

Drink in the Four Seasons

[PR]

Traditionally tourists to Japan visit the ancient cities of *Kyoto* and *Nara*, and travel to *Mt. Fuji*, to capture the essence of Japan. But these delights are not all that Japan has to offer.

The Popularity of Powder Snow

Currently experiencing a popularity boom amongst Australians, with a population of only 16,000, is *Hokkaido's Kutchan Town*. *Hokkaido* is the northernmost of the four main islands that comprise the Japanese archipelago. Here in *Kutchan Town* lies *Niseko*, one of the foremost ski resorts in Japan. With minimal, if any, time difference between Australia and *Hokkaido*, and blessed with breathtaking scenery, a plenitude of hot springs, and the allure of the world's best powder snow, the popularity of *Niseko* has risen primarily through word of mouth, and of course, the Internet. In the wake of *Niseko's* boom, *Hakuba Village* in *Nagano* prefecture, which was host to the 1998 Winter Olympic Games, also experienced a surge in clientele. Another representative of Japan's sublime skiing territory, the popularity of *Hakuba* too, is not without good reason. It enjoys high-quality snow, and has numerous courses to exhilarate and delight beginners to highly experienced sportspeople. One has the convenience of being able to ride the bullet train from *Tokyo*, followed by the bus, to reach *Hakuba* in a mere three hours. Situated at the foot of the Northern Alps of Japan, skiers can revel in the magnificent scenery as they sketch ski trails in the snow.

Cherry Blossoms; A View of Simple Majesty

Amongst the floral symbols of spring, the cherry blossom (*Sakura*) is the most celebrated flower in Japan. With more than a hundred naturally occurring varieties, the Japanese have grown attached to the array of blossoms, from white



Cherry blossoms blooming in the foss' depths



The colourful valley of autumn leaves



Snow flakes whirling in a silvery world

and rose, to deep, rich red. Cherry blossoms are seen throughout Japan, in each area blooming for just a brief moment of spring, the petals scattering in only a fortnight from when they first bloom. In Japan, cherry blossoms herald turning points in life; blooming to coincide with the first school semester, beginning in April, entrance ceremonies, the transition to higher education, and people's first independent steps into society. In addition, in Japan there is the custom of 'Flower Viewing', where people gather under the flowering trees to feast, admire the blossoms, and celebrate the arrival of spring. To see the flowers at night, and to watch them scattering in unison, are of the most remarkable Japanese images.

Cherry Blossoms in Spring; Maple Leaves in Autumn

'*Kouyou*' refers to the phenomenon of the leaves of deciduous trees changing colour in the autumn, from bright pea-green, to scarlet, canary-yellow and gold. *Kouyou* begins in *Hokkaido* in September, and gradually travels south down the Japanese archipelago. Come this season, many Japanese people step out with a spirit of adventure into the cooling air to 'hunt the autumn leaves'. In mountainous areas there is the added pleasure of being able to experience the spectacular colours whilst trekking and climbing. 

Should you require further information about tours and bookings for the abovementioned activities, please direct all enquiries to H.I.S. Westralia Pty Ltd where the staff will be happy to assist you.

Information:

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