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JAPAN HAS A DISCOVERY FOR EVERY SEASON

Japan is a country rich in tradition, cultural expression, innovation and natural beauty. It is, perhaps, this unique combination of tradition and contemporary life, and the juxtaposition of nature and technology, that has made Japan such an attractive destination for travelers.

Indeed, during 2017, Japan hosted approximately 30 million visitors with



Rapid Growth of Visitors to Japan

consistent increases to visitor traffic over the past five years.

Visitors who travel to Japan can enjoy cultural traditions dating back centuries. Such traditions are on full display in the ancient capitals of Kyoto and Nara, where centuries-old temples and shrines populate the landscape and are well-maintained while playing host to many visiting worshippers.

At the same time, visi-

tors can traverse to various parts of the country to view Japan's many wonders



A majestic view of Mount Fuji

while travelling on one of the most efficient rail services in the world – the Shinkansen bullet train.

In fact, travelers may observe just how efficient the Shinkansen bullet train network is, with trains travelling at 300 km/hour, and departing stations every four minutes while remarkably only managing an average delay of just 54 seconds for departures.

On various tours, Japan's picturesque landscapes are adorned with breathtaking views of snow-capped mountains, lush, green forests, magnificent lakes and inviting beaches.

Among the most well-known attractions is Mount Fuji, the highest mountain in Japan and a very popular site among those who

enjoy the challenge of outdoor adventures; not to mention the awe-inspiring views.

Japan's hot springs, or "Onsen" as they are known locally, are also quite appealing to visitors eager to experience a rejuvenating outdoor bath. A refreshing and relaxing bath in an "Onsen" is all part of the Japanese cultural experience.

Some of the most famous sites to visit are the Monuments of Ancient Kyoto (including Kiyomizudera Temple and the Kinkakuji Golden Pavilion), the Shrines and Temples of Nikko (including the Toshogu Shrine), and Himeji Castle.

During the year, Japan is host to four distinctive seasons, each of which contributes to the transformative and mesmerizing beauty of the landscape.



Shinkansen Bullet Trains

JAPAN HAS A DISCOVERY FOR EVERY SEASON (CONTINUED)



Cherry Blossoms in bloom

For Japan, one of the particularly attractive seasons is spring. Spring time

in Japan is synonymous with the pink hues of the cherry blossoms.

Many Japanese engage in "hanami" during this time, which refers to flower appreciation picnics under the blooms of cherry blossom trees.

Unfortunately, the

lifespan of the cherry blossoms is fleeting, so visitors can only enjoy them for



Kinkakuji, Zen Buddhist Temple

one week before the trees shed their pink petals.

Japan has much to offer, and most travelers are very satisfied after their variety of experiences with Japan's fascinating traditions, beautiful landscapes, culinary wonders and abundance of shopping options.

EXPLORE THE CULINARY CULTURE AND TRADITIONS OF JAPANESE CUISINE

When people have a conversation about Japan, inevitably, the topic of Japan's cuisine is mentioned: from sushi to tempura, or from miso soup to soba noodles.

Those who frequent the local restaurants, may have noticed the numerous options for Japanese cuisine now available in the Caribbean.



A finely prepared Sushi dish

Indeed, sushi/sashimi has become so popular that casual shoppers can now find them neatly packaged and readily available in the local supermarkets, gourmet stores, and even in

pharmacies.



An inviting dish of Ramen

Given the international reputation of Japanese cuisine, it is no surprise that many visitors to Japan have the Japanese culinary experience firmly perched at the top of their "to do" list.

One of the first things that visitors discover is the immense assortment of seasonal and regional dishes on offer. Eating establishments come in many different forms: from the casual mobile food stands to the centuries-old ryotei (traditional restaurant), or

uniquely themed restaurants featuring a manga or samurai experience.

Sushi, as the most recognizable Japanese dish, is widely consumed in Japan. There are seven types of sushi available, including Gunkan, Inari, Temaki, Chirashi, Nigiri, Oshizushi, and Norimaki.

Ramen, a noodle soup dish, is also quite popular. Visitors will discover that there are a variety of ramen dishes with a wide selection of toppings to choose from.

The best place to enjoy ramen is at the specialized ramen restaurants, ramenya, which can be easily found near train stations, on busy streets, or in entertainment districts. There are even a few ramen museums in Yokohama for those who wish to expand

their ramen knowledge.

There is also an appetizing selection of dishes for meat-lovers to enjoy, such as yakitori (skewered grilled chicken), tonkatsu (deep fried pork cutlets) and yakiniku (grilled pieces of meat like — mostly pork and beef).



A delightful display of "Washoku": a traditional Japanese diet

"Washoku", or Japanese cuisine, is a well-balanced and healthy diet with an emphasis on the beauty of nature in the presentation. The healthy nature of "Washoku" has greatly contributed to the longevity of Japanese people.

TAKING A LOOK AT THE SHOPPING SCENE IN JAPAN



Shopping district in Shinjuku, Tokyo

In Japan, travelers are immediately presented with an opportunity to ful-

fill a high priority item on their list: shopping.

Underground shopping malls are situated around or below train stations, while shopping districts, clustered around the major stations in large cities like Tokyo and Osaka, are a common sight in Japan.

Many visitors are keen to check out the numerous shopping centers, offering a wide range of items from traditional souvenirs and Japanese sweets, to the latest consumer technology, fashion and accessories.

While shoppers can visit the usual shopping

malls, outlet malls and department stores, they can also try the ever-popular electronics stores, 100 yen shops, covered shopping arcades (nostalgic street shops), and the wide variety of shops lining the approaches to popular temples and shrines.

MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPERIENCE JAPAN'S FESTIVE CULTURE



A giant float featured in the Aomori Nebuta Festival in early August

In Japan, "matsuri" or festival, describes a wide variety of civil and religious ceremonies, particularly shrine festivals of Shinto. Most shrines host at least one festival, with others holding several throughout the year.

Although there is no exact figure available, it is estimated that there are around 200,000 festivals held during the calendar year.

Among others, Japan has religious festivals, performance festivals, music festivals, dance festivals, snow festivals and fire festivals. Some festivals are quite conservative, while others are considered wild.

Some of the festivals are limited to communities or cities, while others are celebrated nationwide, such as the Tanabata (Star) festival in July, and the Doll's festival in March.

Some festivals reflect the changing of the seasons. The Setsubun festivals signal the end of winter in February and mark the coming of spring.

Obon week is Japan's third major holiday season and occurs in August. The Obon festival involves prayers for the souls of departed ancestors. It is believed that the spirits of ancestors return during Obon in order to visit relatives. Lanterns are hung in front of homes to guide ancestors' spirits, while Obon dances are per-

made to temples and house altars.

A handful of small communities place floating lanterns on lakes, rivers and seas in order to guide spirits back to their world. This tradition offers a delightful visual spectacle to visitors in mid-August.



Float Parade in Handa in October

Autumn sees the arrival of numerous harvest festivals, with rice collected to make the first sake (Japanese Rice Wine) of the year.

These events are golden opportunities for visitors to interact with locals and enjoy a fun-loving aspect of Japanese culture.



Akita Kantou Festival celebrated in early August

formed and food offerings