



What's Up Aichi



— Timely Tourist Information On Aichi Prefecture And The Surrounding Central Japan Region —

Inuyama City Shows Off Its True Colors During 2008 Autumn Campaign

Inuyama, in northern Aichi, has long been popular among Nagoyans as quick escape from the city. The close proximity, relaxed pace and manageable size of the town, along with its seemingly inexhaustible supply of fascinating historical and cultural sites, make Inuyama a well-liked destination for city dwellers seeking relief from Nagoya's hustle and bustle.

While Inuyama has enough charm to entice visitors year round, it is during the autumn season that the city is at its most captivating. Fall colors dot the hilly landscape to provide a warm backdrop to the town's precious sites and the scents of the season—whether supplied by fallen leaves being absorbed into moist soil or by the flavors of freshly cooked traditional snacks wafting through narrow thoroughfares—make Inuyama all the more inviting.

This fall is shaping up to be an especially memorable one as Inuyama has embarked on a campaign to share its many seasonal delights with out-of-towners. The fall campaign offers a rare chance to touch genuine history and enjoy breathtaking foliage and arguably Japan's most enchanting season in one quaint and easily navigated setting.

A Walk to Remember

Take the Meitetsu Inuyama line from Meitetsu Nagoya station to Inuyama Yuen station, an approximately 30-minute ride. The town's most famous attractions lie to the west of the station, but they can wait. You'll want to enjoy this portion of your visit while your legs are fresh and the sun is bright, so head east out of the station where Mother Nature awaits you with her palette of fall colors. Speaking of fresh legs, if walking is not your strong suit, you may want to time your visit to Inuyama for the last weekend of November or the first weekend of December, when the city

offers a Free Foliage Route bus (*muryo kōyō rīto basu*) to the best viewing spots and attractions.

As you peer across the Kiso River on your 30-minute walk to Jakko-in Temple, the gold and copper of turning trees reflect off of the surface to create a kaleidoscopic image that is only occasionally broken up by a passing fishing boat. The colorful hills to your right ensure that you're fully enveloped in warm tones for the duration of your mini-hike.



Jakko-in Temple swathed in red maple leaves

The temple, built in 654, is also referred to as Owari Maple Temple, and for good reason—one-thousand of the trees paint the temple grounds a fiery red during the Maple Festival, held from November 15 to December 14. Admission is free and on festival weekends visitors can replenish the calories that they burned during their hike with the temple's seasonal special, *ayu* (sweetfish) sushi.

Continue eastward as you leave Jakko-in for more shades of fall. Fifteen minutes up the road lie Momotaro Shrine and Momotaro Park. Here you'll encounter blissfully kitschy sculptures of characters and other articles from the beloved Japanese folk tale about a boy who sprang from a peach, as well as more of those stunning maples. Treat yourself to a few skewers of *dengaku* (grilled tofu with a generous coating of *miso*-based sauce), an Inuyama favorite that is available at the temple throughout the fall.

National Treasures, Seasonal Pleasures

After your walk back to town, you'll probably be ready for a rest and some refreshment. Uraku-en, just a 15-minute walk to the west of Inuyama Yuen station, is just the place you're looking for. As you enter the traditional garden through the aging wooden gate and step onto the jagged stone path, verdant plants soothe your eyes while a brighter canopy of autumn leafage entices you to gaze upward.

The garden alone, open throughout the fall from 9:00 to 5:00, is worth the visit, but its walls house a rarer treasure that attracts visitors from all over the country. Jo-an tea ceremony house is a tranquil and meditative space built by Oda Urakusai, the younger brother of Oda Nobunaga, an Aichi native and the first of three lords who are credited with unifying Japan. While Nobunaga was famed for his skill in warfare, his younger brother gave up the warrior's life to devote himself to the art of the tea ceremony. In 1618, in the twilight of his life, Urakusai built Jo-an in his Kyoto retreat. The tea house was moved to Inuyama in 1972.



Jo-an under a canopy of saffron maple leaves

Today Jo-an is one of only three tea houses in the entire country to be declared a national treasure. The inside of Jo-an and its adjoining study is usually closed to the public, but from November 14 to 17 visitors can take a rare look inside (ticket price: ¥1900).

Due to its status as a cultural treasure, you won't be able to sip tea in Jo-an, but Uraku-en's other tea rooms provide a satisfactory alternative. Ko-an tea ceremony house is just steps away from Jo-an and is enveloped in the aromas of the same *chabana* (carefully selected flowers whose fragrances complement the enjoyment of tea). Guests can purchase a garden admission/tea tasting combination ticket for ¥1300.

Castle Views of Endless Hues

Apparently no one warned Oda Nobuyasu about the perils of building castles in the sky. His creation, Inuyama Castle (admission: ¥500) is proudly perched high above the city and is without a doubt its most famous landmark. It's not so much the number of maples on the grounds that are the draw here, although Inuyama-jō boasts its fair share of the trees. Rather, visitors to this, Japan's oldest castle and one of only four in the whole country to be declared a national treasure, will want to take in the views of the surrounding countryside, ablaze with every shade of red and orange, from the castle tower.



Fallen leaves carpet the path to Inuyama-jō

Scaling the steep and narrow staircases to the fourth story is no easy task, but the elevated perspective, ideal for witnessing the reddening of the landscape, makes the climb worthwhile. The sight of sprawling plains and the Kiso River below is sure to cause even the most humble visitor to fantasize about leading a middle ages army of *samurai* to capture neighboring lands. It's an outlook with which even the view from the highest of Nagoya skyscrapers, which, incidentally, are clearly visible from the castle, cannot compare.

Autumn Castle Festival: Be a Part of a New Tradition

Even after the sun goes down, there is plenty to dazzle the eyes. On the last weekend of October, Inuyama celebrates

its castle and craftsmanship with the 8th Autumn Castle Festival.



Nighttime Inuyama is not to be outshined

Either day of the festival promises to be an enjoyable time, but you're likely to find yourself most fascinated by the festivities on the evening of Saturday, October 25, when floats adorned with luminous lanterns take to the streets of the Honmachi district. At the top of each three-level float are various *karakuri*, mechanical wooden dolls crafted with precision and passion by craftsman Tamaya Shobei. The Inuyama native's family has created the lifelike dolls in the city for nine generations. Each *karakuri* doll is carved and designed with mechanical precision to carry out traditional tasks such as serving tea or shooting archery.

Dressing the Part

If during your travels in Japan you've allowed yourself to splurge on a *kimono*, the Inuyama fall campaign may be just the chance that you've been waiting for to sport it in a picturesque setting. Inuyama Castle and Uraku-en will offer free admission on selected weekends throughout the fall to anyone wearing the traditional robe.



A client at Koheiji gets ready to hit the town

Even if you've yet to add a *kimono* to your wardrobe, there's still a chance to try one on with the indispensable assistance of a specialist. Have your hotel or guide make an appointment with Koheiji (0568-61-0343), an expert in the sophisticated ways of wearing a kimono. Koheiji's Inuyama *kimono* shop offers the

chance to wear the traditional garb and, once dressed, guests are allowed time to wander through town to show off their fashion sense. Both male and female *kimono* are available, and the 90-minute experience costs approximately \$70.

Skewer Tour

With all of the can't-miss sites to see, one day in Inuyama requires a pretty tightly packed itinerary, so you may have to jettison sit-down meals from your schedule just to keep up. Lucky for you, the best nourishment in this particular city comes in a convenient snack-on-a-stick form.



The perfect treat for the chopstick-challenged

An old shop with an open façade, modest seating, an inviting aroma and a cheerful grandma-type behind the counter is a pretty good sign that you've come across one of Inuyama's ubiquitous purveyors of traditional skewered snacks. A one-hundred-yen coin will get you a stick of *dango* (round dumpling) at most of the shops specializing in the sweet treat. If that's not enough to sate your hunger, you can count on coming across another vendor before long who is just as eager as the last to have you try one of their proud creations, many of which are limited to autumn and make use of seasonal ingredients. In addition to *dango* skewers, the aforementioned *dengaku* can also be enjoyed as a snack or as a complete meal. Just follow the scent of sweet and robust *miso* being grilled over an open flame.

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