



JAPAN

This year, all eyes will be on Japan as the 2020 Summer Olympics (July 24–August 9) kick off in Tokyo. But the summer season is also a wonderful time to explore beyond the capital city by cooling off in the mountains of Nikko, exploring Hokkaido's flower-strewn hills, or cycling through the rural islands of Shikoku and Kyushu.



NEED TO KNOW
In 2019, Delta launched direct flights from Seattle to Osaka, the closest international airport to Nikko. The summer hike starts up again on March 30.

year-round activities. At the new 50-suite Ritz-Carlton Reserve, local mountain guides will lead hiking tours, and a glassy eight-story Park Hyatt will be located within walking distance of trails on adjacent Mount Niseko-Annapuri. Beyond Niseko, the Asia custom tour specialist Remote Lands is expanding its 2020 Hokkaido tours with wildflower hikes to Lake Hangetsu, a volcanic lake at the foot of Mount Yotei, as well as visits to Upopoy, the first national museum dedicated to Japan's indigenous Ainu peoples, opening in spring 2020. —ADAM H. GRAHAM

● NIKKO

One of Japan's most skimmed-over destinations is ready for a deeper dive.

When to go: Mountainous Nikko, just two hours north of Tokyo, is a cool respite from the sweltering city. During the annual Ryou Festival in late July, locals carry Shinto shrines through the streets to encourage prosperity.

Why go: For years, Nikko was known as a day-trip destination. Travelers would take the train up from Tokyo to wander the 103 buildings that make up the Shrines and Temples of Nikko, a UNESCO World Heritage site, and to explore Nikko National Park. Until recently, there were few hotels to tempt overnighters, but this summer, the ryokan Nikko Fufu will open near the Toshogu shrine with 24 suites featuring private outdoor baths. In spring 2020, the 94-room Ritz-Carlton, Nikko, will open in the mountains above town, with views of Lake Chuzenji. From the Ritz-Carlton, travelers will be able to walk to the lake's thundering Kegon

● HOKKAIDO

Visit this northern island for summer blooms, festivals, and some of Japan's finest hiking.

When to go: By June, wildflowers blanket the rolling hills. But the Hokkaido Shrine Festival (June 14–16) is the true summer opener, ushering in a string of events celebrating lavender, fire, and traditional dance.

Why go: With its legendary ski slopes and powder, Hokkaido has long attracted winter travelers, but summer hasn't been as much of a draw. This year brings a change, as well-known luxury hotels open in the ski town of Niseko with an emphasis on



Falls and to the former British and Italian embassies, where the grounds have been converted to parks and the historic residences to lakeside cafés. —ELAINE GLUSAC

● SOUTHERN ISLANDS

Surrounded by the Seto Inland Sea, the quieter islands of southern Japan offer spectacular bike routes and a new hotel that nods to history.

When to go: In June, rhododendrons bloom across Mount Aso. Later in the season, the port city of Tokushima hosts the Awa Odori dance festival (August 12–15), which brings together some of Japan's best dance teams.

Why go: The islands south of Honshu, Japan's main island, are uniquely suited to cycling. A new eight-day trip from Raid Cycling introduces travelers to some of the highlights. The trip starts in Onomichi on Honshu at the stylish Hotel Cycle. From there, guests first tackle the Shimansu Kaido, a 43-mile cycling route that crosses bridges and takes riders through Setonaikai National Park before ending in the city of Imabari on the island of Shikoku. (The trip doesn't include an overnight on Shikoku, but come spring, travelers to the island's Ehime Prefecture will be able to stay in Ozu Castle, a re-creation of a 14th-century wooden fortress that overlooked the Hijikawa River.) Travelers return to Onomichi, then ride to Hiroshima and spend the night, before packing up and boarding a high-speed train to the island of Kyushu, a diverse mix of mountains and farmland. Riders spend the second half of the trip winding through green tea fields and shiitake farms and sleeping in ryokans. The grand finale is a 43-mile ride up Mount Aso, an active volcano. —ALEX SCHECHTER

