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# Experts Say Escape the Summer Heat and Spring Crowds by Visiting Japan In December

Story by Monica Fish • 14h • 5 min read

According to the Japan National Tourism Organization, tourist visits reached an all-time high this year. Increasing steadily since January, they reached a new record in June. Almost one million more people came to the country in the first half of 2024 compared to the same period in 2019.



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American traveler searches on [Priceline](#) placed Tokyo and Osaka at the top of its Most Popular International Destination List for 2024. [Virtuoso](#), whose network of global luxury travel agencies books \$80 billion worth of trips a year, is seeing a 108% increase in Fall vacations to Japan this year.

“The surge in tourism to Japan has been remarkable. The cheapness of the yen vis-à-vis other currencies has played its part, but the increase is probably more due to the growing knowledge about Japan,” shares Paul Christie, CEO of [Walk Japan](#).

“When Japan first reopened after Covid closures, the demand was so high that availability was extremely limited, even when planning several months in advance. Some visitors had to reconsider their travel dates as a result,” adds [Keri Vita](#), Travel Advisor, LBAC Travel, a NEST affiliate.

If explorers don’t want to deal with the summer heat, battle spring cherry blossom or Golden Week crowds, or can only travel during

school closures, December might be the perfect time to consider visiting Japan.

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Japan: Megaquake alert in Japan triggers hotel cancellations, hits tourism industry



## Is December a Good Time?

“When asked about the best time to visit destinations, my answer is often, ‘When do you have the most time?’ If a client is traveling a great distance or visiting a bucket-list destination that they may not get to return to, it’s important to consider whether it is better to have enough time to see and do as many things as they’d like to do rather than picking dates based on weather, pricing, or crowds,” says Vita. “If December is the most convenient time to visit Japan, travelers should do so without hesitation.”

For those who can’t stand high summer temperatures and extreme humidity, December’s pleasant 55-degree Tokyo days make exploring less strenuous. It’s also the driest month of the year, creating stunningly clear blue skies and epic sunsets.

“Morning and evening chills can be combated with a warming bowl of ramen or a soak in Japan’s natural hot spring onsens,” states Sam Goold, Destination Consultant for Japan and Southeast Asia at [Red Savannah](#), an award-winning luxury travel company.



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“I was in Japan for two and a half weeks in December, which was fantastic. Japan is a year-round destination, so there’s no bad time to go. December really seems to bring out the best of everything it offers,” proclaims Luke Stapylton-Smith, Head of Asia for [Unforgettable Travel Company](#). “We are highly encouraging clients to consider visiting Japan in December.”

World Class Winter Sports



Experts Say Escape the Summer Heat and Spring Crowds by Visiting Japan In December  
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Japan is one of the world's top skiing and snowboarding destinations, known for its "japow," a portmanteau combining "Japan" and "powder." Northern cities and mountain towns start their ski season in December as cold winds blow over the Sea of Japan, producing significant snowfalls.



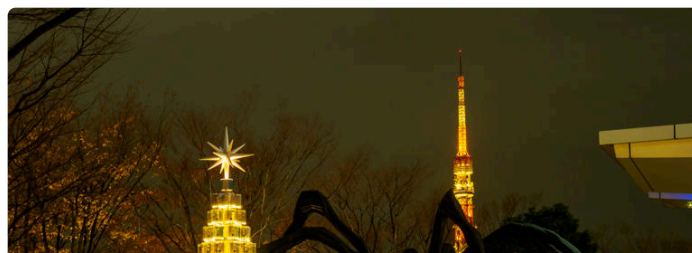
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"Whether you're a ski novice or thrill-seeking powder hunter, Niseko, known as the Aspen of Asia, is unlike anywhere else in the world," says Stephanie Chai, founder of [The Luxe Nomad](#). "Expect awe-inspiring landscapes, luxury to affordable accommodation, and Japan's unique après-ski scene, from onsens to casual izakaya joints and high-end kaiseki restaurants. While Niseko is becoming known to the [high net-worth](#) guest, it is still far more affordable than skiing in parts of America and Europe with daily lift pass starting at \$50."

## Celebrating Christmas





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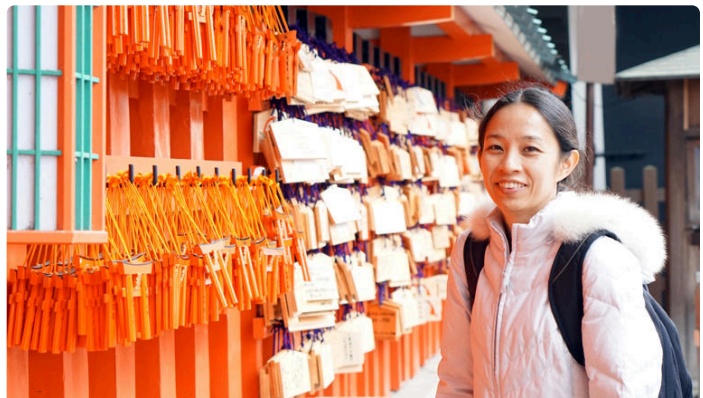
Christmas is a regular workday for residents, with some couples going out to an upscale dinner after work. Shops, attractions, restaurants, and transportation remain open on Dec. 24 and 25.

“Christmas is a festive time in Japan, a mix of Western traditions and Japanese interpretations. At Hoshino Resorts, we celebrate Christmas with fun events and decorations at our family-friendly RISONARE hotels, city-tourism OMO hotels, and free-spirited BEB hotels. Some of these include vegetable-inspired Christmas trees at RISONARE Nasu, Ramen bowl Christmas trees at OMO7 Asahikawa, and bicycle-powered Christmas trees at BEB5 Karuizawa,” shares Qiao Wang, unit director of Hoshino Resorts’ global marketing team.

“The traditional dinner meal for December 25th has become KFC. Yes, Kentucky Fried Chicken!” shares Jessica Klauzenberg, Timbuktu Asia Travel Specialist. “Pre-ordering KFC dinner is very common for Japanese people and is a way to bring the family together.”

“The Ao no Dokutsu in Tokyo’s Shibuya area consists of a long street lined with trees decked in blue lights, giving the illusion of walking through a blue cave. Azumino Park Illuminations is Nagano’s largest illumination display with more than 700,000 twinkling lights and a musical score accompanying many of the displays,” outlines Vita. “The largest display in Japan is the Flower Park winter illumination, in Nagoya, which runs from October to June.”

### Plan Carefully During New Year’s



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The New Year is one of Japan's most important holidays, and many businesses, restaurants, and attractions close for multiple days. Trains, flights, and hotels are crowded and expensive as locals travel home to family. Respectful visitors can join time-honored Japanese holiday traditions like "hatsumode" when visitors pour into shrines and temples and pray for happiness in the New Year.

"One of my best trips to Japan was going out all night from temple to shrine to temple in Tokyo on New Year's Eve. There is so much activity all night, and people are so friendly! I also did this another year in Kyoto," shares 40-time Japan visitor and respected Japan itinerary planner [Marian Goldberg](#). "[The Kyoto Visitor's Guide](#), a free publication available at the train station and so many tourist spots, publishes a list of special light-ups, free performances, and events for the last few days of the year."

"It's a big thing to climb to the highest point you can and watch the sunrise from New Year's Eve to New Year's Day. Lots of people take the cable car up to the top of Mt. Takao, the tallest mountain in Tokyo. Located in the Tama Region, it can be reached in one hour on the Keio line west from Shinjuku Station," adds Goldberg.

Those looking to rest or visit with children can book a stay at a large hotel. They often have New Year's festivities on-site, such as games, ninja experiences, or calligraphy lessons. Naomi Mano, President and CEO of Luxury Travel Partner [Luxurique](#), recommends the New Otani Hotels, which have multiple locations nationwide.

## Tips for Holiday Period Travel



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December remains one of Japan’s quietest months, and international visits are rising. Experts recommend booking reservations far in advance, especially for end-of-month travel or regions with fewer holiday crowds.

For example, the Nasu Highlands is a world away from Tokyo's bustle and neon lights but only a 70-minute bullet train ride. The mountainous region is home to some of the country’s most famous hot springs, an Imperial Villa, and Hunter Mountain, which offers skiing, snowboarding, and kid’s play areas. Enjoy the region’s culinary delights, including cheese, craft beer, and premium Wagyu beef.

Disney and Universal theme parks remain open over the New Year, as many Japanese school and college semesters end and international families arrive for vacation. Purchase tickets in advance and prepare to wait longer than usual for rides and other park attractions.

“If you are interested in traveling to Japan during this period, look into booking an extended-stay executive apartment such as Oakwood. International executives from all over the world who are stationed in Japan, especially Tokyo, go home to their countries during the Christmas-New Year's holiday. Those apartments are vacant, and you could probably get a one-week apartment stay for a good value,” advises Goldberg.

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