

A Song of Autumn

Japan is blessed with four seasons, which Japanese people celebrate and mark with flowers and poems appropriate to the time of the year. Another way that Japanese people show their appreciation for the seasons is with color. For winter there is the white of snow; for spring, the pink of cherry blossoms and various shades of green. Summer is the time of the blue ocean and sky.

For autumn we have yellow and red. These colors have strong associations with the season: Yellow is for gold, the color of ginkgo nuts and ripe grain, and red comes from the colors of the autumn foliage.

Autumn is also the time for harvesting fruits and grains. Shops are filled with new rice, potatoes, Japanese pumpkins, and mandarin oranges. This time of year is marked by verses celebrating the season.

We hope you have the opportunity to visit Japan in autumn.

The Harvest Feast



A Retro Harvest Scene: Maruyama Senmaida, Mie Prefecture

Maruyama Senmaida (Thousand Paddies of Maruyama) was the crystallization of the wisdom of our Japanese forebears. It was their solution to the problem of how to grow rice—the staple of the Japanese diet—in a rugged, mountainous setting. With advances in agriculture, this style appears outdated, and is steadily disappearing. Those places where it remains, though, retain a distinctive beauty in their landscape, a sense of tradition, and a slower pace of life. While no one disputes that Japanese rice grown in the more “modern” way, on flat plains, is delicious, anyone would agree that rice grown on terraced paddies like these, harvested by hand, and dried naturally in the sun, is truly something special.



Satsumaimo (Sweet Potato)

Many foreign visitors are surprised when they first see little trucks or pushcarts with an oven in the back for roasting sweet potatoes. In back streets all over Japan, one can hear the plaintive cry of the vendors “Ishiyaki-imo!” (Roasted sweet potatoes). If you hear that, you should rush out to get one. These sweet potatoes are delicious; they are like a gift from heaven.



Kabocha (Japanese Pumpkin)

The Japanese *kabocha* is like a pumpkin, but smaller. Just as everybody loves pumpkin pie, people in Japan love dishes that include the slightly sweet *kabocha*. They can be prepared as tempura, stewed until soft, or mashed to a pulp for mixing with other ingredients in a salad. Orange *kabocha* on the autumn table is a sign of a sweet, sweet time!



Mikan (Mandarin Oranges)

The *mikan* is a type of orange, but the peel is thinner than an orange's and easier to remove. After the *mikan* is peeled, the sections are eaten one at a time. Japan has many other varieties of citrus as well. Please try many different kinds during your trip. Many Japanese love them so much, they buy *mikan* by the box.



Kuri (Chestnuts)

Chestnuts are one of Japanese people's favorite snacks. Japanese confectioners make many delicious sweets using chestnuts. In recent years, makers of Western sweets have been trying to keep up in autumn by featuring their own chestnut treats. If ever you encounter the rare *waguri* (Japanese chestnut), you are truly lucky. This type of chestnut has a flavor that is unique to Japan.



Sanma (Pacific Saury, Mackerel Pike)

The name of this fish in Japanese—*sanma*—means “autumn knife fish.” The news that *sanma* are available means that autumn has come. The Sanriku coast in Tohoku, which was ravaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake, is well known for its delicious *sanma*. Their return to fish markets is a sign that the harbors of Tohoku are returning to normal.



Kani (Snow Crab)

In Japan we say that if someone is angry, take him or her to eat crab. No one can talk much while eating crab Japanese style. Digging into the legs with a slender fork takes concentration, which brings a friendly silence to the table. The final course is often a porridge of crab meat and rice. By this time, everyone forgets why they were ever angry to begin with. True happiness!

Autumn Colors



A Natural Work of Art: To no Hetsuri, Fukushima Prefecture

To no Hetsuri is a beautiful spot in Aizu, Fukushima Prefecture, that has been designated a natural national monument. The To no Hetsuri cliffs are 200 meters wide, carved by the forces of nature over the course of a million years. In autumn, the contrast between the white cliffs and the brightly colored leaves paints a breathtaking vista. In spring, lavender wisteria flowers adorn the towering cliffs.



Kegan Falls: Tochigi Prefecture

If you visit in autumn, Kegan Falls is particularly stunning, dressed in its colorful leaves, but the huge waterfall is beautiful at any time of year. Enjoy it as a powerful torrent amid the fresh greens of spring, its coolness in midsummer, or as a partly frozen sculpture in winter. Nearby is Lake Chuzenji, a great place to escape the summer heat, and many other places of historical importance.



Oirase Gorge: Aomori Prefecture

Aomori Prefecture's Oirase Gorge boasts some of Japan's most beautiful scenery. The gorge extends for 14 kilometers from the shores of Lake Towada, with numerous waterfalls along the way, hence its nickname: Cascade Road. There are many hotels and inns where one can take in the beautiful surroundings. It is a fantastic place for a slow walk or a bike ride.



Showa Memorial Park: Tokyo

Given the words "autumn," "yellow," and "tree," any Japanese person would respond with the word "ginkgo." Ginkgo trees are everywhere in Japan, and in autumn they give a brilliant yellow hue to urban settings. Somehow, though, the ginkgo trees in Showa Memorial Park are special. A carpet of fallen ginkgo leaves is an unforgettable sight. Who would not hesitate to disturb their beauty?



Shirakimine Plateau: Nagasaki Prefecture

The cosmos flower is as beautiful as the cherry blossoms of spring; in fact, the way to write "cosmos" in Japanese is by putting together the word for "autumn" and "cherry blossom." Nagasaki's Shirakimine Plateau is one of the best places to see an entire meadow of cosmos. There is nothing like standing in the midst of a field of flowers to make one feel like the lead character in a dramatic saga.



Lake Kawaguchi: Yamanashi Prefecture

Mount Fuji is surrounded by the Fuji Five Lakes, a landscape combining trees, flowers, and water. It is impossible to tell which is more beautiful, the cherry trees in spring or the colorful leaves in autumn against the backdrop of Mount Fuji. Lake Kawaguchi is beautiful by day and by night: lights illuminate the autumn leaves in the evening, and best of all is the profound beauty of the colorful leaves vying to outdo the changing colors of Mount Fuji at sunset.