JAPAN

Meeting & Convention Planner's Guide
THE ADVANTAGES OF JAPAN FOR MICE GROUPS

When it comes to hosting MICE events — the collective term for meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions — no other destination excels quite like Japan. With its exceptional infrastructure, wide range of hotels and meeting venues and fascinating, only-in-Japan experiences, this Pacific powerhouse is an ideal destination for a wide variety of groups. A perfect blend of centuries-old traditions and hospitality, coupled with a decisively 21st-century sophistication, makes Japan an irresistible choice for international meeting planners from around the world. In addition, cities across Japan offer their own unique and important areas of industry, ensuring that groups are inspired by an array of new ideas and perspectives.

The benefits of staging a MICE gathering in Japan are many. They can be summed up in four main “values” — advantages that can help make any event a success. Here are some of the qualities that make Japan a natural fit for international meetings and incentives.

The Meeting of Knowledge and Talent
Japan is world-renowned as a leader in scientific and industrial innovation. It’s no surprise that Japan has produced 24 Nobel laureates in the natural sciences — including physics, chemistry and medicine. Many researchers are, in fact, members of international academic societies. In addition, Japan is home to many corporate headquarters and major research centers for some of the world’s best, most technologically advanced companies.

The advantage of Insight
Japan’s uniquely fascinating everyday customs and culture — as well as its interesting regional diversity — stimulates the senses and intellect of visitors from around the world, inspiring new ideas and perspectives. The nation is home to rich contrasts that co-exist and complement each other, as witnessed in strong, centuries-old customs and traditions, which are cherished and celebrated even as advanced science and technology continues to propel Japan further into the future.

In Japan, visitors can attend traditional events like the Gion Festival, which dates back more than a millennium but now takes place against the backdrop of soaring office buildings. Wherever they go, MICE participants will appreciate the close attention to detail that characterizes Japanese society, as well as distinctive elements like traditional crafts, local cuisine and historic sites. Visitors are often wowed by aspects of everyday life that locals find normal — including the seemingly hectic yet organized “scramble intersections” of Shibuya, the automatically opening taxi doors, and the lines of commuters waiting to board the amazingly well-run trains.

A Track Record of Quality
Japan’s long-standing dedication to quality, together with the age-old Japanese spirit of hospitality, creates an atmosphere that’s unbeatable for international MICE groups. The fact that the Japan Convention Bureau was founded way back in 1960 is proof of the nation’s experience and excellence in the art of hosting global meetings and incentives.

The human factor is a key element in Japan’s quality of service. Planners will find operational staff with the reliability, knowledge and flexibility to ensure that there are no unwelcome surprises during any meeting or event. Also worth noting is the natural courtesy and consideration that Japanese people have for others, as well as their ability to swiftly adapt to cutting-edge technology. It’s no wonder that Japan is known for such high standards of quality.

Safe and Clean Cities
Japan is known around the world for its high level of safety, as well as its impressive cleanliness. These people-pleasing factors help make Japan an even more popular choice for planners and attendees. Japan is, in fact, one of the safest nations on earth, and also offers impressive amenities and services, such as 24-hour urban convenience stores in most cities and spotlessly clean public restrooms — many of which are accessible for people with disabilities — that are almost always free.

For all of these reasons and more, Japan is uniquely positioned to serve the MICE market. And the world has taken note. Japan’s strong economy, as well as its leading role in science and industry, underscores the destination’s natural allure as a place to meet and do business. And Japanese tourism offices, private sector and suppliers are well versed at using innovative methods and spot-on service to take the MICE experience to the next level.

EASY ACCESS JAPAN
A big selling point for Japan is the easy access. An ever-growing array of nonstop flights from key U.S. cities has brought the destination closer than ever before. In fact, a trip to Japan from the United States is often easier and shorter than flying to Europe, the Middle East and Australia, and it’s closer than other Asian destinations, too. Four airports in Japan offer direct flights from the U.S.

Japan’s main gateway airports — Narita International Airport and Tokyo International (Haneda) Airport, both of which serve Tokyo, Chubu Centrair International Airport, which serves Nagoya, and International Airport in Osaka — make the arrival and departure experience swift and efficient. Modern regional airports make it possible to reach a variety of cities in Japan within two hours of arriving in Tokyo, and the Shinkansen high-speed railway lines (often called the bullet train) provides swift connections to reach even more parts of the country. From start to finish, Japan is designed to make travel pleasant for groups of every size.
OCTOBER 2016

JAPAN

OUTSTANDING FACILITIES FOR EVERY OCCASION

Japan’s world-famous dedication to technology, hospitality and service is especially evident in the impressive array of convention and event venues that dot the nation. Regardless of size or city, there are multiple facilities to meet the needs of just about any group. Japan is home to a variety of important destinations for the MEICE market; this guide serves as an introduction to five especially important cities: Chiba, Hiroshima, Kitakyushu, Sapporo and Sendai. While these names may not have global recognition yet, a quick review of their infrastructure — as well as the many industries, educational and research institutions that operate there — show why they’re increasingly on meeting planners’ maps of must-see destinations.

Here are a few event spaces in some of the most important destinations in Japan.

Makuhari Messe, Chiba
Located in Greater Tokyo, the city of Chiba is a strategic destination for planners. One of the top venues here is Makuhari Messe. A big part of the facility’s appeal lies in its location between Narita International Airport (the largest international airport in Japan, 30 minutes to Makuhari Messe) and Tokyo International Airport Haneda, making traveling easy with nonstop flights from 20 North American cities (as of August 1, 2016). This ease of access ensures participants maintain their time in this exciting city.

Makuhari Messe hosts numerous international groups each year, such as the 99th Kwanza Annual Convention in 2014 with 2,812 participants from 29 countries — where Chiba’s ease of access help make it the ideal convention location. Makuhari Messe consists of three distinct venues: The International Exhibition Hall, which measures more than 775,000 square feet, the International Convention Hall, which has 22 conference and meeting rooms, and the 9,000-seat (at a maximum) Makuhari Event Hall. Within walking distance are six hotels with a total of 3,235 rooms. In addition, several fascinating and popular attractions are nearby, including the largest class shopping and outlet malls in Japan and a traditional Japanese garden. Makuhari Messe will prove its ability to host large groups when it serves as the venue for seven sports — including wrestling and fencing — during the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games.

International Conference Center Hiroshima
The capital of Hiroshima Prefecture, the city of Hiroshima is the largest city in the Chugoku region and is a natural choice for meetings, conventions and incentives. The city’s biggest facility for groups is International Conference Center Hiroshima, which is located inside Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. With three levels and two basement levels, as well as a variety of small and medium-sized conference rooms, the venue is ideal for a variety of groups and events.

The conference center’s largest auditorium, Phoenix Hall, has 1,304 seats and is perfect for concerts, lectures and conferences, while the International Exchange Lounge features a library with books on international exchange and cooperation, and the on-site Serenade restaurant seats 100. Within walking distance are multiple group-friendly hotels and other conference facilities, including Hiroshima City Banka Koryu Kita Hotel and JMS Aestus Plaza.

Kitakyushu International Convention Zone, Kitakyushu
One of two cities in Fukuoka Prefecture, Kitakyushu is a base for several large companies, making it a highly popular destination for various types of meetings. A direct link to JR Fukuoka Station is conveniently close — and a 30-minute travel time from Fukuoka International Airport. Kitakyushu is an environmentally friendly, barrier-free facility equipped with solar panels that is a short, 5-minute subway ride from downtown. Rich with nature and home to the prestigious Fukuoka University, Sapporo was the perfect choice to host the International Meeting of Microbials Sciences Congress (IFMIS 2011) and the International Wildlife Management Congress (FWMC 2015). Sapporo Convention Center’s flexible, multipurpose meeting space, including 19 meeting rooms, an exhibition hall — not to mention attractive rental rates — make this a first choice for many planners. The Main Hall can easily accommodate large conferences, with a capacity of 2,500 seats, and it can also function as an exhibition hall, with over 20,000 square feet of usable space. In addition, the Sapporo Convention Center is conveniently close to some 23,000 hotel guest rooms, providing extensive options for groups of every size and budget.

Sendai International Center and Yume Messe Miyagi, Sendai
Only five minutes by subway from Sendai station and the city’s downtown, Sendai International Center has a proven track record for holding a number of successful international and large-scale conferences. The third U.N. World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, which consisted of 6,500 participants from 185 different countries, was held successfully in March 2015 and is the largest international conference held within Japan. In addition, Sendai was host to the 88th Annual Scientific Meeting of the Japanese Circulation Society with 15,000 participants, demonstrating Sendai’s ability to cater to large-scale conventions.

Sendai International Center is located in an area surrounded by cultural facilities, such as Sendai City Museum and Miyagi Museum of Art as well as the Kowakusu Campus of Tohoku University. This cultural area was once the site of Sendai Castle. It is possible to stroll to the castle park and enjoy the view overlooking the surrounding city between meetings at the International Center. Another important meeting and event venue, located in the Sendai port area, is Yume Messe Miyagi, which has the largest exhibition hall in the Tohoku region. Benefiting from a major renovation following the tsunami of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, the facility has more than 80,700 square feet of contemporary exhibition space.
HOTELS FOR EVERY GROUP

Hospitality is an important part of Japanese culture, and the nation showcases its outstanding infrastructure, forward-thinking technology and high standards of service in its wide variety of group-friendly hotels, all of which are well versed at serving the needs of meeting planners and their groups. Indeed, the well-trained hotel staff at every major property understands the needs of planners as well as hotel guests and attendees, and also the importance of serving international guests from around the globe.

With their thoughtfully designed guest rooms, well-equipped meeting and event spaces and convenient locations — often near major transportation hubs as well as important convention centers — the top Japanese hotels are geared to make every event both productive and enjoyable.

Here are a few key properties in top business and meeting destinations.

Chiba

An impressive number of hotels are within a walking distance of Makuhari Messe, Chiba City’s big conventions and event complex. For instance, situated next to the facility is Hotel New Otani Makuhari, which hosted the major reception for the 2014 Kiwanis Annual Convention. Additional nearby lodgings offer conference and event space for groups of more than 2,000. Since many of the hotels face Tokyo Bay, guests can enjoy stunning views of the Tokyo skyline and the iconic Mt. Fuji, which lies beyond the bay. In addition, there are plenty of attractions near the hotels, providing multiple options for free-time activities — options include the Aeon Mall Makuhari New City and Mitsui Outlet Park Makuhari, some of the largest shopping and outlet malls in Japan. Also nearby are a traditional Japanese garden with a tea ceremony room, and a man-made beach where the Red Bull Air Race has been hosted for the past two years.

Hiroshima

The Grand Prince Hotel Hiroshima, the host hotel for the G7 Hiroshima Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in 2016, faces the Seto Inland Sea and offers magnificent views — as well as excellent security that has made it a top choice for important international conferences. The staff at the Grand Prince is adept at serving the needs of a sophisticated international clientele. The property has 11 meeting spaces overlooking the sea, including a recently renovated ballroom.

Also noteworthy is the Rihga Royal Hotel Hiroshima, which is located in the central part of the city, with convenient access to public transportation and ideal proximity to Green Arena (Hiroshima Prefectural Sports Center) and NTT Credo Hall, making it possible to coordinate conferences for up to 800 participants using all three venues.

Kitakyushu

The Kitakyushu International Convention Zone is home to the Rihga Royal Hotel Kokura, which has large banquet halls for groups of more than 1,000, as well as a variety of medium-sized and small meeting and event spaces. The Rihga Royal Hotel was the host venue for the recent, high-level G7 Kitakyushu Energy Ministerial Meeting, attended by government energy ministers and bureaucrats as part of the G7 Summit Japan 2016 in Iae-Shima.

Sapporo

Multiple hotels serve the needs of groups in this important business destination. The 292-room Ritz-Carlton Sapporo, located in the city center, has 20 meeting rooms, the largest of which accommodates 2,000 in a theater layout. Also near Ritz-Carlton is the 587-room Sapporo Prince Hotel, which provides more options for accommodations and meetings in the downtown area, with two of the venue’s largest halls capable to fit in up to 1,000 delegates.

Sapporo is also home to the Hotel Emisia Sapporo, which has lots of amenities for groups, including 12 meeting rooms, the largest of which accommodates 480 in a classroom layout. This property is especially convenient since it’s only 28 minutes from the airport, and is also connected by the subway to the city center.

Sendai

Among the recommended properties for groups in Sendai is Sakan, a hotel that hosted the G7 meeting of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors in 2016. This luxurious property is located in Sendai’s hot springs resort district, offering amenities that connect to relax, recharge and review beautiful examples of Japanese culture and nature — including a flame that has symbolically protected a local family for some 400 years, which graces a historical exhibition gallery space.

The world-renowned Winit Hotel in Sendai opened in 2010 only to experience the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011. However, the hotel did not sustain any damage at all and could be called the world’s safest hotel. The hotel also achieved success holding special events for the 3rd APEC Senior Officials Meeting and the 67th IMF World Bank Annual Meeting.
**UNIQUE GROUP EXPERIENCES**

With its centuries-old traditions and fascinating culture, provides MICE groups with experiences they won’t find anywhere else in the world. These one-of-a-kind activities and attractions can enhance any group program and enrich the overall trip, providing fresh ideas, inspiration and excitement that will create a truly memorable event.

From culture and history to food and entertainment, here are a few of the most interesting options that await groups in Japan.

**Chiba**

In Chiba City, visitors can not only produce their own samurai movie, but perform alongside professional actors, support every step of the way — from identifying locations through to the editing process — by actors who have appeared in Hollywood movies including *The Last Samurai*. Visitors can also learn about Chiba’s 890-year history by taking part in tours of historic attractions, including Chiba Castle and Chiba Shrine — or visiting some of the more than 40 breweries, many of which continue the tradition of sake-making that dates back to the 17th century.

Groups can also learn more about Japan’s remarkable technology and research by taking a facility tour at the National Institute of Radiological Sciences, which is renowned for its radiology and cancer research. Visitors can also get a close-up look at cutting-edge technology at the Keio University, a facility that focuses on genetic analysis of humans and plants.

In the Soga district, participants can enjoy a night sightseeing cruise with views of the glittering factory buildings. The cruise sets off from a brand-new landing bridge where a shopping complex called K’s Harbor stands. A restaurant serving the freshest seafood — filled with aquaria — is located in K’s Harbor, suitable for pre- or post-convention tours.

**Hiroshima**

Hiroshima is a great destination for foodies. The city produces more oysters than anywhere else in Japan, so it’s a rewarding place for groups to enjoy these delicacies in a variety of forms, including raw, crumbed and deep fried, and also as the topping for okonomiyaki, a savory pancake that’s one of Hiroshima’s most popular dishes.

Another must-see activity is a visit to the island of Miyajima, one of the most scenic places in all of Japan. One of Hiroshima’s two world heritage sites, Miyajima is graced with the largest torii of Itsukushima Shrine, which seems to float on the ocean. Visitors can also stroll the shopping street of Miyajima Omotesando, trying new foods and even dressing in a Heian era costume or kimono.

**Kitakyushu**

The city of Kitakyushu makes it easy to organize industrial tours and excursions, thanks to the more than 50 participating companies that have a presence in the region. Among the most popular “industrial tourism” sites are the Yawata Robot Village, the TOTO Museum and the former government-run Yawata Steel Works, which joined the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2015.

Kitakyushu is home to countless places that can please a variety of groups, including the former Moji Mission Club, where Albert Einstein stayed during his visit to Japan, the Kitakyushu Museum of Natural History & Human History, which ranked second in Trip Advisor’s list of the top Japanese museums, the Kannon Strasse Pedestrian Tunnel, which offers the rare experience of being able to walk under the ocean, and Kosuiyama Pond, which was named by CNN as one of Japan’s 31 most beautiful places.

**Sapporo**

Located on the northern island of Hokkaido, the host of Asia’s first Winter Olympics in 1972, Sapporo is a true mecca for winter sports and is known for its beautiful natural settings. Indeed, Sapporo is all about food and the great outdoors, ranging from exciting ski resorts to relaxing hot springs. Groups can sample one of the top-selling beers in North America at the Sapporo Beer Garden, which can also host private events for up to 1,000 participants. One must also check out the Nise Fish Market, which is the place to visit for one-of-a-kind local seafood.

**Sendai**

This lovely destination offers a myriad of opportunities for groups. A sightseeing ferry service for Matsushima, one of Japan’s three most beautiful spots, departs from Shingama Port. During winter, as you cruise and enjoy the beautiful scenery you can also enjoy fresh oyster hot pot cuisine. Among the other top attractions is Shukkei-en, which was constructed during the Meiji period and was once the home to a feudal lord family called Date. Today, it’s a restaurant that’s highly praised for its use of local produce, which is expertly prepared and served using traditional Sendai handicraft.

Also worth a visit is Yamadera, where the beautiful Risshakuji temple is a nationally designated landmark. Just 50 minutes from Sendai Station, the site has historical and cultural significance and offers picturesque views from historic Gedaido Hall.
A CITY GUIDE TO JAPAN

Representing one of the world’s largest economies as well as thousands of years of dedication to service and innovation, Japan is a logical place to meet and do business. It’s no wonder that the nation has such great allure for MICE groups.

Here are some of the top destinations, and what makes them noteworthy for business, academics, research, and the MICE segment.

Chiba
Chiba is home to superb meeting and convention locations within the city’s key industrial areas. For example, the S ECC district is home to important manufacturers of materials for use in steel and electrical power industries; and the Makuhari Messe is the meeting ground for exciting, near-future technologies and next-generation industries. These National Strategic Economic Growth Areas also offer vast restrictions, making them even more attractive for businesses.

Chiba’s strategic positioning and excellent offerings make it a natural choice as the meeting place for the Million Dollar Round Table (MDRT), an association of financial professionals.

The reasons we chose Chiba, Japan for our MDRT Experience meeting were many,” said Ray Kopetski, the organization’s senior director. “For one, the convention center in Makuhari Messe offers modern facilities with expansive space for general sessions, breakouts and exhibits. In addition, the convention center itself is connected to an assortment of excellent hotels by a covered walkway, making it very easy for delegates to get to and from sessions. Also within a short walking distance are many wonderful restaurants with cuisine to suit any taste, as well as shopping and entertainment opportunities, all located within a few blocks of the convention center.”

Service was also a key factor in the decision to choose Chiba, according to Kopetski. “One of the most important reasons for our choice was the superb customer service level we experienced from the convention center, our hotel partners, and the Chiba Convention Bureau,” he said. “The result: a tremendously successful meeting experience for over 6,000 of our attendees from around the globe.”

Hiroshima
This destination is a powerhouse in many ways, thanks to the presence of important companies in a variety of fields — all of which attract a great number of business travelers and meeting groups every year.

Among the top producers in Hiroshima is Mazda, the automobile manufacturer known throughout the world for its Skyactiv Technology, which delivers outstanding performance while meeting strict environmental guidelines. Also in Hiroshima is Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd., a leading manufacturer renowned as a producer of compressors, turbines, and medical apparatus. Otahiko Sake Co., Ltd. is a producer of high-quality food products favored by Hiroshima residents, while Daiso is a brand of so-called “100-yen” shops that are extremely popular in Japan, and Tomotaki is a manufacturer of well-regarded skin-care and hair-care products formulated with seaweed.

Kitakyushu
Since the establishment in 1901 of the government-run Yawata Steel Works, Kitakyushu city has developed as a heavy and chemical industry zone that includes iron and steel, machinery and chemical manufacturers, effectively leading Japan’s industrialization and rapid economic growth. In recent years, Kitakyushu City has become a base for various industries including the robotics, automotive, telecommunications and service sectors, and continues to develop as a city that attracts high-tech manufacturers.

Kitakyushu City is a transformative city, promising inspiration for every conference or incentive group that meets there.

Sapporo
An important center of learning and research, Sapporo attracts various meetings thanks to prestigious institutions such as Hokkaido University, which is Japan’s oldest. Hokkaido University’s Dr. Akira Suzuki, in fact, won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 2010. The city also has extensive experience hosting major international conferences, ranking third in Japan after Tokyo and Kyoto according to the 2014 ICCA Rankings. Sapporo is a magnet for knowledge and innovation in fields like geosciences, medical sciences, chemistry, zoology, and information technology.

“Sapporo is an excellent meeting destination for a number of reasons,” explained Bellinda Doey, regional director of APAC for American Express Meetings & Events. “Not only does it provide an alternative to the usual Tokyo-locations, but Sapporo has some unique offerings that really stand out. During my time there, I have found that there are some unique and interesting activities and locations for groups to incorporate into their agenda — from ski resorts and hot springs to beer gardens and special venues.”

“The city is well designed,” Doey continued. “Facilities are within close commute and there is a huge variety of hotels to meet many different needs. Sapporo is also a destination that can provide some financial efficiency when compared to more common locations. All in all, Sapporo is a welcoming and unique location that has a relaxed vibe, away from the hustle and bustle of Tokyo. I would highly recommend it as a destination.”

Sendai
The hub for the Tohoku region’s economy, Sendai is also an important academic center. With numerous companies operating in the region, Sendai offers easy access to an impressive variety of big-name players in industrial, agricultural and other sectors. Among the famous brands present in the area surrounding Sendai are Nilka Whisky, Kirin Beer and Sapporo Beer. Toyota automobiles are manufactured in a nearby village as well, while Toshiba Electronics — located in another neighboring town — is an important manufacturer of semiconductors.

Sendai has also shown great innovation. In response to the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, for example, Tohoku University established the International Research Institute of Disaster Science (IRIDeS), as a new multi-disciplinary center, conducting practical disaster risk reduction research. Learning from the region’s experiences through scientific data, IRIDeS aims to provide solutions to better deal with rare but possible mega-disasters within Japan and abroad. Although it is a city with a population of over one million people, nature and urban functions work together in harmony.

“Sendai is a city that can be traced back to the culture and traditions of Date Masamune. Today the city continues to adopt initiatives with a focus on culture and the arts as well as supporting our next generation of creators by making changes that reflect not only new developments in Japan, but also the voice of our overseas students,” said Japan Convention Service, Tohoku Branch, Branch Manager, Mr. Kazuo Shimizu. “Large-scale conferences of up to 20,000 participants can now be held in Sendai by utilizing multiple venues in this city.”
JAPAN
See a whole new view for Business

New ideas start here