

新潟 Niigata



Only two hours by shinkansen from Tokyo on the coast of the Sea of Japan lies Niigata city, capital of the prefecture of the same name.

With the sea on one side, the long prefecture is otherwise surrounded by beautiful mountains.

Rice growing and saké production are well known Niigata specialties. Agriculture is an important sector for the prefecture. The prefecture has a large flood plain with two major rivers, including Japan's longest river, the Shinano, and this fertile plain yields the biggest rice harvest in Japan. It is also known for growing flowers, in particular tulips, which are the Niigata city flower.

Niigata city flourished as a sea port during the Edo Period. It is the largest port city on the Sea of Japan coast, and it was one of only five ports that were opened up to international trade in 1858. It has the only remaining customs house from that time. Today Niigata is the largest city on the Sea of Japan coast and it has developed into a modern industrial city; chemicals, machinery and oil refining are major industries.

Niigata city is also known as the gateway to Sado Island, part of Niigata prefecture, a place of exile during the Middle Ages when many anti-government intellectuals were banished to the island. Later in the Edo Period, the island experienced a gold rush after a rich gold mine was discovered. The mine is now closed. What was once the best gold mine is now open to the public as a museum. While its history is of interest to many visitors, so too are the island's natural beauty and culture. The island is famous for its drumming tradition.

Many visitors to Japan never get to visit the Sea of Japan. Niigata being so accessible from Tokyo thanks to the shinkansen is surely an option to consider. With its excellent food and saké, great ski resorts and onsen, Niigata has much to offer visitors.

For more information

Niigata prefecture's tourism board urges you to "Enjoy Niigata", the name of its website—<http://enjoyniigata.com/english/index.html>—which is easy to navigate with a good listing of the prefecture's many attractions.

See also Japan National Tourism Organisation:
<http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/regional/niigata/index.html>

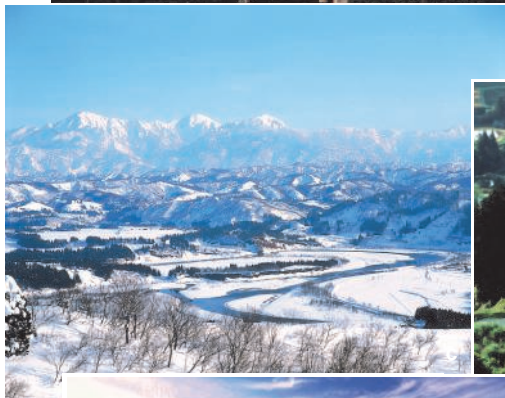


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Pictures of Niigata

(a) Toki Messe Convention Centre—the modern face of Niigata on the waterfront; (b) the Former Niigata Customs House dates from 1869; (c) beautiful mountains many of which are part of national parks; (d) rice terraces; (e) flat land makes for excellent farming; (f) women enjoying a footbath—Niigata has the 3rd highest number of onsen with accommodation; (g) Sado Okesa is a famous local dance of Sado Island; (h) the Toki Shinkansen links Niigata with Tokyo.