Inuyama City Shows Off Its True Colors During 2008 Autumn Campaign

Inuyama, in northern Aichi, has long been popular among Nagoyans as quick escape from the city. The close proximity, relaxed pace and manageable size of the town, along with its seemingly inexhaustible supply of fascinating historical and cultural sites, make Inuyama a well-liked destination for city dwellers seeking relief from Nagoya’s hustle and bustle.

While Inuyama has enough charm to entice visitors year round, it is during the autumn season that the city is at its most captivating. Fall colors dot the hilly landscape to provide a warm backdrop to the town’s precious sites and the scents of the season—whether supplied by fallen leaves being absorbed into moist soil or by the flavors of freshly cooked traditional snacks wafting through narrow thoroughfares—make Inuyama all the more inviting.

This fall is shaping up to be an especially memorable one as Inuyama has embarked on a campaign to share its many seasonal delights with out-of-towners. The fall campaign offers a rare chance to touch genuine history and enjoy breathtaking landscapes to provide a warm backdrop to the town’s precious sites and the scents of the season—whether supplied by fallen leaves being absorbed into moist soil or by the flavors of freshly cooked traditional snacks wafting through narrow thoroughfares—make Inuyama all the more inviting.

A Walk to Remember

Take the Meitetsu Inuyama line from Meitetsu Nagoya station to Inuyama Yuen station, an approximately 30-minute ride. The town’s most famous attractions lie to the west of Inuyama Yuen station, just a 15-minute walk to the west of Inuyama Yuen station, is just the place you’re looking for. As you enter the traditional garden through the aging wooden gate and step onto the jagged stone path, verdant plants soothe your eyes while a brighter canopy of autumn leafage entices you to gaze upward.

The garden alone, open throughout the fall from 9:00 to 5:00, is worth the visit, but its walls house a rarer treasure that attracts visitors from all over the country. Jo-an tea ceremony house is a tranquil and meditative space built by Oda Urakusai, the younger brother of Oda Nobunaga, an Aichi native and the first of three lords who are credited with unifying Japan. While Nobunaga was famed for his skill in warfare, his younger brother gave up the warrior’s life to devote himself to the art of the tea ceremony. In 1618, in the twilight of his life, Urakusai built Jo-an in his Kyoto retreat. The tea house was moved to Inuyama in 1972.

National Treasures, Seasonal Pleasures

After your walk back to town, you’ll probably be ready for a rest and some refreshment. Uraku-en, just a 15-minute walk to the west of Inuyama Yuen station, is just the place you’re looking for. As you enter the traditional garden through the aging wooden gate and step onto the jagged stone path, verdant plants soothe your eyes while a brighter canopy of autumn leafage entices you to gaze upward.

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Due to its status as a cultural treasure, you won’t be able to sip tea in Jo-an, but Uraku-en’s other tea rooms provide a satisfactory alternative. Ko-an tea ceremony house is just steps away from Jo-an and is enveloped in the aromas of the same chabana (carefully selected flowers whose fragrances complement the enjoyment of tea). Guests can purchase a garden admission/tea tasting combination ticket for ¥1300.

Castle Views of Endless Hues

Apparently no one warned Oda Nobuyasu about the perils of building castles in the sky. His creation, Inuyama Castle (admission: ¥500) is proudly perched high above the city and is without at doubt its most famous landmark. It’s not so much the number of maples on the grounds that are the draw here, although Inuyama-jō boasts its fair share of the trees. Rather, visitors to this, Japan’s oldest castle and one of only four in the whole country to be declared a national treasure, will want to take in the views of the surrounding countryside, ablaze with every shade of red and orange, from the castle tower.

Scaling the steep and narrow staircases to the fourth story is no easy task, but the elevated perspective, ideal for witnessing the reddening of the landscape, makes the climb worthwhile. The sight of sprawling plains and the Kiso River below is sure to cause even the most humble visitor to fantasize about leading a middle ages army of samurai to capture neighboring lands. It’s an outlook with which even the view from the highest of Nagoya skyscrapers, which, incidentally, are clearly visible from the castle, cannot compare.

Autumn Castle Festival: Be a Part of a New Tradition

Even after the sun goes down, there is plenty to dazzle the eyes. On the last weekend of October, Inuyama celebrates its castle and craftsmanship with the 8th Autumn Castle Festival.

Either day of the festival promises to be an enjoyable time, but you’re likely to find yourself most fascinated by the festivities on the evening of Saturday, October 25, when floats adorned with luminous lanterns take to the streets of the Honnachi district. At the top of each three-level float are various karakuri, mechanical wooden dolls crafted with precision and passion by craftsman Tamaya Shobei. The Inuyama native’s family has created the lifelike dolls in the city for nine generations. Each karakuri doll is carved and designed with mechanical precision to carry out traditional tasks such as serving tea or shooting archery.

Dressing the Part

If during your travels in Japan you’ve allowed yourself to splurge on a kimono, the Inuyama fall campaign may be just the chance that you’ve been waiting for to sport it in a picturesque setting. Inuyama Castle and Uraku-en will offer free admission on selected weekends throughout the fall to anyone wearing the traditional robe.

An old shop with an open façade, modest seating, an inviting aroma and a cheerful grandma-type behind the counter is a pretty good sign that you’ve come across one of Inuyama’s ubiquitous purveyors of traditional skewered snacks. A one-hundred-yen coin will get you a stick of dango (round dumpling) at most of the shops specializing in the sweet treat. If that’s not enough to sate your hunger, you can count on coming across another vendor before long who is just as eager as the last to have you try one of their proud creations, many of which are limited to autumn and make use of seasonal ingredients. In addition to dango skewers, the aforementioned dengaku can also be enjoyed as a snack or as a complete meal. Just follow the scent of sweet and robust miso being grilled over an open flame.

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