

# JAPAN HIGHLIGHTS

**Dec - Mar** (actually year long now in Japan). This is still the best strawberry picking season. Nothing beats the freshly plucked strawberries and dip them in condense milk, the way how Japanese eat them!



Dec is generally a tricky month for ski. A lot of places these days does not snow till mid-late dec. So I would not commit to ski fields if possible. If you must, 3<sup>rd</sup> week of dec till **end Feb for Honshu and mid Dec till end Mar for Hokkaido** will be safest.

Winter is a good time for the Japanese to have HOTPOT (called Nabe) or Sukiyaki. Why not have a farmer style Sukiyaki while visiting a real farmer house in lake Biwa. This is best when you have half a morning and is staying in Kyoto or Osaka in **Dec - Mar**.



Do you know there is an Ice Igloos village built on top of a frozen lake in Hokkaido. Actually there are 2 more popular one. One is near to Tomamu resort, where winter is a good time to see the sea of clouds too. The original one is built on Lake Shikaribetsu, and has an Ice bar and an outdoor ice onsen pool. Village only appear from **last week of Jan till end March**.

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If you are basing at Nagoya between **Dec - May**, why not make a side trip to see the night illumination of Japan's amazing Nabana no Sato winter light show. Walk through the 200m tunnel of lights. This is less season dependent and would be a lot easier to plan



Shirakawago village night illumination. If your group is visiting the UNESCO village during the below 4 dates, why not do a night tour there to see the illumination?

**Jan 21,28, Feb 2,12**

Closer to Tokyo, 1.5hrs drive away, visit the famous wisteria garden, Ashikaga flower park, from **Dec – Early Feb** at night. replacing the draping wisteria flowers are hanging lights that are meant to resemble seasonal flowers and music-synchronized light shows.



Juhyo appears from **Jan to Mar, with Feb** being the best season to see the legendary Ice monster on Mt ZAO. All trees are covered with snow and ice. Juhyo only formed with extremely wet and cold wind from Siberia. When that wet wind hits the high mountain like Zao, Juhyo appears. It is one of the most unique and beautiful scenery of Japanese winter. This is my next spot to explore too!

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**End Jan to end Feb** is also the season of the Ice breaker cruise in Hokkaido. Also throughout February, there are many ice festivals scattered around different cities of Hokkaido. Do not miss this very unique experience when visiting Hokkaido in Feb.



Omizutori Festival – **1-14mar**, festival to welcome Spring to Nara with a wide range of rituals. The main events involve burning giant torches surprisingly close to a 1200 year old wooden building at Todaiji Temple to rain sacred sparks on a crowd standing below. Priests conduct a fire ceremony every evening from 6pm, swinging long torches in the air to ward off evil. At 2am on the 13th, water is drawn from the 1200 year-old well and offered to visitors.

Sumo Spring Basho, **March 11-25 (2018)**, Osaka  
The only chance of the year to see a professional sumo tournament in Osaka. Each day of the tournament is like a marathon of Sumo with matches running from early morning to late afternoon. Each day builds with intensity as higher ranked wrestlers are scheduled last.



There are a lot more. I have avoided festivals/events that are 1 or 2 days as they are hard to plan in trips unless you have locals to bring you there.

One point of advice is that do not ONLY plan these as the main highlight of the trip. These can add flavours to the journey but more importantly is how you can route them smoothly into your program,

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