



What's Up Aichi



- Timely Tourist Information On Aichi Prefecture And The Surrounding Central Japan Region -

Aichi Onsen

One of the great pleasures of a visit to Japan is taking time out to enjoy a long, drawn out bath in a communal hot spring. While it might take some guts the first time if you are used to spending bath time alone, once you muster up the courage, you're sure to be hooked. And what better place to try your first group bath than a country where no one knows you? And what better time to try than when your bones are stiff from the mid-winter chill?

At **onsen**, or natural hot spring baths, elements occurring in the spring water such as sodium, calcium and iron reinvigorate the body while the hot temperatures help bathers wind down and relieve stress.

Aichi prefecture has a number of fine hot spring baths, each with its own unique charm.

Many of the onsen in Aichi's southern **Chita Peninsula** region offer stunning views of the Pacific Ocean and the incomparable feeling of relaxation brought on by taking in the fresh sea breeze. Just minutes away from Centrair (Central Japan Airport), the Chita Peninsula baths are a great way to unwind after a long flight from overseas. Bathing enthusiasts who simply can't wait to chill out in a hot bath can even bathe inside of Centrair's **Miya no Yu**, a unique bathing facility that overlooks the runway.



Genjiko, Minami-chita Onsen

Travelers who take the time to journey to the mountainous region of eastern Aichi will be rewarded with baths that not only soothe the body, but that offer excellent feng shui for the soul as well. The gentle flow of clear water overheard from onsen situated along the banks of the easy-flowing Ure and Toyo rivers is certain to wash away any stress, and a few cups of sake and sweetfish pulled straight from the fresh river water are a perfect way to wrap up a hard day of bathing.



Yukawa, Yuya Onsen

Closer to Nagoya, hot spring baths offer a quiet respite from city life. Outdoor baths with meticulously maintained gardens are an inexpensive getaway for even the most rushed travelers, and a morning dip in a hot bath is a great way to start a day of traveling or business negotiations off on the right foot.

For travelers who like the idea of a good bath, but are not quite up for sharing all of their secrets with a tub full of strangers, a **kazoku buro**, or family bath, might be the best choice. Many Aichi bathhouses offer these private facilities that are typically paid for by the hour and allow for more secluded bathing for friends or couples.

Visitors to onsen should make use of showers situated away from the bathing area to wash and rinse their bodies thoroughly before entering the bath. Towels should be kept out of the baths.

Hadaka Matsuri

Your dip in an Aichi onsen should get you in the right frame of mind for one of central Japan's most unique and popular festivals.



"Does this outfit make me look fat?"

The **Hadaka Matsuri**, or Naked Festival, has been around for 1200 years and draws hundreds of thousands of participants and festival goers hoping to dispel the misfortunes of the previous year and summon the spring.

During a solemn ceremony in the days before the festival, a local man is chosen to be the **shin otoko**, literally "god man," on whom all of the year's sins and misfortunes will be cast. The stripped shin otoko, shaven of all of his body hair and purified from days of confinement in **Konomiya Shrine**, makes his way through a horde of nearly ten-thousand men dressed in mere loincloths and headbands all vying to touch (or hit) him in order to drive away the year's troubles and gain good fortune for the new year. Once the scapegoat reaches the gates of the shrine, he faces assault from the unclothed mass of freezing men as his outnumbered guards bravely fend off the rambunctious townsmen by dousing them with buckets of ice cold water.

As many of the men succeed in their attempts to lay a hand on the shin otoko and others give in to the winter chill, the god man is finally able to fight his way, bruised and battered, into Konomiya Shrine, where he will pay his respects to **Kunitamanokami**, the shrine's divine protector, before being driven from town.



Inazawa City welcomes foreign participants in the Hadaka Matsuri and local hotels **Wayokan** and **Wako** offer a great package deal (¥8,800/\$75 US) that includes daytime use of a room, lunch and all of the traditional accoutrements for running through the streets nearly nude. The "full set" service also includes help donning the loincloth and headband, as well as admission to hot spring baths on the day of the festival. The hotels are located just steps away from JR Inazawa station and Konomiya Shrine. For reservations, dial 0120-23-5564 in Japan.



Beware of pickpockets

Celebrated on the 13th and 14th days of the lunar New Year, this year's Hadaka Matsuri will take place on Friday, March 2nd. While the festival gets going at around 3 pm, you'll want to arrive early to beat the crowds and catch the traditional activities leading up to the big event. You don't have to disrobe or shave anything to see the festival close up; just take the nine-minute train trip from JR Nagoya to JR Inazawa or the 21-minute train ride from Meitetsu Nagoya station to Konomiya station.

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Hatsumode

Hatsumode, the first visit to a shrine in the New Year, is an important tradition all over Japan. Visit these Aichi shrines and temples at the strike of midnight or during the first days of the new year to make a wish for 2007 and receive charms and talismans:

Atsuta Shrine, near Jingu Nishi subway station on the Meijo line

Osu Kannon Temple, near Osu Kannon subway station on the Tsurumai line

Fukagawa Shrine, near Owari Seto station on the Meitetsu train line

Tsushima Shrine, near Meitetsu Tsushima station

Toyokawa Inari Shrine, near JR Toyokawa City station



Osu Kannon Temple

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Around Aichi

Be sure to check out these events happening around Aichi in January and February:

Tenteko Festival Nishio City, Jan. 3

This ancient festival commemorates the selection in 859 of the Niike locality to provide rice to the gods that are believed to have given birth to Japan's imperial family. Local men of inauspicious age, representing the male component in rice fertilization, parade through town keeping drum beats with phallic Chinese radishes strapped to their waists. Local women of every age blush and giggle.

Oni Festival Toyouhshi City, Feb.10, 11

Aka Oni (red oger) and **Tengu** (a long-nosed goblin) engage in the latest round of their 400-year-old battle as townspeople gather at **Akumikanbe Shrine** to cheer on the unremitting underdog. As the contenders make their way to the shrine grounds, onlookers vie for bags of Aka Oni's medicinal candy. After suffering yet another loss to the smug Tengu, Aka Oni flees the scene in a cloud of fine white dust that covers the crowd and is believed to stave off illness.



The 423rd time is a charm!

Matcha Day Nishio City, Feb. 6

Southern Aichi's Nishio City produces one-fifth of Japan's matcha, or powdered green tea, and on Matcha Day, the locals celebrate this integral part of their hometown's culture. Visitors can enjoy cooking lessons featuring matcha dishes, visit a matcha factory and even take a matcha bath!



Nishio tea

Doburoku Festival Obu City, Feb. 25

Join parishioners of the **Nagakusa Tenjin Shrine** as they carry on their 500-year tradition by making offerings of their homemade **doburoku** (unrefined sake). Sip the cloudy, creamy concoction for yourself alongside **Shojo**, the 10-foot tall red-faced drunken beast.

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