

Regional Guide 2010 – Joetsu City 上越市



Joetsu City (上越市) and Niigata-ken (新潟県)

The region offers you a little bit of everything; more so, in my opinion, than prefectures in the far north or south of the country. Joetsu has all the amenities you would expect from a city of its size – the conveyor-belt sushi, karaoke, intercity buses and trains, cinema, DVD rental, 100¥ shops, multi-storey driving ranges and *izakaiyas* (Japanese pubs). The smaller towns that make up “Greater Joetsu” provide amenities on a more local level – get out, explore and see what you can find! If Joetsu isn’t big enough for you, Niigata City (the prefectural capital), Nagaoka City, and Nagano City are all within easy reach. Also, Tokyo is just a hop, skip and a jump by Shinkansen while Kyoto is around four to five hours away.

Joetsu is the third biggest city in Niigata Prefecture after Niigata and Nagaoka. About 30 years ago the towns of Naoetsu and Takada merged to create Joetsu City. The areas are still very distinct and each has their own centre with shops, restaurants, bars etc. Naoetsu is on the Sea of Japan and is a busy port, while Takada is a castle town about 10 minutes inland. Joetsu is not blessed with a comprehensive transport network, so most people use cars or bicycles to get around.

As of January 1st of 2005, another shake-up saw 14 municipalities - the former Joetsu City and the smaller municipalities of Yasuzuka, Urugawara, Oshima, Maki, Kakizaki, Ogata, Kubiki, Yoshikawa, Nakago, Itakura, Kiyosato, Sanwa, and Nadachi - merge together to give birth to a new city with a population of over 210,000 people. Once you get out of Joetsu City proper, things can get pretty rural, pretty quickly. Within minutes of leaving the tight streets of Takada or Naoetsu, paddy fields carpet the landscape in all directions. Niigata is said to produce the best rice in Japan and, as a result, some of its best sake.

“Joetsu – a city for all seasons”

In this part of the country the seasons are very distinct.

In summer there’s a thick wall of humidity accompanied by a chorus of frogs and cicadas (*semi*, in Japanese). This is the time to enjoy the numerous local festivals, the world famous firework display in Nagaoka, the Fuji Rock Festival (which is in Niigata and nowhere near Mt. Fuji) and the Earth Celebration festival just across the water on Sado Island.

In autumn, a cool breeze brings welcome relief from the heat and with it the beautiful autumn leaves.

In winter we get an extraordinary amount of snow. Niigata and neighbouring Nagano are two of the best places for winter sports in Japan. For these months your social life is transported to the slopes of Mt. Myoko (just an hour from Joetsu). This is also the time of year when you put your inhibitions to one side and become a regular at your local *onsen* (hot spring). Nearby Tokamachi puts on an excellent snow festival, second only to Sapporo’s Yuki Matsuri.

Spring is heralded by the famous cherry blossom of Takada Park, where sake is drunk and haiku are penned.

Places to eat / shopping

Shops

JUSCO is the first shop you should be familiar with in Joetsu. It has pretty much anything you'll need for your home on the ground floor and there are various other shops on the first floor. It's not always the cheapest place to get stuff, so check out the 100¥ shop first.

Honcho is the main shopping street in Takada. There are too many to mention here, but there are some nice *izakayas* mixed in there for good measure.

Supermarkets

There are many **Harashin** and **Narus** stores throughout Joetsu and some of them are 24-hour. Narus is probably the cheapest. **JUSCO** has a large food section, while **Yamaya** (next to JUSCO) has a good selection of booze and foreign food. **Ichiko** is a bit more posh. There is a supermarket in **Valor** but it doesn't have a great selection and isn't as cheap as Narus. Rural farmer's market stores and other local supermarkets can be good for seasonal fruit and veg.

- **Home stores:** Komeri, Musashi, FMP
- **Large drug store:** Aoki (can be found all over Joetsu. Look for the red and white sign, a man walking out of an "A", good value with a point card)
- **Clothes:** UniQlo (basic fashion as well as cheap *yukata* in the summer); JUSCO upstairs; Aoyama (formal men's clothing); Valor (good for womens fashion)
- **Electronic goods:** Kojima, Yamada Denki, Joshin (whichever one you go to make sure you get a point card, especially if you are going to make big purchases)
- **DVD / CD rental:** Tsutaya (even if you don't rent DVDs there it is worth getting the point card because it can be used all over the place; ビデオ1 (Video 1 – often has some crazy offers such as 1 ¥ rental, and has some old classics that you probably can't find elsewhere); GEO (look out for the 100 ¥ rental days)
- **Books:** Toda Books (the best selection of English books in Joetsu), Book-Off, Mr Books, Shimin Plaza book exchange, and Chiyudo. Chiyudo also contains the closest thing you will find to a Starbucks in Joetsu – Barista Café
- **Department stores:** Daiwa (near Takada station) is Joetsu's only department-style store
- **General:** JUSCO, Valor, Ito Yokado (shopping mall in Naoetsu), Cowboy / Wing Market area (many shops of different kinds, a few restaurants and even an *onsen*), 100¥ shops, Avenue (good for presents)
- **Sporting and outdoor goods:** Sports Depot, Xebio, Masa (snow/surf/skate boarding)
- **Second-hand shops:** Second Street, Hard-Off, Off-House
- **Cinema:** J-Max
- **Shimin Plaza:** English book exchange, internet, Japanese classes (Tues 5.30pm – 7.00pm from September), JOIN (Joetsu International Network)
- **Internet:** Galaxy, on Joetsu Odori. Requires registration, but is not too expensive. There are some free drinks, and you can order food. Very useful before you have internet in your home.

100¥ shops

There's probably one near where you live. For basic stuff, it's always worth trying the 100¥ shop first. If you can't buy it in a 100¥ shop, you probably don't need it! 100¥ shops in Joetsu City itself include Nanjamura near JUSCO and Seria near Shimin Plaza. There is also a big Daisou near Cowboy, and one in Valor (the mall on the way to Arai/Itakura).

Kombini (a contraction and katakanising of "convenience store")

A bit of an institution in Japan. You can do everything in a *kombini*, from buying sumo tickets to paying your Amazon bill. They often also have food, beer, ATMs, photo printing and the all-important loo. Main chains are 7/11, Lawson, Daily Yamazaki, Save-On and Circle K.

Restaurants

- **Conveyor belt sushi** (*kaiten-zushi*) – Tomizushi (all over the place), Kappa Zushi (Joetsu Odori, next to Pizza Hut and KFC), Sushi Ondo, Kito-Kito Sushi
- **(Japanese) curry** - Coco Ichiban (near Toda Books, JUSCO area)
- **Fast food** - Pizza Hut (Takada, Joetsu Odori), KFC (same as PH), 3 McDonalds (2 on Joetsu Odori – one in Takada the other nearer Naoetsu; and a new one on Route 63), Mos Burger (3 on Joetsu Odori – one in Takada, one on the way to Arai, and another near Ito Yokado on the way to Naoetsu), Lotteria (near JUSCO)
- **Café / restaurant** – Heaven’s Café (Cowboy) Mister Donuts (in JUSCO and Valor – good doughnuts and free refills on coffee)
- **Family restaurant** - Apple Grim (Takada, Joetsu Odori), Gusto (Joetsu Odori, adjacent to McDonalds), Satomi (Route 63, cheap Japanese food)
- **Italian** - Cannery Row (near JUSCO), El Camino (near JUSCO, isn’t great), Pizzeria (near Uniqlo), Nishi Mori (Takada, by Omachi EMS), Tommy Say (Nakamachi, Takada, seafood)
- **Ice Cream** - Baskin Robins (in JUSCO)
- **Chinese** – Bamiyan (near JUSCO), Shanghai Syokudo (Takada, near Narus), Tokusaiko (One on Honcho, Takada, and the other near Bird’s Inn on Route 63)
- **Steakhouse / burger restaurant** - Bird’s Inn Café (Route 63), Bar 66 (Takada, near Omachi EMS and Nishi mori)
- **Yakiniku** – Sanmu (near JUSCO), Gyu-kaku (Honcho), and a bunch down on Route 8
- **Shabu shabu** – Gyuan (Route 63, also does *yaki-niku*, not that cheap but good)
- **Loisir** – hotel in Takada with all you can eat/drink beer garden.
- **Yasune** – Beer garden in Takada, near Nakamachi.
- There are also countless ramen shops throughout the city.

Onsen / Sento

Onsen are a natural Japanese hot spring. They are a central part of Japanese relaxation and tourism. There is a definite etiquette to follow – rather than listing it here, I’d recommend going with someone who can show you the ropes. *Sento* are similar to *onsen*, but their water is not derived from natural hot springs. Go and try out your local *onsen*. It’s a great way to pass the time. To complete the experience, have a bite to eat, strap yourself into a massage chair for 10 minutes and then pass out on the tatami. Shichifuku is a *sento* near JUSCO and Tennen is a new *onsen* near the Education Plaza. For a good list of Joetsu *onsen* go to www.city.joetsu.niigata.jp and look under *Tourism*.

Izakaiya (Japanese pub)

These are often little hole in the wall affairs, but popular ones in Joetsu are Funae (near Takada Station, great atmosphere), Tokusaiko (one on Honcho and another near Bird’s Inn Café, Chinese food), wara wara (also on Honcho, cheapish). Another good effort is Hoheto, which is conveniently located out in Itakura.

Bars

Those frequented by the ALT population are PTA (a cosy karaoke bar) and Nick's, which is the most western-style bar in Joetsu. Bar 66 is a nice café style place good for day or night with good food and Guinness on tap. Nakamachi is the main drinking street in Takada and there are loads of bars there.

Some favourite bars with events

Club Nova – dub/reggae/hip-hop/rock/DJs events once a month

Bird's Inn – parties held every few months with DJs and lots of food!

66 – Occasional rock DJs and events. Cosy little bar, open for lunch too!

Mocco Mocco – relaxing bar with chilled atmosphere, gets full quite quickly.

Jazz and Swing – small and smoky, occasionally hosts jazz musicians.

PTA – Free karaoke and open until the wee hours – usually a good after party place.

Café faith – standard Western style bar

Nick's bar – Beer, movies and music. Western style.

For detailed information on these venues and bars please see <http://snipurl.com/1omzm>

Getting to and from bars

Unfortunately, most people living in Joetsu live in the country regions outside of the main town, making car transport necessary which can be a slight inconvenience when it comes to parties in town!

Car pooling and having a designated driver is the cheapest option, but if everyone wants to drink things can get a little expensive. Taxis are generally quite expensive, while train services are somewhat limited at night.

If you are going to take a car, the cheapest car park is behind Daishi bank in Takada, it is also open 24 hours. Always check rates before driving into car parks because some are pretty expensive!

Driving your car in and getting a *Daiko* back is the cheapest way to get into town. That way you don't pay for a taxi both ways. The *daiko* drivers will take you and your car home for a reasonable price.

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| ➤ Joetsu Daiko | 0120-39-0126 |
| ➤ IM Taxi | 0255-23-3188 |
| ➤ Family Taxi | 0255-23-6222 |
| ➤ Rupan | 0255-21-5070 |

Karaoke

An absolute institution in Japan. A favourite venue is the Takada Station Mae Karaoke shop – excellent all-you-can-drink deal and friendly staff. Maneki Neko (“the beckoning cat”) has several branches throughout the city, while Cote d’Azur (Joetsu Odori, near Shimin Plaza) allows you to bring your own booze. PTA is a karaoke bar, but there are no private rooms, so you’ll have to sing in front of everyone!

Things to see and do in Joetsu

- **Region Plaza** – theatre, swimming pool, ice rink (Oct - Apr)
- **Joetsu Bunkakaikan** – Joetsu Cultural Hall where you can see Noh, classical music, ballet, etc
- **Takada Library** – this library has occasional art exhibitions throughout the year
- **Takada Park** – great place to chill. Especially beautiful in August with the lotus plants and in springtime when the cherry blossom reaches Joetsu.
- **Bowling** (on Route 8) – other than bowling there is a small arcade and pool tables
- **JJ's** – Large arcade with a number of other activities - ¥100 for 15mins (need to get membership).
- **Hiking** – Mt. Myoko and Mt. Hiuchi beg to be climbed (both around 2,500m). Yoneyama (1,000m) is an easier option.
- **Beaches** – There are a number of beaches up and down the coast (best place for them, if you ask me). Tanihama, which is south of Naoetsu is worth a visit while the weather's good.
- **Skiing / snowboarding** – Myoko has a number of resorts - Ikenotaira, Suginojima, Akakura, and Pine Valley. Cupid Valley in Yasazuka is also popular. With Nagano and the Japan Alps on your doorstep, you won't have to go too far to find some of the white stuff. www.snowjapan.com will lead the way. There is also a ski museum at Kanaya-san – Skiing was first introduced to Japan in Joetsu.
- **Aquarium** – over 1000 marine animals and a summer dolphin show
- **Dry bobsleigh run** – Kanaya-san has this option for adrenaline junkies after the snow has melted. There is also a BMX track in the same area.
- **Iwanohara winery** – the local plonk. They have tastings and tours (Apr – Nov). In Japanese only.
- **Eating!**

Surrounding area attractions

Ninja mura in Togakushi (you'll need a car to get there) is a ninja park with lots of cool playground equipment to practice your ninja skills. It's actually intended for children, but adult foreigners can have a lot of fun there, too!

Nagano-city – a standard big city with shopping, movie theatre, food etc.

Nagaoka-city – another big city with shopping, museums, food etc.

Tokamachi – a mountain town which is most popular in the winter, good snowboarding and a snow festival are some of its highlights.

Niigata – Big city with shopping, movie theatre, museums, food, visas, ferries and a small airport.

Kashiwazaki – a medium sized city with popular beaches, food and shopping. This was the epicentre of the earthquake a couple of years ago in Niigata prefecture.

Welcome Events

There are many regional local events planned. This is a good chance to get out and about early doors and see a bit of the prefecture. More details to follow.

Essentials

Banks and Post Offices

Opening hours are less than convenient. Banks are only open until 3pm (in some larger places, if you are very lucky, 4:30pm), but your school will let you nip out for half an hour or so if you ask nicely. ATM withdrawals are available until 9pm during the week and 7pm at weekends. Convenience stores often have ATMs, but there is a small charge for withdrawals.

All ATMs are closed on national holidays, so stock up on cash beforehand!

Post Offices are open from 8am to 5pm, but the central Post Office in Takada is open 24 hours for sending letters and parcels. You can also take care of money transfers and the like, but only until 4pm.

Communication

Cell phones are cheap and omnipresent. The three networks are **docomo**, **au** and **Softbank**. I think docomo has the best coverage in Joetsu, but au is a little cheaper. Softbank seems to have the least coverage, but also has some pretty funky phones (including the iPhone). There's a lot paperwork and contract stuff to sort out when you get a phone, so it's best to ask your supervisor. You will need your name stamp (hanko), residence card, bankbook and patience.

Other options for contacting those at home are skype, MSN messenger and Yahoo! messenger. All of these allow free calls from computer-computer and calls to landlines for a fee. You will of course need to buy a headset. Getting your friends at home to buy headsets and webcams is a nice way to stay in touch. Using Skype, you can call real phones/have people call you from real phones for under 1000 yen a month.

Information about setting up an internet connection can be found at www.bbapply.com or call the Yahoo! BB English line on 0800-111-1130. Alternatively, ask a local veteran ALT to help.

Getting paid and paying bills

We are paid on the 21st of every month. The money goes directly into your account, but Mr. Tojo sends you a pay slip through the internal mail. It may take a month or so to sort out, but most of your bills will come out of you bank account automatically – if this is what you want to happen. Other bills must be paid either at the bank or at a convenience store.

Travel and holidays

Major holiday periods in Japan are: New Year, Hanami (the cherry blossom festivals around April – time varies depending on the weather), Golden Week (late Apr - early May), August (the schools are closed) and when the leaves change in autumn (Oct / Nov). This is when most Japanese people take their holidays, thus it can be expensive to travel and difficult to book accommodation. It's always advisable to book ahead as you never know if your trip happens coincide with a local festival.

If you are going to travel abroad during your stay in Japan, you will need to get a re-entry permit. The nearest places to Joetsu you can go to get the permit are Nagano City or Niigata City. See the Niigata JET website for more info.

Niigata is the nearest airport, which services a few international locations as well as the Japanese hotspots. Unusually, airport parking doesn't cost the earth. IM Taxi operates an airport minibus to Narita for about ¥13,000 one-way. You have to book in advance, ask your JTE to help - 0255-233-188.

Especially for foreign travel, travelling off-peak can be much cheaper than at peak times. However, try to find a balance between taking advantage of these off peak deals and being at school. Taking three weeks off in the middle of term to go backpacking around the Philippines will put your English department colleagues in a bit of position.

Japan has many national holidays dotted throughout the year. Adding a couple of days of paid leave to fill in the gaps between these holidays and the nearest weekend is a good way to make your leave go further. For example, if Wednesday is a holiday, then taking Thursday and Friday as paid leave gives you a five day break. Look ahead in your JET diary for possible long weekends.

****Be careful that your long weekend plans don't clash with scheduled elementary school visits****

Travel within Joetsu and Japan in general

In Joetsu and around, the main roads are Route 18, which runs from Joetsu to Arai, and Route 8, which runs through Joetsu from Niigata City down to Itoigawa. The English Japan road atlas is a worthwhile investment – you can order through Amazon Japan if Toda Books doesn't have a copy. The Joetsu Google map can be found at <http://snipurl.com/1omzm>.

Train travel within Japan is efficient, but it can be a little expensive. However, it's worth noting the distance you are covering for you yen. Return from Naoetsu to Tokyo on the Shinkansen is around ¥20,000 and takes 2 ½ hours, while return to Kyoto is ¥25,000 and takes 4 ½ hours. The Kitaguni night train to Kyoto takes 6 hours, has no changes and costs around ¥14,000. What you save in money, you lose in sleep... Train times and prices can be found at www.hyperdia.com and the English train helpline is 050-2016-1603.

Intercity buses are a good option and operate three times a day. An overnight bus from Joetsu to Ikebukuro (Tokyo) costs as little as ¥9,000 return. Tickets can be bought at any of the bus stations on the route.

Taking your car is a feasible option for long distances, especially if you have a car full of people to split tolls. The highway toll roads can really save time on long distances as you cut your way through the mountains rather than driving over them.

Summer

It seems as though it's too hot outside for even the insects, so you'll find that they like to come into your apartment from time to time. The supermarkets and hardware stores sell a large range of defences against whatever has chosen to invade your apartment.

Humidity boxes (joshitsuki) help to stop mould in cupboards. You will need to turn your futon from time to time, again, to fight mould, and leaving it outside to dry out – out of your window or on top of your car is perfect!

Aircon is obviously a great way to keep cool in your apartment, but it does use a lot of energy, so try and use it sparingly.

Carrying a hand towel / sweat-rag is really handy for drying your hands or wiping the beads of sweat pouring down your face. Handheld fans (*uchiwa*) – the manual kind – really effective, so make sure you've got one at your desk.

Winter

You either love it or hate it. Either way, you have to find some way of getting through the snow-filled months in Joetsu.

- **Snowboarding/skiing:** Sports Depot, Xebio and Masa stock gear from October. Buying second-hand equipment can also save you a bit of cash. There are loads of resorts nearby. In recent years many ALTs have bought season passes for Ikenotaira ski resort at Myoko. These can cost less than ¥15,000 if you apply early as a group. A one-day pass without a season pass would cost around ¥4,000, so you can make your money back after only a handful of visits. www.snowjapan.com is the best source of info for reviews and current weather conditions.

- **Niigata Musical:** Another popular pastime is the musical. Each year a group of mainly ALTs put on a charity musical which tours around Niigata. The process of the Niigata charity musical is quite straightforward. Auditions are usually held in September along with the first volunteer trip meeting. Rehearsals occur almost every other weekend between October and

December. Each rehearsal takes place in cities around Niigata Prefecture so everyone can have an opportunity to see parts of the prefecture they might not visit otherwise. Special events are sometimes arranged during the rehearsal weekends. The shows tour around the prefecture and go from January to March. Before we know it, it is early spring and the cast and crew members who contributed their time to the musical embark on the volunteer destination. The charity musical is a multi-layered project with many levels of contribution from a number of different people. NICO is affiliated with the Niigata Papua New Guinea Association and PNG has been the destination for the past two years. Previous destinations also include Fiji, Vanuatu, Sri Lanka, and India. All travel costs are the responsibility of the volunteers, and the money raised by the musical this year went to building materials and education costs in remote villages in the Waria Valley of Papua New Guinea. (more details at the Prefectural orientation, and later via email)

Whatever you choose to do, it's important to get out and socialise to avoid cabin fever. Eating healthily and getting regular exercise is vital.

Tips on keeping warm

- Heat one room.
- Kerosene is pretty cheap and about ¥500 can last you a week.
- A kotatsu (heated table) with a blanket over the top is a very good friend in winter. Electric carpets and blankets can be used in combination as a cocoon to create a kotatsu-like effect.
- Insulating windows with plastic sheets can make a difference to heating bills – special sheets can be bought at hardware stores.
- If you have paper screens, make sure there are no big holes that will let cold air in.
- Small pouches called kairo are cheap and a great to keep in your pockets on really cold days - the kinds that you can stick to the base of your back or put in your shoes are fantastic.
- Layers of clothing work better than one or two thick items.
- The pinnacle of Japanese decadence is to be sitting in a warm onsen with snow gently falling on your head. There are many dotted around Joetsu and it's a great way to warm the soul after a day spent in cold classrooms.

Festivals and annual events

Take two Japanese and a bag of mochi and you've got yourself a festival. Every city, town, village and hamlet has an annual event where they let down their hair and celebrate something. Here is a list of some of the things to see and do throughout the year (more details can be found at www.city.joetsu.niigata.jp). This is by no means an exhaustive list, so keep your ear to the ground for events in your neck of the woods. I'll try and send out an email about any forthcoming events if I get more info.

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| Mid Jan | <u>Kuwadori Valley New Year</u> | Kuwadori |
| Early Feb | <u>Lerch Festival</u> - In honour of Major Lerch, the man responsible for introducing Alpine Skiing to Japan. | Mt. Kanaya |
| Mid Feb | <u>Snow Carnival</u> - This festival is home to an array of winter-related events including massive snowball fights and winter races. | Uragawara |
| Late Feb | <u>Echigo-Oshima Snow Firefly Road</u> - Over 3,000 small candles are lit and placed in nooks carved out of the large snow accumulations on roadsides throughout Oshima Ward. The view at night is amazing. | Oshima |
| Late Feb | <u>Snow Festival Candle Road</u> - Over 50,000 roadside candles and snow sculptures serve to light up the night sky in Yasuzuka ward. | Yasuzuka |
| Early-mid April | <u>Takada Cherry Blossom Festival</u> - Over 4,000 cherry trees surrounding Takada castle make this one of Japan's top three locations for night time cherry blossom viewing. | Takada Park |
| Early-mid April | <u>Sakata-ike Cherry Blossom Festival</u> - Many fun events and 300 <i>Someiyoshino</i> cherry trees make this lake-event very popular. | Kakizaki |
| Late April | <u>O-ike Forest Cherry Blossom Festival</u> - 386 cherry trees line the lake in Kubiki. | Kubiki |
| Late April | <u>Fresh Leaves (Wakaba) Festival</u> - Mountain herbs and a grand 'Bucket Rolling Race' are among the highlights of this spring festival. | Uragawara |
| Early May | <u>Fresh Fish Event: "Blue Sky Auction"</u> - Come along and bid on freshly caught snapper and shrimp. | Nadachi |
| Early May-Oct | <u>Tourist Beach Netting (Jibikiami)</u> - Every Sunday morning (barring bad weather), large nets are laid out in the sea and pulled to shore. The catch is made into the local 'Pirate's soup' and is enjoyed with wine. | Ogata |
| Early June | <u>Ogata "Legend of the Kappa" Festival</u> - This festival is themed around the mythical river-dwelling creature, the <i>Kappa</i> . | Ogata |
| Mid June | <u>Thanksgiving (Hikiage) Trade Festival</u> - Held in remembrance of St. Shinran, this bustling trade festival includes a massive outdoor market with over 250 stalls in all. | Kakizaki |
| Early July | <u>Firefly Concert Festival</u> - See their graceful dance in Firefly Park, along the Firefly Bridge and in the Firefly display area. | Oshima |
| Mid-late July | <u>Joetsu Festival</u> - With its long history, the Gion Matsuri in Joetsu, spread out over a week, is Joetsu's big summer event. Portable shrine parades, a huge fireworks display, and a traditional dance event with more than 2,000 participants are just some of the many highlights. | Takada & Naoetsu |
| Late July | <u>Nadachi Festival</u> - This summer event includes a large-scale traditional dance procession and a firework display. | Nadachi |
| 8 Aug | <u>Uragawara Festival</u> - This event includes traditional Obon and Yosakai Dance Performances, raffles, shops and fireworks. | Uragawara |
| Early Aug | <u>Echigo-Yoshikawa Yattare Festival</u> - Based on the famous poem "Yakata Kanto", this energetic festival has a multitude of events | Yoshikawa |

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| | including a shrine procession. | |
| Early Aug | <u>Summer Carnival in Kiyosato</u> - Run by local residents, this big summer event boasts numerous stalls, traditional Yosakoi Soran Dance, traditional Japanese drum performances and a 20km. portable shrine procession. | Kiyosato |
| Early Aug | <u>Kakizaki Times Summer Festival</u> - In honour of one of Uesugi Kenshin's four top captains, Kakizaki Kageie, events include a large mountain shrine procession. | Kakizaki |
| Early Aug | <u>Summer Evening Breeze Fireworks</u> - The summer night sky is illuminated with over 200 volleys of fireworks. | Kakizaki |
| Early-mid Aug | <u>Joetsu Lotus Festival</u> - People travel from far and wide to see the natural beauty of the lotus-filled moat at Takada Park. | Takada Park |
| Mid Aug | <u>Kenshin Festival</u> - Held in honour of Uesugi Kenshin, a legendary general of the warring states period. Every year the 16th and 17th of August give way to a festival that takes you 400 years into the past. | Kasugayama |
| Late Aug | <u>Unohama Onsen Festival</u> - Held to commemorate the end of the summer season. Events include fireworks, large-net fishing and traditional Yosakoi dance. | Ogata |
| Mid Sept | <u>Nadachi Nabe (Big Pot) Festival</u> - A large hot-pot meal for up to 500 people is prepared from fresh local ingredients harvested from both mountain and sea. | Nadachi |
| Late Sept | <u>O-ike Festival</u> - Held at a campsite near the lake, visitors will enjoy the open-air market and will receive complementary pork-miso soup and special rice balls. | Kubiki |
| Early Oct | <u>Echigo-Yoshikawa Sake Festival</u> - 200 labels of choice rice wine from all over the country are entered in various sake-tastings and contests. In addition, numerous stage shows make for a unique and memorable experience. | Yoshikawa |
| Early Oct | <u>Kubiki Charcoal Grilled Beef Fair</u> - Sampling some of the famous local Kubiki beef, grilled to perfection over charcoal, is a highlight of the autumn season. | Maki |
| Mid Oct | <u>Takada Flower Road</u> - Flower-themed art works serve to accentuate the area around Takada Castle. | Honcho |
| Early Nov | <u>Itakura Furiiai Festival</u> - Art and cultural showcases and a lively market are just some of the many events that make this festival worth visiting. | Itakura |
| Late Nov | <u>Salmon Hunting Rally</u> - Events include barehanded salmon catching and workshops on authentic salmon filleting and preparation. | Nadachi |

Elsewhere in the prefecture

Below are some other notable festivals, events, places and activities in other parts of the prefecture. The numbers in parenthesis refer to the map on the front page. More detailed info can be found in the events section of www.enjoyniigata.com.

Spring

- Okuzu Bunsui and Courtesan Procession - the 3rd Sunday of April (4)
- Hina Matsuri (Doll Festival) - early March, Murakami City (1)
- Fox Bridal Procession - early May, Tsugawa, Aga Town (2)
- Bull Wrestling - May to November, twice per month. Ojiya Town and Nagaoka City, Higashiyama Family Land (6, 5)

Summer

- Shirone Giant Kite Battle – early June, Nakanokuchi River Bank, Shirone (3)
- Gion Kashiwazaki Festival – late July, on the main street near the train station (5)
- Nagaoka Firework Festival – early August, Shinano River, Chosei Bridge, near Nagaoka Station (5)
- Niigata Festival – mid-August (3)
- Kanbara Matsuri - Niigata City, late June (3)
- Murakami Matsuri – early July (1)
- Niigata Jazz Street – mid-July (3)
- Yahiko Lantern Festival – mid-late July
- Fuji Rock Festival – late July, Naeba Ski Resort (6)
- Nagaoka Matsuri – early August (5)
- Niigata Matsuri – early August (3)
- Sanjo Matsuri – early August (4)
- Earth Celebration Festival, mid-late August, Sado Island www.kodo.or.jp (8) Island information, ferry timetables, festivals, etc: <http://www.mijintl.com/>
- Sekikawa Big Snake Festival – mid-late August (1)
- Tokamachi Matsuri - mid-late August (6)

Sea and beaches:

- Sasagawa Nagare – Kangawa to Hamashinbo, Sanpoku Town (1)
- Echigo Nanaura (1)
- Mt. Yahiko (for the view) (3)

Other:

- Marinepia Nihonkai Aquarium, Niigata city. www.arinepia.or.jp ¥1500, 0252 22-7500 (1)
- Teradomari Fish Market. Teradomari Shioaramachi, Nagaoka. 8:30am-5:00pm (5)

Autumn

- Lake Okutadami Pleasure Boat – Otori, Yunotaniimogawa, Nonuma City, 40 minutes (6)
- Kimura Tea Ceremony and Art Museum (5)
- Yahiko Shrine – Chrysanthemum Festival, November
- Valley of Autumn leaves, www.e-yahiko.com (3)
- Shirone grape garden (3)
- Iwanohara vineyard (7)
- Ojiya Hanabi, September (6)
- Senami hot springs, Murakami (1)
- Tsukioka hot springs (1)
- Agano river boat ride – Ishima, Aga Town (2)
- Oku-Aga pleasure cruise – starts at Tsunogami Dam, 1 hr. 15min. (2)

Winter

- Bridegroom throwing festival (Mukonage/Suminuri Festival), Tokamachi City – January (6)
- Hadaka Oshi-ai (“naked pushing”) Festival – early March, Minamiuonuma (6)
- Tokamachi Snow Festival – 3rd Friday of February: downtown area, Tokamachi City (6)
- Skiing & Snowboarding information: www.snowjapan.com
- Lake Hyo-ko – thousands of swans settle here in the wintertime. Suibara, Agano-shi (2)
- Northern Cultural Museum – art museum in Soumi, Niigata-shi (3)
- Ichishima Sake brewery – Shibata-shi (1)