.

Speaking about his love for Nagoya, Zhang said: "Whether it be sightseeing, culture, the economy or shopping, everything is here. Nagoya is a place where you can interact with many people from different countries and backgrounds. The roads are wide, it's easy to get around, and there's convenient public transportation. I really appreciate the warmth of people here. I have a lot of friends who travel to Nagoya and they all fall in love with this city. I've been here for 27 years and I don't see myself leaving anytime soon."