Beat the Heat at Aichi Beaches

Visitors to Nagoya this summer will surely find that the stifling heat takes a bit of the oomph out of their adventurous mind-set. At the end of rainy season in July, the earth seems to sweat out all of the moisture it absorbed during the previous weeks, making for the most humid days of the year. Luckily for travelers, Aichi has 350 miles of coastline where you can shed some clothes and escape the sticky heat.

Generally, swimming season in Central Japan begins in mid July with the end of rainy season and lasts until late August, when sharing the water with territorial jellyfish puts you at risk of bringing home a most unwelcome souvenir.

Aside from the cool Pacific waves, Aichi beaches offer unique options for tourists looking for temporary relief from the scorching summer. Umi no ie, or beach houses, are not, as the name might suggest, overnight facilities for weekend beach bums, but rather shady hut-like retreats from which to take in views of the sea. After an ice-cold draft beer or a refreshing kakigori, the Japanese version of a snow cone, a lazy afternoon nap on cool tatami mats while being gently caressed by a sea breeze blowing into the open façade is a great way to rejuvenate between dips in the ocean. Many beach houses also offer changing rooms, lockers and shower facilities for a minimal charge.

The Chita Peninsula is the nearest ocean getaway to Nagoya. Shinmaiko Marine Park Blue Sun Beach, in Chita City, is a manmade white sand beach with a large field that is perfect for family picnics and sports. The beach’s gentle breezes attract windsurfing enthusiasts and cool off sunbathers. Events held throughout the summer make Blue Sun Beach a great place to mingle with other beachgoers.

Couples will want to hit Tokoname City’s Ono Beach for a late afternoon swim before strolling along the shoreline and taking in the breathtaking views. Also in Tokoname City, the shallow waters of Sakai Beach are perfect for travelers who want to blend with the locals while collecting shellfish or just roll up their pant legs and let the cool saltwater sooth their travel-weary feet.

Several other beaches stretch down the Chita Peninsula to the west of Minami Chita Prefectural Nature Park, including Aichi’s most popular, Utsumi Beach, the ideal destination for travelers with people-watching in mind. Utsumi is also your best bet for jumping into a pickup game of beach volleyball.

The seashore of eastern Aichi is slightly further afield, but travelers who make the trip will be rewarded with less crowded beaches stretching for miles along the Pacific Ocean. Head to the Irago resort area, at the tip of the Atsumi Peninsula, where the deep blue waters and jagged rock formations frame an awe-inspiring sunrise and provide a stunning backdrop for the resplendent Cape Irago Lighthouse, a popular destination for Japanese visitors. A dip in the shallow waters is a great way to cool off after a round of golf or a leisurely ride along the area’s scenic bike routes on a cycle rented from a local hotel.

Surfers from all over the country flock to nearby Pacific Long Beach for some of the best waves in Japan. With a dozen or so breaks, Pacific Long Beach has enough wave diversity to keep all levels of surfers satisfied. Even if you’ve never set foot on a board, you can enjoy the waves vicariously by taking in one of the surf competitions held throughout the summer.

So make sure to pack a bathing suit and flip-flops for your trip to Japan this summer. With such outstanding and varied beaches awaiting you in Aichi, you might just decide to bypass some of the country’s cultural offerings and spend your days lazily soaking up the sun.

Toyohama Sea Bream Festival

As long as you’re at the seaside, why not make time for a one-of-a-kind marine-themed festival with the warm people of an Aichi fishing town? Minami Chita is Aichi prefecture’s leading fishing town, and many of the townspeople make their livelihoods fishing the Ise Bay to feed the hungry Nagoyans to the north. For a place whose prosperity is so closely tied to the sea, it’s perhaps no surprise that the year’s biggest event is the Sea Bream Festival, or Tai Matsuri, held on July 28th and 29th this year. The festival, surrounded by symbolism and tradition, is a great opportunity to get a glimpse into the values of rural Japan.

In the weeks before the festival, Minami Chita’s five districts each construct a sea bream float of up to 60 feet long from wood, bamboo and cotton. The sea bream are then paraded through the streets on the shoulders of the town’s young people to heartening tunes played by taiko (traditional drum) players and flutists who are precariously perched inside the giant fish. The strength of the creations is then put to the test as they are butted into each other and rammed into a ceremonial structure known as the okari-ya.

The celebration culminates in the plunging of one or several of the giant fish into the sea while the musicians fight to maintain their balance and keep up their inspirational tunes. Against a constant battering of waves, the float-bearers fight to keep the sea bream upright and ensure that it only turns to the left; the Japanese seamen’s term for “counterclockwise” resembles the word for “catch,” so it is believed that keeping the sea bream rotating only to the left will ensure a bountiful fishing season and continued
Visitors to the festival can catch a bus from Utsumi Station, which is a one-hour train ride from Meitetsu Nagoya Station.

Octopus Hunting in Himakajima

Climb Mt. Fuji ✓
Visit Kyoto's Golden Pavilion ✓
Stay in a ryokan ✓
Catch an octopus with bare hands

What?! You mean wrestling with an eight-legged sea beast was not on your to-do list for Japan? Well you must not have heard the ancient Japanese saying: “He who visits Japan without conquering and devouring the mighty octopus has not truly visited Japan.”

Well fret not, intrepid traveler, because Aichi has just the place for you to complete your journey properly and create an unforgettable story to tell all of your envious friends back home.

Himakajima is a large island located off of Aichi’s southern coast, smack dab in the middle of the Mikawa and Chita Bays, a location that provides the island with enviable access to some of the richest waters in Japan. Just an hour away from the city, Himakajima is a popular destination for Nagoyans hunting for the most delectable seafood. And hunt they do, because at Himakajima visitors have the unique opportunity to capture and eat their own octopus.

“Be sure to get my good side.”

Roughly comparable to a greased pig chase at an American county fair, octopus catching, or tako tsukami, is unique to Himakajima, and you won’t find it in any guidebooks. Groups of 10 can take part in the slippery, slimy activity for 31,500 yen (approximately $25 per person with an extra charge for additional participants) from July to September (with a brief break during the August O-bon holiday).

Tako tsukami is highly recommended for groups with energetic children looking to cool off in mid-summer. The octopuses are surprisingly strong and quick, but if you’re agile enough to snag one, your reward is the unforgettable experience of fresh tentacles expertly barbequed for you by the staff of Yuko shia, the organizers of your hunt.

Tako tsukami is a one-of-a-kind experience that you won’t want to let slip away, so have your travel agent or another Japanese speaker contact Yuko shia at 0569.68.3611 to set up your adventure.

Fireworks Add Flash to Aichi Festivals

If your days are filled with the pleasures of water this summer, Aichi fills your nights with the wonder of fire. Fireworks are a staple of late-summer festivals, and towns all over the prefecture are proud to show off their flair for flares.

Visitors to Nagoya won’t want to miss the chance to celebrate summer in the city with 300,000 spectators at Nagoya Port Festival, or Minato Matsuri, taking place on July 21st. Last year, 3,600 dazzling explosions lit up the sky over the port’s Nagoya Garden Pier. This year, the 100th anniversary of the port’s opening is certain to add to the excitement.

The pier is a short walk from Nagoya Port (Nagoya ko) station at the end of the Meiko subway line.

True firework freaks will want to head out to Aichi’s most spectacular displays. On July 20th and 21st, Toyota City amazes with its blazes during the Gion Festival at the Yoshida Shrine. On Friday night, streams of flames spray from hand-held tezutsu fireworks, showering the night sky in blinding hues of orange. Originating from the shrine and dating back to the Warring States period, Toyohashi’s fireworks gained popularity during the Edo era when well-known artists and writers praised their beauty.

On Saturday, the town hosts a more typical display boasting 12,000 explosions that reach a dazzling climax with the popular “Starmine” grand finale.

Toyohashi City is less than half an hour from Nagoya by bullet train.

Toyota City’s Oiden Festival, held this year on July 28th, is a light-hearted affair in which you’re just as likely to encounter cross-dressed men performing boy-band-worthy boogies or housewives moonlighting as pink-haired cheerleaders as anything more traditional. Ten-thousand flamboyantly dressed citizens participate in the enormous dance competition held in the city streets.

With such a colorful festival, the organizers of the fireworks display, held the following day, have their work cut out for them so as not to be outshined by the revelers. They meet the challenge with 15,000 bursts set to popular music. Also unique to this festival is the pyrotechnics competition in which firemasters vie to outdo each other in one-minute face-offs.

Toyota City can be reached in less than an hour from Nagoya.