

Gifu, Japan



Nagara River
Tourism Office

YOUR LOCAL DMC ON THE NAGARA

Nagara River Tourism Office (NRTO) is the destination management company for the Nagara Basin, operated by NPO ORGAN—a team that has worked alongside the river's cormorant masters, artisans, innkeepers, and shrines for over fifteen years. The experiences in these pages are developed, curated, and operated by our team together with trusted local partners.

FOR TOUR OPERATORS & DMCs:

- Net tariffs and seasonal rate sheets
- Room allotments across the region —Gifu, Gujo, Mino, and Seki
- Licensed English-speaking guides
- Private experiences, charters, and FAM support
- One contact for the whole river

Nagara River Tourism Office

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Nagara River

Tourism Office

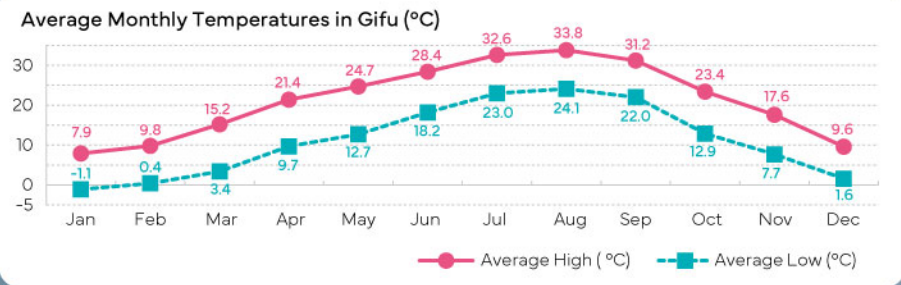
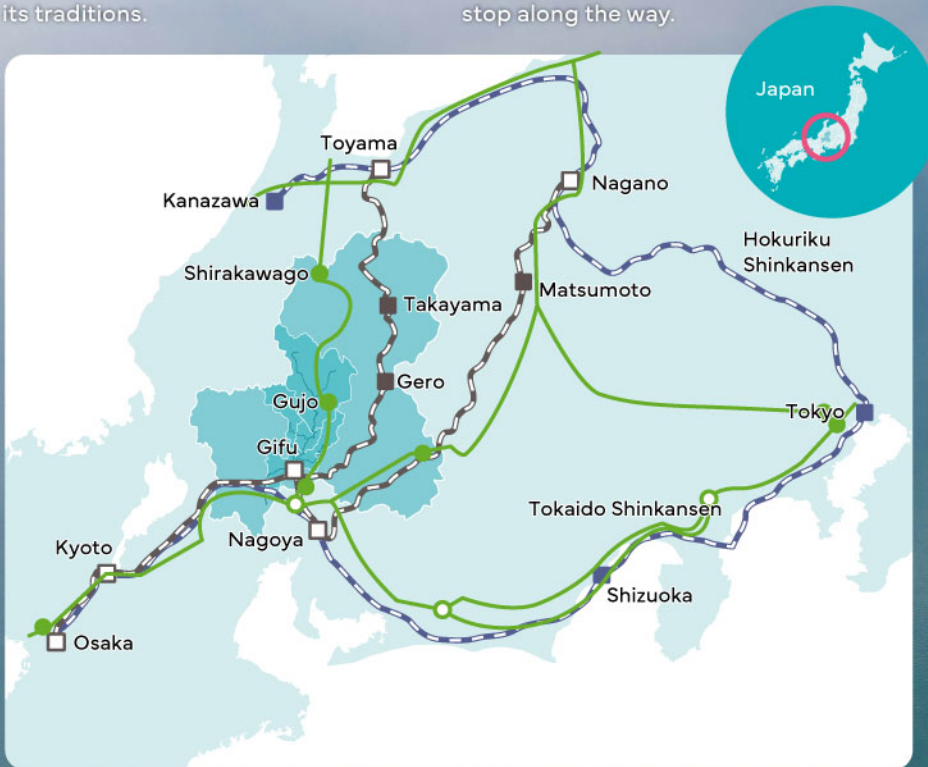
Gifu · Seki · Mino · Gujo —
Nagara River Basin, Central Japan



Follow One River. Find All of Japan.

In Central Japan, where the mountains meet the plain, the Nagara River rises in the sacred Hakusan mountain region and flows 166 kilometers to Ise Bay. Along the river's upper and middle reaches, clear waters connect four towns—Gujo Hachiman, Mino, Seki, and Gifu—each shaped by the river and its traditions.

Few places in Japan are so well connected and yet so overlooked. Just twenty minutes from Nagoya, Gifu is an easy extension from the Golden Route for travelers continuing toward Takayama, Shirakawa-go, and Kanazawa. Here, the natural hot springs of Nagaragawa Onsen offer a relaxing stop along the way.



Location & Access

- Location: Gifu Prefecture, Central Japan
- From Nagoya: 20 min (JR Tokaido Line)
- From Tokyo: approx. 3 hrs / From Kyoto: approx. 1.5 hrs (Shinkansen + JR)
- From Chubu Centair Int'l Airport: 1 hr (Meitetsu Line)
- To Gujo Hachiman: 70 min from Gifu Station (highway bus)
- To Seki & Mino: via the scenic Nagaragawa Railway
- To Inuyama (side trip): 35 min from Gifu (Meitetsu Line)
- From Takayama: 2 hrs (JR Ltd. Exp. "Hida")

Closer than you think: 1.5 hours from Kyoto and 20 minutes from Nagoya—yet most travelers pass right by. While Takayama and Kanazawa draw the crowds, the towns along the Nagara retain a quiet character all their own.



Follow One River. Find All of Japan.

You may already know some of these things: hot springs, cormorant fishing, geisha, handmade paper, swordsmiths, castle towns, summer dances, sacred mountains. What you may not realize is that they all come together along a single river.

The Nagara begins in the Hakusan mountain region, where sacred Mount Hakusan has been revered as a source of life-giving water for more than 1,300 years. Reverence for the mountain flowed downstream with the river, shaping communities across the basin. Clear water made papermaking possible; paper became lanterns and umbrellas. Water and pine charcoal drew swordsmiths,

whose blades earned the region worldwide renown.

The river sustained ayu, and fishermen learned to catch them with trained cormorants—a tradition carried on for 1,300 years. Along its course grew castle towns, merchant ports, a geisha district, and a dance that lasts thirty nights. Kyoto, Takayama, and Kanazawa are magnificent—and crowded. Just twenty minutes from Nagoya, the Nagara Basin offers deep-rooted culture that is still woven into everyday life. Follow one river, and you will find hot springs, fishing fires, artisans, pilgrim paths, and dancing streets—all of Japan, one story at a time.

GIFU

A warlord's castle, fishing by fire, geisha banquets on the river, amber-colored hot springs. The river's grand finale.

SEKI

Eight hundred years of blades. Watch a sword being born—then take home what may be the best kitchen knife you ever own.

MINO

Japan's oldest and finest paper, and the merchant town its wealth built.

GUJO

A castle town that runs on spring water, where the whole town dances all summer long.

Bridge jumping is not recommended for visitors.

Spring

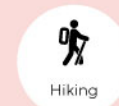
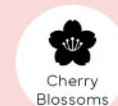
Cherry blossoms transform Gifu Park into a spring gallery beneath historic Gifu Castle. Stroll with a handcrafted cherry-blossom wagasa—a traditional paper umbrella that adds elegance to every step.

Experience a spring festival rooted in 1,900 years of history. Ornately decorated dashi floats parade through blossom-filled streets, carrying traditional musicians and intricate karakuri puppets. While the famous festivals of Kyoto and Takayama draw the crowds, here you celebrate shoulder-to-shoulder with locals—in an intimate tradition far removed from the large tour crowds. Upstream, spring blooms twice more. In Mino, the Hana-Mikoshi festival fills the streets with portable shrines crowned with thousands of pink washi-paper flowers—a fitting celebration in a town famed for its paper. In Gujo Hachiman, cherry trees circle the castle on its mountaintop.

As spring deepens, Mount Kinka turns radiant gold. Thousands of chinquapin trees burst into bloom at once, cloaking the mountainside in shimmering light. Hike through this golden forest for panoramic views of the river and cityscape below.



HIGHLIGHTS





Summer

Summer along the Nagara River means one thing: crystal-clear water. The riverbed is so transparent you can count every stone, and its shallow stretches are ideal for families—a rare find for a city river. Step into the same waters generations of locals have enjoyed. Upstream in Gujo, children leap from bridges into the cold pools of the Yoshida River, as their grandparents did before them.

Each evening from May to October, fireworks signal the start of ukai (cormorant fishing) on the Nagara. Torchlit wooden boats glide downstream as masters in traditional attire guide their cormorants—a 1,300-year tradition carried on nightly beneath Gifu Castle.

And when night falls on Gujo Hachiman, the streets themselves begin to move. For around thirty nights each summer, the whole town gathers to dance the Gujo Odori. There are no spectators—everyone joins the circle.

Taste ayu (sweetfish), the Nagara River's signature fish, known for its delicate aroma reminiscent of watermelon.



HIGHLIGHTS





Autumn brings ideal cycling weather. Ride an electric bike and glide along the river, where its crystal-clear surface reflects the fiery reds and golds of the surrounding mountains.

Temple gardens come alive with autumn color, offering a serenity found far from the crowds of Kyoto. At Daichiji Temple, a 700-year-old cypress rises above a tranquil moss garden—with no admission fee, no queues, and no tour groups—just crimson leaves reflected in still ponds.

In mid-October, the merchant streets of Mino glow during the Akari Art Exhibition: hundreds of washi-paper lanterns created by artists from across Japan line the old town after dark.

Along the banks, watch local fishermen work with the river's currents. They stretch ropes across the water and strike the surface to startle ayu during their downstream spawning run. As the startled fish pause, the nets fly. Upstream at the yana fish weirs, the same autumn catch is grilled over charcoal.

Autumn

HIGHLIGHTS



Cycling



Temple Gardens



Autumn Foliage



Traditional Fishing



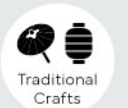
Riverside Walks



Winter dusts Mount Kinka in white, with Gifu Castle rising above its snow-covered slopes. After a crisp morning walk, sink into the iron-rich waters of Nagarachawa Onsen. These mineral springs tint the baths a warm rust hue and leave you with a deep, lasting warmth. Finish the day with atsukan—local sake served warm, its gentle heat opening up deeper flavors. Upstream, the snow settles thicker. On some winter mornings, Gujo Hachiman Castle floats above a sea of clouds—locals call it the “castle in the sky.” In Mino, winter is the papermakers’ season: the coldest, clearest water tightens the fibers, and the finest washi of the year is lifted from icy vats at the height of winter. The Nagara never freezes, even in the depths of January. Its waters run so clear you can watch fish drift between the stones at dawn. Each January, the castle grounds glow with a winter illumination featuring Gifu’s traditional crafts—Gifu wagasa umbrellas and Gifu lanterns shining against the darkness.



HIGHLIGHTS

Snow-Covered
Castle ViewsHot
SpringsWarm Sake
EveningsCrystal-Clear
Winter RiversTraditional
Crafts

Nagara River

Satokawa

Most cities push their rivers behind concrete walls, but the Nagara flows through the heart of Gifu, clear enough to swim in. Life here unfolds on the water: people live beside it, work upon it, and find peace along its banks. In 2015, the UN recognized this landscape as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System—honoring not only what the river provides, but the way people live in harmony with the water. The Japanese call it “satokawa”: a river that flows through human life without losing its wild spirit. For over a thousand years, this balance has endured. Fishermen harvest ayu sustainably, helping maintain healthy fish populations, while cormorant masters pass their ancestral skills from generation to generation. The river links mountain forests to riverside workshops and city markets—carrying culture as surely as it carries water. This relationship continues along the river’s entire length. From the mountain villages near its sacred source to the heart of the city, people still swim in the Nagara—a 166-kilometer river still woven into everyday life. Stroll along the riverside paths. Soak in hot springs fed by the same ancient watershed. Watch the traditional fishing by night, or simply sit on a bench and listen to the current. Here, water does not divide nature and daily life—it weaves them together. This is why people return.



Hakusan Faith

1,300 Years of Reverence for Mountain and Water

Many of the traditions along this river are rooted in the same sacred landscape: Mount Hakusan, the white mountain associated with the Nagara's headwaters. Rising to 2,702 meters and snow-capped for much of the year, Hakusan has long been revered as a sacred mountain and source of life-giving water. Its snowmelt fed rice fields, supported papermaking and swordmaking, and carried boats downstream. In 717, the monk Taicho opened a route to the summit. Hakusan went on to become one of Japan's three sacred mountains, and reverence for the mountain and its waters has continued for over a millennium. The pilgrimage began at Nagataki Hakusan Shrine, upstream from Gujo Hachiman. In its medieval heyday, this was a monastic center with hundreds of lodgings, filled with pilgrims bound for the summit. The route they walked—the Mino Zenjodo—is still walked today. Shrines dedicated to Hakusan stand throughout the river basin, and their festivals have helped shape the region's sacred traditions, while the river's waters have long sustained everyday life. Kyoto is known for its temples. Here, you can feel a living faith.



Formal Worship at Nagataki:

Join a formal ceremony led by the shrine priest and view treasures from the inner sanctuary, including nationally designated Important Cultural Properties. English interpretation available by arrangement.



Misogi & Renewal at Suhara:

For centuries, pilgrims purified themselves at Suhara Shrine before the climb. Step into the Nagara itself for misogi—guided purification in the flowing river—then climb Mt. Tsurugata, a sacred peak facing distant Hakusan, and descend renewed. Arranged through the Nagara River Tourism Office (NRTTO).





Gifu Castle & Mt. Kinka

Gifu Castle — A warlord's mountain fortress

About 460 years ago, the warlord Oda Nobunaga seized this mountain and its castle. He renamed the region Gifu and made it his base. From here, he launched his campaign to unite Japan's warring provinces under one ruler—a dream no one had achieved for generations.

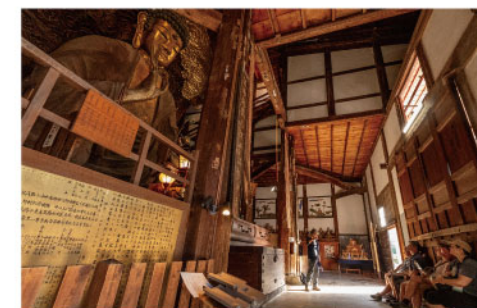
He came close. At 47, he was betrayed by one of his own generals and died in flames. He never saw his dream fulfilled—but the mountain remains. Climb to the 329-meter summit and

look out over the world below. See the Nagara River winding through the plains and the distant mountains rising on the horizon. This is the view Oda Nobunaga once saw as he shaped his ambitions.

At the mountain's base, stone ramparts trace the gardens where he once lived—garden ponds, curving paths, and the remains of halls where he met allies and enemies. Walk these ruins and stand where one man changed the course of Japan's history.



Mount Kinka rises straight from downtown. Ten forest trails lead to the summit—gentle to steep, 30 to 60 minutes. Or take the ropeway: four minutes to the top.



At the mountain's foot sits the Gifu Great Buddha, one of Japan's three Great Buddhas. Built over 38 years from bamboo, clay, and layers of washi inscribed with sutras, then sealed in lacquer and gold, it is a Buddha made of paper and prayer.

Night falls. Fires blaze atop wooden boats drifting down the Nagara.

Masters in traditional attire guide their cormorants to catch ayu; the birds surface with fish in their beaks and return to their masters. This tradition has unfolded every summer night for over a thousand years.

In the 1500s, the warlord Oda Nobunaga brought his guests here to witness it. Today, only nine masters remain—the only cormorant fishermen in Japan appointed to serve the Imperial Household. Charlie Chaplin visited twice and called them artists. The birds live up to three times longer than wild cormorants; when they die, they are laid to rest with gravestones.

They are not tools. They are family. On the same river, another art comes to life. Gifu's geisha begin training in their teens—learning tea ceremony and shamisen, along with songs unique to the region and dances passed down through generations. Their most iconic setting is aboard the boats of the Nagara: during the fishing season, they play music, dance, and pour sake as guests dine on the water and the fishing fires drift past. Some 460 years ago, Oda Nobunaga entertained his guests in much the same way. The fire and the music share the same night, and the same river.

A cormorant fishing cruise and a geisha banquet can be combined into a single evening—ask the Nagara River Tourism Office for details.

Nights on the Nagara

Cormorant Fishing & Geisha



Geisha Banquet

Art on the water

In Gifu, geisha begin their training in their teens, learning tea ceremony and shamisen, along with songs unique to the region and dances passed down through generations. The training is rigorous, requiring years of discipline and practice, and their lifelong dedication helps keep these local performing traditions alive. Gifu's geisha perform in traditional ryokan and restaurants, but their most iconic setting is aboard the boats of the Nagara River. During the cormorant fishing season, an evening aboard the riverboat unfolds with shamisen music, dance, conversation, and sake, with the cormorant fishing taking place just beyond the boat. Some 460 years ago, Oda Nobunaga entertained his guests in much the same way. Here, art and river flow together as one.



Kawaramachi

The Paper Port

For three hundred years, this is where the paper came ashore. Upstream in Mino, papermakers shipped their washi from the river port of Kozuchi. Boats laden with washi rode the current down the Nagara and docked here at Kawaramachi, Gifu's river port. Paper wholesalers and timber merchants lined these lanes, their warehouses filled with washi, bamboo, and mountain timber. Here, the paper changed shape—into lanterns, umbrellas, and fans—in workshops just a few doors from the dock.

Walk these streets today and the wooden buildings still stand: latticed

windows, dark timber facades, and narrow lanes between merchant houses dating back to the Edo period.

People still live in these homes. Some have become shops selling traditional crafts; others are now home to an umbrella maker, a bakery, or a cafe. This is not a museum. It is a living neighborhood where daily life continues within 300-year-old walls. The river flows just steps away. From Kawaramachi, you can walk to the cormorant fishing boats, the hot springs, and up Mount Kinka. Everything is connected—through water and time.



Paper Crafts of Gifu

Wagasa, Lanterns & AKARI

The paper and bamboo that came down the Nagara became, in this town, umbrellas and lanterns.

Open a Gifu wagasa and soft light passes through layers of washi, revealing the intricate threadwork stitched between the bamboo ribs. Close it, and the form emerges—sharp, geometric, strikingly beautiful.

Gifu lanterns glow with a gentler light: thin washi painted with flowers and landscapes, diffusing light like morning sun through mist. Japan's finest wagasa are still made here, by a new generation of artisans creating functional art for daily life—not for museum display.



In 1951, the sculptor Isamu Noguchi came to Gifu to watch cormorant fishing. At a lantern workshop, he saw craftsmen stretching washi over bamboo ribs—simple materials, centuries-old techniques—and began sketching new designs the very next evening.

He called them AKARI: not lamps, not lanterns, but light itself shaped as sculpture. Over the next 35 years, he created more than 200 designs. They are still produced today by the same Gifu workshop, using the same washi and bamboo. Without this town, AKARI would not exist.

Swordsmith

Fire and steel, 800 years in the making

Follow the Nagara River upstream to Seki, the neighboring "City of Blades." Around 800 years ago, swordsmiths discovered that this region offered everything they needed: iron-rich clay for tempering, pine charcoal for the forge, and pure river water for quenching. They settled here and began forging blades.

The techniques have been passed down for generations. Steel is heated until white-hot, hammered flat, folded, and forged again and again. Sparks fly. Metal rings. The process produces blades prized for their resistance to chipping and bending—qualities that earned Seki's swords worldwide renown.

At the Sanshu smithy, you can watch from just a few meters away as a swordsmith draws white-hot steel from the forge and hammers it into shape—the heat on your face, sparks at your feet. Then take up the hammer yourself: hands-on courses let you forge your own small knife under the smith's guidance, from a short taster to a full-day workshop. Demonstrations and workshops run year-round.

Note: Japanese swords are strictly regulated by law and cannot be purchased or exported without the proper permits.



City of Blades

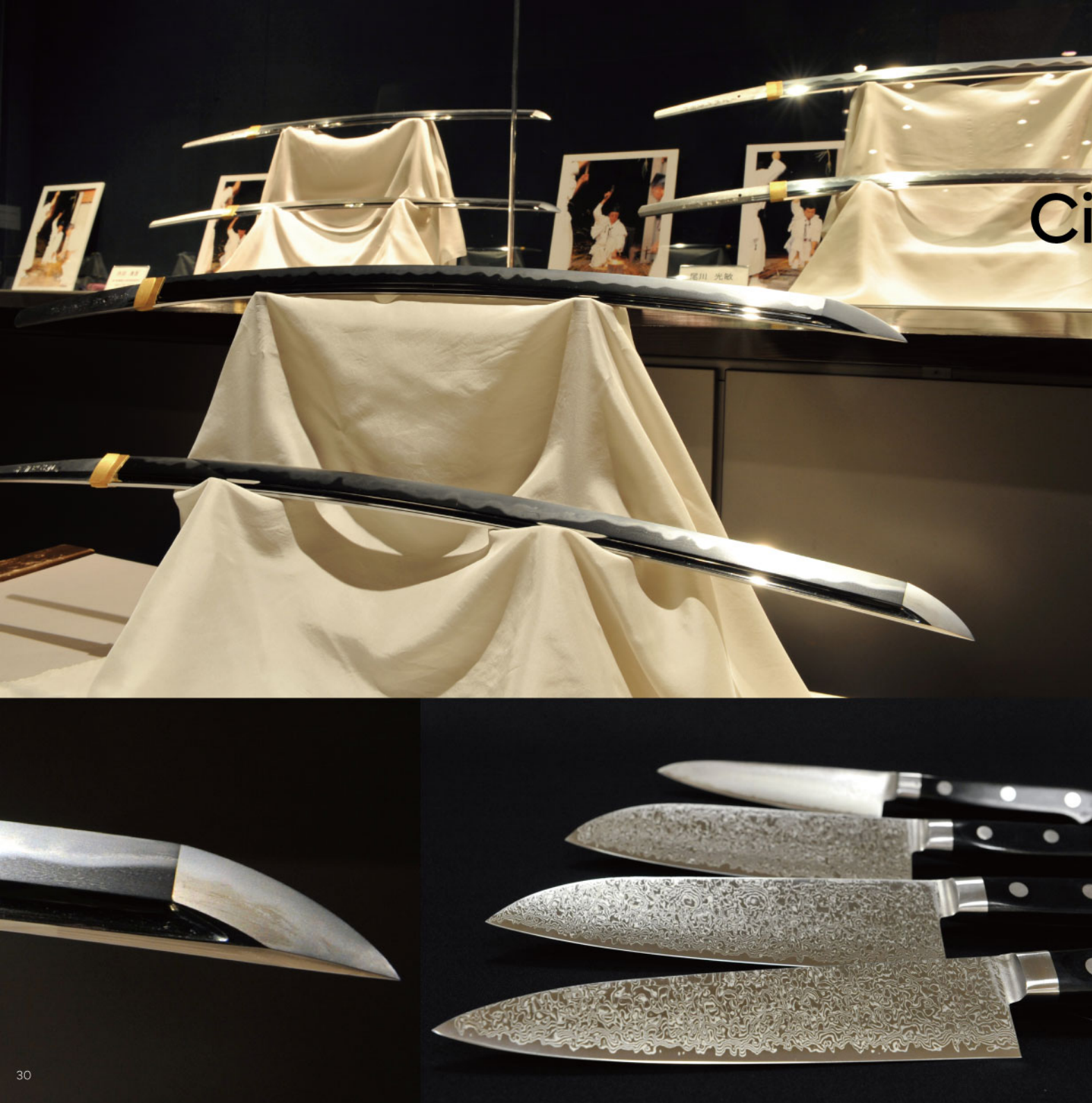
Where to Buy Your Knife

The swords made Seki famous. The kitchen knives will make it personal. Today, Seki stands alongside Solingen in Germany and Sheffield in England as one of the world's three great blade capitals—and unlike a sword, the blades here are made to go home with you. Seki's workshops produce some of the finest kitchen knives in the world, along with scissors, razors, and nail clippers of extraordinary precision. Chefs fly here from Europe just to buy.

Give yourself two hours. Compare hundreds of blades at cutlery halls and factory shops—Western-style chef's knives, Japanese santoku, and single-bevel knives for fish. Watch a craftsman put the final edge on your chosen knife, then have your name engraved on the blade in Japanese characters, stroke by stroke, while you wait. A knife sharpened and engraved in Seki is not a souvenir. It is a tool for the next thirty years.

Note: Kitchen knives can be taken home—pack them in checked luggage.

Photo courtesy of the Seki City Tourism Association
(General Incorporated Association)



Mino Washi

1,300 Years of Japanese Paper

The lanterns, umbrellas, and fans you saw in Gifu—if you have touched them, you have already touched the paper of Mino.

Papermaking here is 1,300 years old. Japan's oldest surviving paper, kept in the Shosoin imperial treasury, is a census from this province dated 702—the very document that holds Japan's first record of the Nagara's cormorant fishermen. The country's oldest paper and its oldest fishing tradition share a single page.

Hon-minoshi, the finest grade of Mino paper, is still made using time-honored methods: cold, clear

water from the Nagara, kozo mulberry fiber, and a bamboo screen rocked by hand until the fibers lie evenly. In 2014, UNESCO inscribed the craft on its Intangible Cultural Heritage list.

Museum conservators around the world use Mino paper to repair priceless art and documents—paper strong enough to last another thousand years, thin enough to disappear into the page it heals. The clear water made this paper possible. The river carried it to the world.



Mino Washi Papermaking: Stand at the vat in a working studio, rock the screen through the water, and lift out your own sheet of Mino paper. Once dried and pressed, it goes home with you. Approx. 1 hour; English support available.

The Town Paper Built

Paper built this town, and the rooftops prove it. Walk the old merchant streets of Mino and look up: wealthy houses are topped with udatsu—ornate raised firewalls at each end of the roof, crowned with tiles. Only successful merchants could afford them, and paper merchants competed to build the finest. To this day, the Japanese say of someone who never gets ahead that “their udatsu will never rise.” Nowhere in Japan do more survive than on these streets. Down the slope, at the riverbank,

stands a nine-meter wooden lighthouse at the former river port of Kozuchi, where for three centuries paper was loaded onto boats and carried downstream to Gifu. Forty licensed boats once worked this dock—riding the current downstream and being hauled back upstream by rope. The lamp is still lit at night.

Each October, the town turns its craft into a festival: the Akari Art Exhibition fills these streets after dark with hundreds of washi lanterns made by artists from across Japan.

Udatsu Townscape & NAE MINO



Three historic buildings along the udatsu street have been restored as an intimate hotel, preserving earthen walls and deep wooden beams. In the house pictured here, guests stay in rooms where a washi paper merchant once did business. By evening, the day visitors are gone, and the old town feels almost entirely their own.



Bridge jumping is not recommended for visitors.



Gujo

The Water Town & Castle

Two hours up the river, the water moves from scenery into daily life. Gujo Hachiman is a castle town built around spring water. Channels run along the streets and past kitchens; koi carp swim beside front doors; households still rinse vegetables at communal basins, each family leaving the water clean for the next. At the town's heart is Sogisui, a spring so revered that it was the first in Japan to be named among the country's hundred famous waters. People come here with bottles to fill. The water needs

no treatment. You simply drink.

Follow the sound of water down Igawa Komichi, a lane where the channel runs wider than the path, then cross the cold, clear Yoshida River, where children leap from the bridge all summer. This is not a preserved townscape—it is a working town that runs on spring water, as it always has.

And one more surprise: those uncannily perfect plastic food models displayed outside restaurants across Japan? The craft was born here.



Above it all stands Gujo Hachiman Castle, Japan's oldest reconstructed wooden keep (1933). Climb at dawn in late autumn and you may find it floating on a sea of clouds—the castle in the sky.



Gujo Odori

Dance All Night

Most Japanese festivals you watch.
This one you join.

For over 430 years, the people of Gujo Hachiman have danced the Gujo Odori—and for around thirty nights each summer, the whole town still does. A wooden float is set at a crossroads, the singers climb aboard, and the street becomes a slowly turning circle of dancers, hundreds strong, moving through ten dances to the clack of geta on stone. There are no spectators and no stage: locals will pull you in, and the steps can be learned within a song.

UNESCO inscribed the dance as Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2022—but its roots reach much further back.

Long before it filled these streets, it belonged to the mountain: villagers from the highest hamlets on sacred Hakusan—those who lived closest to the sacred mountain—walked down to Nagataki Hakusan Shrine to dance in its worship hall. The dance carried a message of blessing from mountain to river, much as the water itself flows downstream.

Then as now, no line is drawn between a dance of prayer and a dance of joy. Behind the clack of the geta, there is a prayer. The climax is the Tetsuya Odori, four nights in mid-August (13–16) when the dancing continues until dawn, the circle turning as the sky grows pale.

Held on around 30 nights from July to early September; free to join.
Yukata and geta rentals available in town; locations change each night.

Gujo

Artisan Hopping

Four workshops, one culture. Everything the dance needs, this town has made for centuries. The Watanabe dye works—founded over 430 years ago and now in its 15th generation—still dyes indigo cotton by hand in the same riverside workshop, its cloth dressing generations of dancers. Gujo's geta craftsmen carve the wooden clogs whose beat becomes the festival's heartbeat. Gujo Hachiman is the birthplace of Japanese silkscreen printing—the craft

behind the festival's tenugui towels and banners. And the replica-food ateliers, another local invention, once modeled the dishes served to festival crowds.

Spend half a day walking between the four craft shops with an English-speaking guide, then roll up your sleeves at one of them and make something to take home. You are not touring workshops: you are walking through the anatomy of a 430-year-old festival.



Watanabe Dye Works

Indigo dyed on this riverbank since the 1580s.



Gujo Geta

The festival's wooden clogs, carved and strapped by hand.



Silkscreen Studio

The town where Japanese silkscreen printing began.



Food Sample Atelier

The uncanny craft of replica sushi.

Photo by Essential Japan Travel



Gujo Nights

Local Food & Bar Hopping

When the workshops close, the town's story continues.

Gujo cooking is mountain cooking: keichan—chicken marinated in local miso and grilled at the table; venison and wild boar from the surrounding forests; sweet ayu from the rivers; and the deep, dark miso itself. The water that runs past every front door also runs into the glasses. A brewer who moved here for the spring water makes craft beer at Kobokobo, a taproom inside the brewery. And from a small distillery in these mountains, Tatsumi's craft gin—distilled with local botanicals and Gujo water—is now served in bars around the world. The lanes are small, the doors are low, and the best places are the ones you would never find alone.

Gujo Food Tour: three hours, three to four stops, and an English-speaking local guide who knows every back lane—local dishes, local sake, and craft beer included. A night of mountain food in the water town—the perfect way to spend your first evening in Gujo.

Photo by Essential Japan Travel





Inuyama

Two National Treasures

Thirty-five minutes from Gifu: one more river, and two National Treasures.

On a bluff above the Kiso River stands Inuyama Castle—one of only twelve original castle keeps remaining in Japan, and a National Treasure. Climb the steep wooden stairs polished by four centuries of footsteps, step out onto the top-floor balcony, and the Kiso River and its plain open beneath you in every direction.

A ten-minute walk away, in the garden of Urakuen, waits a treasure of a very different scale: Jo-an, a tea house of just two-and-a-half tatami mats, built in 1618 by Oda Urakusai—Nobunaga's younger brother, who survived the wars of the age but left his mark through tea. It is regarded as one of Japan's three finest tea rooms, all designated National Treasures. Take a bowl of matcha in the garden pavilion and consider the range of one family: the brother who tried to unite Japan from Gifu Castle, and the brother who perfected a room the size of a bed.

In the castle town below, old shopfronts sell street food, and you can try tosenkyo—an Edo-period parlor game of tossing a folded fan at a target. Elegant, playful, addictive.

Inuyama Castle Town Tour: day trips from Gifu arranged through NRTO. Meitetsu Line, 35 min.





Photo by Essential Japan Travel



Photo by Essential Japan Travel

Ride One River

In Europe, you put your bicycle on a train and ride home along the river. Almost nowhere in Japan can you travel that way. Here, you can. The Nagara Basin is made for cycling: one river, one gentle gradient, and a string of castle towns, workshops, shrines, and swimming holes along its banks. We run three guided e-bike courses—one downstream, one through the middle reaches, and one from the sacred source—so whichever

town you stay in, the river is yours for a day. Electric assist takes the effort out of the hills, local guides lead you to places you might otherwise miss, and the Nagaragawa Railway carries you and your bicycle upstream for an easy ride back down. Ride all three, and you will have seen the river from its sacred upper reaches to the warlord's castle on the plain—at the speed the landscape deserves.



Photo by Essential Japan Travel



Photo by Essential Japan Travel



Photo by Essential Japan Travel

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Nagara River Cycling

Ride the river the way people beside it always have—through what the Japanese call *satokawa*: a river shaped by everyday life, farmed, fished, and lived with for generations. In 2015, the United Nations recognized this relationship along the Nagara as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System.



Gujo Train & Ride
(Full-Day)

Gujo Half-Day

Gifu Full-Day

Gifu
Half-Day

Gujo Train & Ride (Full-Day)

Take the train up, coast the river down

30 km / 7 hours

Ride the train upstream to Hakusan Nagataki Shrine, then coast back down past yana weirs, a riverside BBQ, and a footbath.



Photo by Essential Japan Travel

Gujo Half-Day

Ride the river of daily life

25 km / 3 hours

From the water-and-dance town of Gujo Hachiman, follow the Nagara downstream to Minami, where mountain and river run together at their wildest.



Photo by Essential Japan Travel

Gifu Full-Day

Ride the river of daily life

30 km / 6 hours, lunch included

Everything on the half-day ride, plus open rice paddies, a working sake brewery, and a quiet old temple tucked into the hills.



Photo by Atsushi Kobayashi

Gifu Half-Day

Ride the river of daily life

15 km / 3 hours

See a river fisherman's trade, pause for tea at a temple with the resident priest, chat with a local farmer, and ride past orchards heavy with fruit—all beneath Gifu Castle on Mt. Kinka.



Eight Experiences, One River

Rates and availability:
contact the Nagara River Tourism Office.



Gifu

GIFU WAGASA ARTISAN TOUR

Make a miniature paper umbrella in
Japan's umbrella town. 3 hours.

NAGARA RIVER CORMORANT FISHING CRUISE

1,300 years of fire on dark water. Evening
dinner cruise, May 11–Oct. 15. Add the
NAGARA RIVER GEISHA BANQUET—art on
the water—for a private evening.

Gifu



Gifu

GIFU IZAKAYA BAR HOPPING TOUR

Small bars and local dishes you'd never
find alone. 3 hours; food and drinks
included.



Seki

SEKI SWORDSMITHING & SAMURAI ARTS

Forge with a master in the City of Blades.
Sword demonstration, hands-on
forging, and unagi lunch.

Mino

MINO WASHI PAPERMAKING

Make your own sheet of UNESCO-listed
Japanese paper. 1 hour.



Gujo

GUJO ARTISAN HOPPING

Four crafts in one castle town; make one
yourself. Half a day, English-speaking
guide.



Gujo

GUJO FOOD TOUR

A night of mountain food in the water
town. 3 hours; food and drinks included.



Nagataki & Suhara

NAGARA RIVER PILGRIMAGE & MISOGI

Sacred traditions and river purification,
following the path of pilgrims for
centuries. Full day, Nagataki & Suhara.



ONSEN

NAGARAGAWA ONSEN
(Nagara River Hot Spring)



A rare urban sanctuary where natural spring water rises beneath vibrant city streets. Along the Nagara River, ryokan draw from the same ancient source that has soothed generations of locals.

The spring emerges clear from deep underground. Upon meeting the air, it turns a deep amber hue—warm and soothing against the skin. Rich in iron and minerals, the waters are prized for their warmth and restorative feel. Gentle on the skin, they leave a lasting sense of warmth and moisture.

Sink slowly into the amber waters that have comforted the people of Gifu for centuries. At some ryokan, you can soak while gazing out over the gentle flow of the Nagara River.

Accommodation

Five ryokan and hotels, each with its own character, are united by the Nagara River and its mineral-rich hot spring waters. Their cuisine draws from the river and surrounding region—fresh ayu sweetfish, seasonal ingredients, and flavors unique to Gifu.



Juhachiro

Founded in 1860, during the final years of the Edo period, Juhachiro is a long-established ryokan offering seasonal cuisine, mineral-rich hot springs, and an atmosphere shaped by over 160 years of hospitality.

10 Minato-machi, Gifu City
+81-58-265-1551



◀ GoogleMap



Hotel Park

With over 120 years of history, Hotel Park blends the charm of a traditional ryokan with modern comfort. Nobel Prize-winning author Yasunari Kawabata once stayed here, drawn by the same serene riverside views that define the property today.

397-2 Minato-machi, Gifu City
+81-58-265-5211



◀ GoogleMap



Usyo no le Sugiyama

Deeply connected to the Nagara River's cormorant fishing tradition, Usyo no le Sugiyama overlooks the river and Gifu Castle. Operated by a family of hereditary cormorant fishing masters, the ryokan offers seasonal cuisine and hospitality rooted in local tradition.

73-1 Nagara, Gifu City
+81-58-231-0161



◀ GoogleMap



Ishikin

Known for its cuisine and tranquil atmosphere, Ishikin is a traditional ryokan near the Nagara River. Guests unwind with seasonal kaiseki cuisine, hot springs, and the distinctive flavors of Gifu.

112 Nagara, Gifu City
+81-58-231-8156



◀ GoogleMap



Gifu Grand Hotel

An urban resort overlooking the Nagara River and Gifu Castle, Gifu Grand Hotel offers the amber waters of Nagaragawa Onsen in the heart of the city.

648 Nagara, Gifu City
+81-58-233-1111



◀ GoogleMap

Accommodation

Gujo & the River Towns

From the castle lanes of Gujo to a merchant house in Mino, and onward to the City of Blades, more places to stay await along the Nagara River. All bookable through NRTO.



Sekisuien

A classic ryokan at the foot of Gujo Hachiman Castle, just minutes from the dancing streets. Spacious rooms—some with private open-air baths—seasonal kaiseki dinners, and the town's evening calm right on your doorstep.

511-2 Yanagi-machi, Hachiman-cho, Gujo City, Gifu
+81-575-65-3101



◀ GoogleMap



NAE MINO

NAE MINO occupies three restored buildings along Mino's udatsu street, including a former washi paper merchant's house, offering an intimate stay woven into the town's paper-trading history.

1912-1 Motozumi-cho, Mino City, Gifu
+81-575-29-6611



◀ GoogleMap



Nakashimaya

A small, family-run ryokan on the main street, its renovated guest rooms blending old timber with modern comfort. The town begins outside the front door.

940 Shin-machi, Hachiman-cho, Gujo City, Gifu
+81-575-65-2191



◀ GoogleMap



A little further afield, worth the detour:

SHUKU

Set within Inuyama's Edo-period castle town on the banks of the Kiso River, SHUKU occupies a 400-year-old sake brewery and a former merchant mansion, now restored as an eight-room inn rich in local history.

633 Higashikoken, Inuyama, Inuyama City, Aichi
+81-568-65-9553



◀ GoogleMap

Restaurants & Souvenirs



Kawaramachiya
28 Tamai-cho, Gifu City,
Gifu 500-8008, Japan



GoogleMap



rustico4
12 Tamai-cho, Gifu City,
Gifu 500-8008, Japan



GoogleMap



**LONGGOOD
Gin Distillery**
12 Tamai-cho, Gifu City,
Gifu 500-8008, Japan



GoogleMap



CASA stella
6 Tamai-cho, Gifu City,
Gifu 500-8008, Japan



GoogleMap



**Kawaramachi
Hanazakuro**
29 Motohama-cho,
Gifu City,
Gifu 500-8007, Japan



GoogleMap



Shag
428-2 Kamizaimoku-cho,
Gifu City,
Gifu 500-8005, Japan



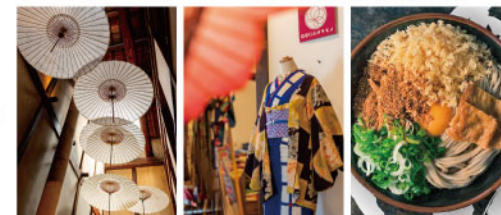
GoogleMap



**Nagaragawa
Department Store**
45 Minato-machi, Gifu City,
Gifu 500-8009, Japan



GoogleMap



SUGGESTED ITINERARY 4 nights 5 days

PART 1 Two nights at Nagaragawa Onsen. One base, no repacking.

Day 1

Arrival, Wagasa & Cormorant Fishing

Around noon: Arrive in Gifu (20 min from Nagoya)
/ bags to ryokan / lunch in Kawaramachi

Afternoon: Gifu Wagasa Artisan Tour — craft your own miniature umbrella and visit one of Japan's last umbrella-rib workshops
Check in; soak in the amber onsen

Evening: Nagara River Cormorant Fishing Cruise — dinner on the water as the fires drift past
(May 11–Oct. 15; add Nagara River Geisha Banquet for a private evening)

Sleep: Nagaragawa Onsen

Day 2

Cycling (or Inuyama) & Izakaya Night

Fair weather: Nagara River Cycling — Gifu Full-Day / rice paddies, sake brewery, tea at a Zen temple

Rainy day: Inuyama Castle Town Tour — two National Treasures, 35 min away

Evening: Gifu Izakaya Bar Hopping Tour— small bars and local dishes with a local guide

Sleep: Nagaragawa Onsen

Note: Rainy-day alternative pre-arranged; choose locally on the day.



PART 2

Two nights in Gujo Hachiman, 70 min from Gifu by scheduled express bus.

Day 3

Transfer to Gujo & the Castle Town

Morning: Shuttle from your ryokan to JR Gifu Station / express bus to Gujo Hachiman

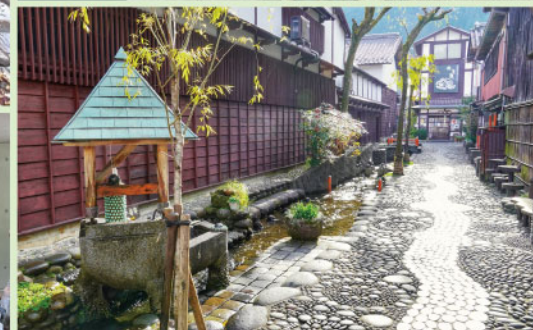
Late morning: Arrive / drop luggage at Castle Town Plaza

Lunch: Hida beef grilled on a hoba leaf with miso

Afternoon: Explore the castle town on foot — Sogisui spring, water channels, and the castle above
(English-speaking guide and Gujo Artisan Hopping available on request)

Late afternoon: Shuttle to your inn / dinner

Sleep: Gujo Hachiman (Sekisuien or other inns)



Day 4

NAGARA RIVER CYCLING – GUJO (TRAIN & RIDE)

Morning: Ride from the inn through town lanes and Jionzenji Temple garden / take bicycles on the Nagaragawa Railway upstream

Midday: Formal ceremony at Nagataki Hakusan Shrine / pizza lunch

Afternoon: Downhill ride — yana fish weir, Yamato Onsen footbath, river swim / finish at a machiya café
(Rain: guided by car)

Evening: Gujo Food Tour — local dishes, sake, and craft beer with a local guide

Sleep: Gujo Hachiman

Day 5

Departure (or onward to Kanazawa)

Morning: Bus back to Gifu and Nagoya / or continue north via Shirakawa-go, reaching Kanazawa by mid-afternoon. No backtracking.

From Nagoya: Extend to a 6–10-night route via Shirakawa-go and Kanazawa. Tailor-made arrangements through NRT0.