



# What's Up Aichi



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

## O-bon Season Offers Opportunities for Cultural Insight and Celebration

Travelers making the trip to Japan in August may notice that things quiet down considerably for a few days mid-month. Aside from the dog day heat keeping people indoors, the summer hush can also be attributed to the **O-bon** season, which occurs in Central Japan from August 13 to 16.

During O-bon, or the Bon Festival, Japanese who can get away from work travel back to their hometowns to gather with their families, welcome the spirits of ancestors and pay tribute to departed relatives by visiting and maintaining their grave sites. Although much of O-bon is by nature quite private, opportunities exist for foreign visitors to Central Japan to observe some fascinating local traditions celebrated during the festival season.



Dancers pack Gujo Hachiman's public spaces

### Dancin' in the Streets in Gujo Hachiman

A two-hour express bus from Nagoya's Meitetsu Bus Center is your quickest connection to Gujo Hachiman, a picturesque water town tucked away in the mountains of central Gifu prefecture where dance rules the summer. Blessed with crystal clear rivers that are channeled into town and provide the ubiquitous sound of gently flowing water, Gujo Hachiman is at its most stunning during the **Gujo Odori**, a 400-year-old dance festival that takes place for 31 days throughout the summer. At the heart of the festival are four days of



Locals happily offer impromptu dance lessons

all-night dancing that take place during O-bon.

Townspersons don their most colorful *yukata*, or summer kimono, and gather in the narrow streets for a dusk-to-dawn dance party that was initially created by a feudal lord who wished to encourage harmony among the town's aristocrats and commoners. Visitors are encouraged to join in—in fact, you may find that you have no choice—and shops rent *yukata* and other traditional summer clothing that will make your experience more authentic. Dance lessons are offered throughout the day at the Gujo Hachiman Kinenkan Tourist Center, or you can just find a friendly local to teach you the steps.

All of that dancing at night may leave you exhausted in the daytime, but make sure to spare enough energy to walk Gujo Hachiman's streets and enjoy the tranquil atmosphere provided by the merging of the Kodara, Yoshida and Nagara rivers, which flow from the mountains surrounding the town. The people of Gujo Hachiman utilize the blessings of the waterways in their daily lives through a strictly regulated Edo era system of channels, drinking the pure mountain water and using it to wash locally grown vegetables and laundry before the rivers regroup and flow southeast to the Pacific.

As you make your way leisurely through the car-free, narrow streets, follow the locals' lead and sip pure mineral water from centuries-old stone basins. The

ever-present basins keep you well hydrated as you make your way through town, resting at its **picturesque temples**, and climb the hill to **Gujo Hachiman Castle**. The castle, which was originally constructed in 1559, provides awe-inspiring views of the town below.

For more information, visit the extensive Gujo Hachiman website:

<http://gujohachiman.com/kanko/>

### Yonezu River Festival

Every year, on August 15, the city of Nishio, just south of Nagoya, celebrates O-Bon with a stunning spectacle of light that is at once poignant and festive.

At the **Yonezu River Festival**, thousands of elaborately decorated lanterns are released into the Yahagi River in a glowing tribute to lost ancestors. As the lanterns float quietly downstream, the somber mood gives way to jovial anticipation. Soon the familiar light of summer fireworks fills the night sky and colorful embers parachute downward, creating a breathtaking contrast with the shrinking image of the drifting lanterns.



A moving scene on the Yonezu River bank

Board a Nishio-bound train from Meitetsu Nagoya station for the 40-minute trip to Yonezu station and follow the *yukata*-clad crowd to the Yonezu Bridge, the epicenter of the festival. Arrive before sundown to see the lanterns in their splendor and claim a seat for the fireworks display.

## Something is Brewing in Nagoya

Nothing counters summer heat quite like an ice cold beer or two...or three...or five. Nagoya swelters with the best of them in the middle of summer, so we thought we would recommend a few places in the city to kick back with a cold one.

### Asahi Beer Factory Tour

Asahi is Japan's leading brewer, and its most popular beer, Super Dry, is a staple of summertime outings. Visitors to **Asahi's Nagoya Factory** have a chance to come in out of the heat to learn more about the 120-year-old company.

Nearly all of the Asahi that is sipped, swigged, swilled and shotgunned in Central Japan is made in the company's Moriyama factory. Visitors smell and touch fresh hops and malts and see the huge tanks in which these and other key ingredients are combined to create the beloved beverage. You'll also see the high-tech canning process and walk amongst towering stacks of Super Dry, all shiny and new in their trademark silver and black labels.



A backstage look at Japan's most popular beer

The highlight of a visit to the beer factory for many comes after the tour is finished and they get a chance to sample draft Asahi for twenty minutes (up to three glasses). The professional beer servers in the tasting area pour perfect mugs of Super Dry and other Asahi favorites, achieving the ideal foam-to-liquid ratio in every glass. For youngsters (the Japanese drinking age is 20), moms-to-be and teetotalers, a selection of Asahi's non-alcoholic drinks is on offer.

The 75-minute tour, given from 9:30 to 3:00 daily, is by reservation only. To make a reservation or request an English tour, call 052-792-8966 in Japan.

The Asahi Beer Factory is a 15-minute walk—or a 30-minute stumble—from Shin-Moriyama station on the JR Central Line.

## Nagoya Beer Gardens

Maybe those three glasses of Asahi were only enough to pique your thirst, or maybe you are looking for another ale-centric night making the best of the hot summer weather. Beer gardens are a great place to drink like a fish and get stuffed to the gills, and Nagoya has plenty of choices. Here are just a few of the city's most popular summertime drinking spots.

The top of the **Chunichi Building**, in the Sakae district, provides the perfect perch from which to enjoy cold drinks while overlooking some of Nagoya's best known landmarks. Oasis 21 and the Nagoya TV Tower are both visible from the rooftop beer garden, which is just steps from Sakae station and offers an all-you-can-eat-and-drink package for ¥3500 that features a wide array of food choices. Kirin Ichiban, Super Dry's biggest rival, and Kirin Black draft are available on tap, or combine the two for a slightly bitter half-and-half. Fruity "sours," refreshing Japanese cocktails made with *shochu* (distilled liquor), are also featured on the menu.

Sapporo completes the trifecta of Japanese megabreweries, and the country's oldest brewer weighs in big with several options for beer lovers at Nagoya's **Kouyouen**, which is a quick walk from Tsurumai station on the JR Chuo or Tsurumai subway lines. Diners can choose from set menus and all-you-can-eat options that include barbecue and *shabu shabu* to accompany their all-you-can-drink beer. The brewery restaurant, which features Sapporo's hard-to-find craft beers, is a fun option for connoisseurs of the bubbly stuff.

If it's variety and views that you're after, look no further than **Beer Garden Miami**. Situated on the rooftop of the Dai Nagoya Building across from Nagoya station, Miami is celebrating its 45<sup>th</sup> year. Throughout the summer, Miami offers all-you-can-drink and an all-you-can-eat buffet selection that features local dishes. For two and a half hours you can stuff yourself silly and choose from 11 types of beer and a wide selection of *sake* and *shochu*. After all of those drinks, you may just think you're seeing double as you peer off of the top of the 12-story building. Rest assured. Those are just the twin JR Towers. Beer Garden Miami offers up-close views of these and other giants of the rapidly evolving cityscape.

## Summer Ceramics Festivals

On August 30 and 31, Tokoname, one of the two *rokkoyo* (Japan's six great kiln towns) that are situated in Aichi will hold its biggest celebration of the year with the 42<sup>nd</sup> **Tokoname Yaki Festival**. Walk along the kiln-lined Pottery Path from the Ceramics Hall and peak into galleries to search out deals on signature Tokoname-yaki teapots, characterized by earthy red coloring.

Tokoname is a 30-minute ride on the Meitetsu Tokoname line from Nagoya's Jingumae Station.



Searching for ceramic treasures in Seto

On September 8 and 9, Aichi's other *rokkoyo* welcomes visitors to its own pottery party. The **Setomono Festival**, begun to honor the memory of Kato Tamikichi, a porcelain master who introduced techniques to the region in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, is in its 76<sup>th</sup> year. Most of the pieces that you'll find in the city of Seto are relatively refined compared to the more rustic Tokoname-yaki style.

Get to the festival early, as you'll be competing with half a million visitors for the best bargains at over 300 shops. In addition to booths set up for the festival, be sure to allow time to visit the city's many outstanding museums and galleries.

Take the half-hour trip on the Meitetsu Seto line to Owari Seto from Nagoya's Sakae station.

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