

AUTHENTIC TRAVEL EXPERIENCES ACROSS JAPAN

FROM SNOWY PEAKS TO ANCIENT TEMPLES, DISCOVER JAPAN BEYOND ITS BUSTLING CITIES AND TOURIST TRAILS. *By Daniel de Bomford, Bernard Thompson*

While Japan's sprawling metropolises are still a global tourism favorite, visitors increasingly are searching for experiences beyond the Golden Route between Tokyo and Osaka. Not far beyond the boundaries of the great cities lie paths rarely trodden by outsiders, offering beautiful natural scenery and intimate cultural experiences that invite curious travelers to discover a new side of Japan.

From adorable snow monkeys to some of the highest-quality powder snow in the world, a wealth of experiences awaits those willing to step off the beaten path. Travelers won't be left out in the cold either, with everyone from transport to accommodation providers looking to help ensure their trips are safe and memorable.

How does one begin planning a trip that extends beyond the neon-soaked, Instagram-famous streets of Japan? Simple: ask the experts. Before setting foot in Japan, having a local understanding alongside an international perspective is an invaluable tool for travelers to ensure that every trip is an incredible experience of authentic Japanese culture and remains respectful to local communities.

Tour company Untold Japan crafts unique journeys through some of Japan's culturally rich locales. By forging close partnerships with local communities, Untold Japan ensures visitors of having authentic experiences that go unseen by the average visitor. "We work directly with each client ... without intermediaries and create the trip from scratch based around their interests," CEO Joshua Lassman-Watts explains. The company includes for visitors an "Untold destination" in every itinerary, something unique to each client's preferences, and Lassman-Watts says they are almost always the highlights for the client.

Begin Your Trip with an Adventure

Families visiting Japan can turn their trip into an adventure by staying in one of MIMARU's Ninja Rooms at MIMARU Osaka Shinsaibashi North. These themed, apartment-style hotels bring Japan's legendary stealth warriors to life with hidden treasures that children can discover during their stay. Each of MIMARU's varied rooms includes kitchens and bedrooms to meet the needs of families of all sizes, allowing guests to balance excitement with comfort.

Hideki Fujioka, president of Cosmos Hotel Management, says many travelers describe Japan as "almost like a wonderland." He explains, "That sense of wonder is exactly what we want guests to feel at MIMARU." This wonder is not about extravagance but about the warmth of a place that feels wonderfully like home, where staff provide attentive service and families can relax as they explore. The Ninja Rooms capture this feeling, giving families space to play, rest, and experience Japanese culture in a fun, hands-on way that children will remember long after the trip ends.

In Tokyo, visitors often flock to temples, museums and shopping districts, but Tokyo Dome City offers a different kind of experience. Set around the iconic Tokyo Dome, the complex combines a theme park, natural hot springs, VR attractions, theaters and live entertainment. It is as much a place for relaxation as it is for thrills. "Our approach is to make Tokyo Dome and Tokyo Dome City accessible and enjoyable for people of all ages and genders," says Tsutomu Nagaoka, president of Tokyo Dome Corp. For travelers seeking something beyond traditional sightseeing, it delivers an unconventional yet memorable day out.

Escaping the City to Picturesque Nagano

Barely a stone's throw from the city, up in the picturesque mountains of Nagano, there is a world to explore. Stunning natural wonders like ancient forests and soothing hot springs, surrounded by charming towns with millennia of history, make the region a must-see. Famous for its snow and traditional Japanese charm, the idyllic and serene villages are connected through a robust transportation infrastructure, combined with modern technology, to ensure convenience for non-Japanese speakers.

Getting to Nagano from Tokyo is convenient and straightforward. The area is serviced by both high-speed rail and highway buses, which are aligned with the local transport infrastructure through groups like Alpico, a fully integrated tourism provider. The group offers convenient transportation, tours and a variety of accommodations to suit all travelers.

It also provides bespoke transportation services, such as chartered flights from Matsumoto Airport and a taxi service. "This dual approach—offering both large-scale transportation and bespoke, premium travel—enables us to meet a wide range of customer needs," President Yuichi Sato says. Sato seeks to revitalize Nagano by offering new experiences that turn Nagano into a destination of global significance.

Likewise, Nagano Electric Railway President Toshiyuki Kubota aims to promote year-round tourism in Nagano to help combat the population decline. "That's why we want to do everything we can to attract visitors, both domestic and international," he explains.

Nagano Electric Railway provides transportation between many of Nagano's famous attractions. From the snow monkey park to Zenkoji Temple and Obuse, the company enables tourists to travel without needing a private car, contributing to the sustainability of the area's tourism.

The company partners with JR East to provide digital signage, and the president says that digitization, facilitated through app-based support for navigation, sightseeing and dining is crucial. "We are working together to enhance accessibility and user experience for both domestic and international travelers," the president says.

Head North for Year-Round Enjoyment

Nestled within the scenic mountains of Hachimantai, Iwate, APPI Hotel and Resort offers accommodations and incredible experiences, no matter the time of year. While certainly famous for its high-quality powder snow, APPI is shaping up to be a one-stop destination for travelers looking to break away from skyscrapers and city streets.

The resort offers a variety of outdoor activities in the warmer months without snow. "Visitors can escape the heat and enjoy a variety of outdoor activities, including swimming, disc golf, glamping, barbecues and fishing," says Susanna Wong, President of Iwate Hotel and Resort.

Japan offers far more than its famous cities. From family-friendly stays to the powder slopes of Iwate, travelers can uncover authentic experiences rooted in culture and nature. With strong local partnerships and modern infrastructure, Japan is ready to welcome visitors seeking discovery beyond the usual routes.



MIMARU Osaka Shinsaibashi North



Discover with Alpico



Tokyo Dome City



Enjoy powder snow among the trees in Iwate at APPI Resort



Sushi Experience with Untold Japan



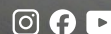
Monkeys enjoying a Nagano hot spring

EXPLORE NAGANO WITH ALPICO

EXPLORE NAGANO WITH ALPICO GROUP, LOCAL CHAMPIONS OF TOURISM WHO OFFER TOURISTS AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES IN THIS BEAUTIFUL REGION, BARELY A STONE'S THROW FROM THE GOLDEN ROUTE. *By Daniel de Bomford and Cian O'Neill*



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While millions have thoroughly explored Japan's golden route, regional destinations, like the alpine wonderland of Nagano, are the next frontier. Nagano's breathtaking landscapes, punctuated by snow-capped peaks, crystal-clear rivers, and an incredible cultural and natural history, are enchanting a new wave of visitors seeking authentic experiences away from the bustle of Tokyo.

Alpico is working towards this vision of regional tourism in Nagano, through services it has developed in close collaboration with the region. The group acts as the beating heart of tourism in the area, with operations spanning hotels, transportation, retail, logistics and recreation within its portfolio. President Yuichi Sato says that the true essence of Japan can be found in its regional areas, which offer deeply authentic experiences.

Alpico's 105 years of operation in Nagano have enabled strong relationships with local governments and organizations, built on trust. This foundation allows the company to implement comprehensive and multilayered tourism strategies. Drawing on the region's diverse culture and attractions, Alpico introduces visitors to a wide range of authentic and meaningful experiences available in Nagano, such as rural farming activities, soba noodle workshops, snow sports and guided tours to see the raichō (rock ptarmigan), a nationally protected bird.

Repeat visitors to Japan who have already experienced the glitz and glamour of the big cities are increasingly seeking experiential, nature-based and cultural activities. Regional tourism is becoming

"The true essence of Japan can be found in its regional areas, which offer deeply authentic experiences."

Yuichi Sato

President,
ALPICO HOLDINGS Co., Ltd.



ing a major driver of returning visitors, opening new journeys and experiences and easing the burden of over-tourism on popular metropolitan destinations.

The group initially began operations in transportation with the Chikuma Railway and expanded to operate various transport routes. "Today we offer a fully integrated tourism infrastructure—from mobility to accommodations to visitor services—all within the group," he says. The group's accommodations range from modern, luxurious hotels to charming *ryokan* and even tranquil campsites.

Just a few short hours away from Tokyo, Alpico's bus service facilitates easy transfer between Nagano's diverse locals, from the skiing paradise of Hakuba to the natural wonders of Takayama, Gifu Prefecture. By integrating bus and taxi transport with local experiences and accommodation, Alpico offers visitors a stress-free way to experience Nagano.

The company also offers premium transportation options, including taxis and chartered flights from Matsumoto Airport. "This dual approach—offering both large-scale transportation and bespoke, premium travel—enables us to meet a wide range of customer needs," the president states.

President Sato describes Alpico's goal as more than just preserving the way of life in Nagano but also enhancing the region's global presence. In his words, "We want to create new value that attracts international travelers—not by merely offering rooms and buses, but by making Nagano a destination of global significance."



TRANSFORMING NAGANO INTO A FOUR-SEASON DESTINATION

NAGANO ELECTRIC RAILWAY PROMOTES YEAR-ROUND TRAVEL, BALANCING SEASONAL TOURISM WHILE SUPPORTING CULTURAL HERITAGE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

By Daniel de Bomford, Paul Mannion and Cian O'Neill



Nagano's stunning scenery is like walking into a painting. Enormous mountains reach for the sky, while lush green valleys cradle meandering rivers and the towns that decorate them. It is a place deeply steeped in history and culture, where monkeys enjoy warm onsens and oyaki dumplings warm the soul.

While renowned as a winter destination, Nagano has something to offer all year round. Toshiyuki Kubota, president of Nagano Electric Railway, aims to transform Nagano's image, mitigate overtourism during the winter, and revitalize the community. "We would like to encourage more year-round tourism," Kubota says.

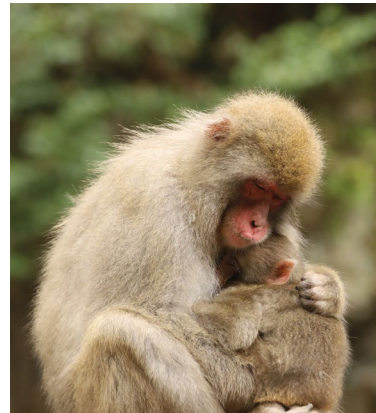
Outside of skiing, one of the region's most famous attractions is the snow monkeys; however, it is overly busy in the winter months. However, when the snow melts in the spring, new monkeys are born, which Kubota describes as "incredibly adorable."

Now, the company's goal is not just to promote the snow monkey park, but all of Nagano's tourist attractions evenly across the year. With Edo-era towns like Obuse and beautiful cultural sites like Zenkoji Temple, Nagano offers a wide variety of intimate and authentic Japanese experiences.

Kubota points to Shibu Onsen as another major draw. Describing it as "charming," the ambience and atmosphere evoke a sense of nostalgia in visitors. "Interestingly, Shibu Onsen inspired the setting of the famous animated film 'Spirited Away' by Hayao Miyazaki," he says.

Nagano Electric Railway contributes to regional revitalization as a secondary transport provider after arriving by shinkansen. The company offers train services, as well as direct buses from Nagano Station to Snow Monkey Park Bus Stop and Shiga Kogen. The company also offers highway bus services to Nagano from Tokyo, Osaka and Niigata.

While transportation can be difficult for foreign tourists to navigate, the company has partnered with



JR East on projects that use digital signage and smartphones to make traveling easier and more convenient. By promoting local public transportation, Nagano Electric Railway aims to mitigate the environmental impact of tourism and contribute to sustainability.

Kubota is passionate about Nagano and its revitalization. He describes population decline as serious and is working with the community to promote Nagano. "That's why we want to do everything we can to attract visitors, both domestic and international."



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"Unlike Tokyo or Kyoto, we have a more intimate and authentic Japanese experience to offer."

Toshiyuki Kubota

President,
Nagano Electric Railway



TRANSFORMATION OF IWATE'S APPI ALL SEASON RESORT, SUPER JAPOW PARADISE

NESTLED IN IWATE PREFECTURE, APPI RESORT OFFERS PRISTINE SLOPES, SEASONAL CUISINE AND THRILLING ADVENTURE, AND IS PREPARING FOR AN EXCITING TRANSFORMATION. *By Kyann Edouard*

A seasoned skier stands atop a gentle slope, dry powder crunching beneath each step. It feels early for such perfect snow, yet at APPI Resort in Hachimantai, Iwate, skiing is believing.

“Snow is a powerful differentiator for us,” says Susanna Wong, president of Iwate Hotel and Resort Co. The region’s conditions deliver long, stable ski seasons, and APPI will soon debut a new snow activities center and Japan’s first two-section gondola.



course, and expanded retail and entertainment options.

Like Whistler in Canada, APPI aims to attract both international residents and seasonal visitors, strengthening tourism and community life in Iwate.

Guests already can choose from three distinctive hotels: the ANA InterContinental, ANA Crowne Plaza and ANA Holiday Inn. Options range from spacious family suites and traditional Japanese rooms to luxury accommodations. More properties are in development.

APPI’s temperate climate brings relief from Japan’s oppressive summer heat. Visitors can enjoy golf, tennis, pickleball and mountain biking. Nature lovers can take part in beech forest tours, firefly viewings, glamping and fishing.



APPI ALL SEASON RESORT

“We are transforming with new infrastructure and new events. Together with our high-quality snow and interesting trails, APPI will be the next most popular ski resort internationally.”

Susanna Wong

President, Iwate Hotel and Resort Co., LTD.



APPI’s “japow” rivals the famed snowfalls of Hokkaido, with backcountry terrain and tree zones that draw international guests. “International guests love the thrill of weaving through natural tree runs,” Wong says. “This season, we may be welcoming IKON pass members.”

The resort is undertaking a multiyear, \$850 million (JPY 128 billion) transformation to become a year-round international destination. Plans include redesigned trails, a racquet center with pickleball and paddle courts, a landscaped 36-hole golf

Dining is another highlight. “Whether it’s authentic teppanyaki, sushi, or modern fusion, the food speaks for itself,” Wong says. Seasonal menus showcase local ingredients and innovative culinary styles.

APPI also plays a role in regional revitalization, creating jobs and professional opportunities in the hospitality and tourism sectors. The goal is to keep young graduates in the area while supporting long-term growth.

“APPI is an integral part of the Hachimantai community,” Wong says. “We will continue to contribute to the region not only by creating economic growth, but also by introducing new ideas and international perspectives.”

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