

The Future of Wellness Tourism

In Nagano Prefecture's Matsumoto city, visitors can relax and unwind in nature — while accessing cutting-edge medical care

Words by Callie Buesman

The term “wellness tourism” likely conjures a specific impression to mind: a picturesque seaside spa, perhaps, or a tranquil yoga retreat, or a bracing trip to the mountains for salutary alpine exercises. This is the traditional image of a wellness-oriented trip — a personal pilgrimage people have been making for thousands of years.

Nagano Prefecture offers a modern update on this classic journey. Like an ancient healing site, the mountainous, onsen-rich region presents visitors with myriad opportunities to recuperate mentally

and physically; teeming with ski slopes and hiking trails, it's also ideal for anyone who wants to be active outdoors.

But on top of this, the prefecture also boasts a state-of-the-art medical facility, where visitors can get an in-depth physical checkup conducted by a team of specialists. This is a new type of wellness experience for an era of self-tracking one's personal health — a pristine natural escape where you can get a panoramic snapshot of your physical condition, with detailed guidance on what you can do to protect and improve it.

Know Yourself, Heal Yourself

Japan's unique, comprehensive system of preventative health care, believed to be one of the reasons for the country's incredibly long life expectancy, comes in several forms. The most thorough of the system's health checks is the ningen dock, which involves an exhaustive series of examinations and screenings. The ningen dock is not only a highly effective means of detecting disease at an early stage, it's also a valuable way to confirm one's personal health and instill a sense of peace and well-being.

Aizawa Hospital, nestled in the castle town of Matsumoto, gives international

visitors the chance to undergo this examination — performed with a full range of advanced medical equipment — at a low cost. Afterward, a highly trained specialist explains the results step by step. (Knowledge of Japanese isn't required, as multilingual support is available.)

The hospital also has a dedicated center for sports and health medicine, called JAMS (Jisenkai Aizawa Medical Science Center for Health and Sports), where athletes or those interested in improving their exercise routine can undergo a detailed physical fitness checkup conducted by physical therapists, who then provide personalized exercise suggestions to help maximize one's performance and prevent injuries. This is a fitting start to a new kind of wellness getaway, empowering you with in-depth, vital knowledge about the state of your own body. It's an updated form of healing: healing intelligently, combining the best of modern technology with traditional approaches.

Peace of Body and Mind

Those coming to Nagano to enrich their health can get a fully holistic experience: looking after the body by taking advantage of cutting-edge medical technology, then revitalizing the spirit in beautiful natural surroundings. Within Japan, Nagano is a popular getaway spot, known for its natural scenery as well as its abundant hot



springs, national parks and historical sites; Matsumoto in particular is famous for being the site of one of the nation's most beautiful castles and is often referred to as the gateway to the Japan Alps. Moreover, the city is easily accessible from Tokyo's Shinjuku Station by limited express train.

It's an idyllic setting for unwinding and releasing stress, a perfect place to engage in a mental reset after committing or recommitting to the pursuit of physical health. In the winter, visitors can luxuriate in

the snowy scenery, skiing or snowboarding at world-class resorts like the Hakuba Happo-One Snow Resort. In the warmer months, opportunities for trekking and hiking are abundant, particularly in Kamikochi, one of the best places to view the stunning beauty of the Japan Alps. Year-round, Matsumoto Castle — one of just five castles to be designated a National Treasure of Japan — is an unmissable experience. The castle grounds, abounding in cherry trees, are especially exquisite during sakura season.



Rest and Rejuvenate

With centuries of history and culture, Matsumoto abounds in picturesque accommodations in which guests can relax and reset. For those who wish to stay close to the city center, the spacious and refined Matsumoto Marunouchi Hotel is a mere five-minute walk from the legendary castle at the heart of the city.

A bit farther out, hidden away in the verdant mountains of Utsukushigahara, is Tobira Onsen Myojinkan, a sumptuous hot springs resort with onsen baths in each room. Visitors hoping for a chance to fully immerse themselves in the region's history will be drawn to the regal Satoyama Villa Honjin, a renovated centuries-old residence originally used by feudal lords as a place to rest.

If private accommodation is more your style, Villa Umbrella Hakuba, a stylish chalet in northwestern Nagano with 360-degree views of the mountains, is an excellent option.

More than just a chance to unwind in the clear mountain air, enjoying lavish lodgings and revitalizing hot springs, a wellness trip starting in Matsumoto gives visitors the ability to fully understand and appreciate their physical health. This level of self-awareness is invaluable, and it can't be reached through typical means, making it well worth the journey.

More Info

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