

NIHONMATSU CITY STUDY TOUR

Tucked away in the hills of central Fukushima prefecture, Japan, Nihonmatsu City has a prestigious history and extensive sightseeing opportunities. Founded in 1643, Nihonmatsu Castle was a prominent castle in Eastern Japan, now listed among the top 100 castles in Japan. The castle itself having been lost in years gone by, the central castle grounds have been converted into Kasumigajo Park, a large area set on a hill in the western side of Nihonmatsu City. At the front of the park, Minowa Gate has been rebuilt and now serves as the entrance to the complex. At the foot of the hill leading to the Gate is a monument to the Boys' Squad: a group of young men who fought to defend their home from attack during the Boshin War.

Running between the beginning of October and the end of November each year is the Nihonmatsu Chrysanthemum festival and Chrysanthemum Figures. The Chrysanthemum festival is a multifaceted event. Beginning with the competitive exhibition, where growers' associations from around Nihonmatsu City and Fukushima Prefecture show off their best flowers in several different categories. The two most impressive categories would be the "Set of 3 Large Flowers" and the "Daitarin" (Thousand Flowers) events. Large domes covered with over a thousand flowers are indeed something to behold.

The Garden Zone is an area of masterfully crafted garden areas, led by professional designer Hiroshi Tamazaki. The Chrysanthemum Figures are a set of life-size dioramas exhibiting eight scenes from the transitional period from the end of the Edo period and through the Meiji Restoration. However, each character in the scene is dressed in clothes of Chrysanthemum flowers in various colours, creating a truly unique look at this important period of Japanese history.



The Boys' Squad in front of Minowa Gate



Nestled on the slopes of Mount Adatara, Dake Onsen is a hot springs town overlooking Nihonmatsu City. Fed by underground aquifers, the sulphur-enriched naturally-heated water attracts many visitors with its healing properties year round. The main street of Dake Onsen retains a relaxing feeling, with a stream running down the centre of the road. Framing the road are Sakura trees, which come into bloom in early April, covering the town in their beautiful pink petals. Just off the main road is a little clearing where one can enjoy putting their feet and lower legs into the onsen water – free of charge.

Dotted around the town are traditional Japanese inns, called “ryokan”. With excellent service and exquisite dining, any ryokan is an unforgettable experience. Most ryokan have large shared baths, however some have smaller, private baths attached to an individual room. Sharing an onsen bath with your partner or friends is excellent for those not so accustomed to strangers. For those a little more comfortable, there are



plenty of onsen where you can just visit for the day or stay overnight. One kind of bath, called a “roten-buro” is set outdoors. It’s quite something to sit in the hot water outside and watch the clouds leisurely drift

past.