

Must-Visit Flower Festivals around Tokyo!

Shower of Blossoms Interwoven with Traditional Techniques and Nature

Tobu Railway Co., Ltd.

Take a Tobu Railway train from Asakusa, Tokyo's old traditional town, and make a day trip to our recommended sightseeing spots where you can feel the essence of spring in Japan! In this newsletter, we introduce must-visit sites of flowers along the Tobu Railway lines.

With 20,000 trees of 100 varieties, feel the power of "Azaleas of Shimizu Park"

A Tobu limited express train will get you from Asakusa Station to Kasukabe Station in about 35 minutes. From there, transfer to the Tobu Urban Park Line, and in about 20 minutes you will be at Shimizu-Koen Station, from where you can access Shimizu Park, which the station was named after, with about a 6-minute walk.

Nestled in lush greenery, Shimizu Park offers many activities, including a field athletics course, camping, BBQ, and a pony farm, appealing to all kinds of visitors from kids to adults alike in every season. Besides all these fun experiences, there are some more enjoyment that Tobu Railway would like to recommend: azaleas.

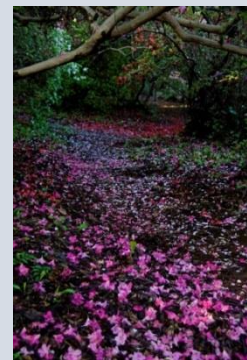
Shimizu Park started to be developed around 1894 as a nature park adjacent to the temple called Konjoin. The park was so developed as to preserve native Kirishima Azaleas and Omurasaki Azaleas, which had grown in clusters on this ground.

In developing the park, it was ensured that trees would grow with their inherent strength, without human intervention as much as possible. Thanks to such efforts, the azalea trees in Shimizu Park are tall, and their typical multi-trunked stems are massive. You can feel the strength of the tree in their twisted branches that stretch long and thick.

Today, some 20,000 azalea trees of 100 varieties proudly display their colorful blooms in the best time for viewing, which is from the end of April to the beginning of May, while Kirishima azaleas, which have been here since the establishment of the park and are estimated to be over 300 years old, are worth a look. Except some restricted areas, you can stroll around freely among trees to see azaleas in the park. In some locations, you can even walk under a tunnel of azaleas. So why don't you come and feel the scenery of Japan leisurely in the warm spring sun.

A brochure of Shimizu Park is also available in English.

URL: https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g651652-d1314551-Reviews-Shimizu_Park-Noda_Chiba_Prefecture_Kanto.html



The view of "Azaleas of Tatebayashi" admired also by lords in the Edo period

It is about 60 minutes by Tobu limited express train from Asakusa Station to Tatebayashi City, Gunma Prefecture, where you can find a brilliant park of azaleas called Hanayama.

An azalea garden preserved over about 400 years

Situated east to Tsutsujigaoka Park, Hanayama, as it is so fondly called by the locals, is a some 1.7-hectare area on the hill side where azalea trees are planted. From the middle of April to the beginning of May, Hanayama is literally covered with colorful azalea flowers.

Rich in variety, many of ancient azalea trees in Hanayama have grown so large that they can be admired from below. The magnificent profusion of azalea blossoms leaves the viewer with a real sense of awe.



Azaleas in Tsutsujigaoka Park, Tatebayashi City

By the beginning of the Edo period, Hanayama was already known as a notable site of azaleas in the neighborhood. Since Tadatsugu Sakakibara (also known as Tadatsugu Matsudaira), the lord of Tatebayashi Castle, transplanted clusters of old azalea trees to this area in 1627, the azalea garden had been protected and nurtured by feudal lords and others.

Noteworthy, the garden has been well preserved over about 400 years up to today, which is perhaps an unprecedented case in the world. Imagine that the view of azaleas you see in the park today may be the same as that admired by lords in the Edo period.

Azaleas that can be found only here

Among many varieties found in the park, Edo-Kirishima, which was cultivated in Okubo, Tokyo during the Edo period, is preserved in clusters in Tsutsujigaoka Park, which is one of such very few spots in the country. Further, eight varieties with special color mutation from the park's signature Yama Azalea and Oyama Azalea have been registered as originals of Tatebayashi City – that is to say, they can be found only in Tsutsujigaoka Park. Visitors can also view "space azaleas" grown from seeds that were brought to space by Chiaki Mukai, an astronaut from Tatebayashi who flew on the space shuttle Columbia.

Come and enjoy the annual Azalea Festival, the biggest festival in Tatebayashi City, held from April to May.

Walk under an about one-kilometer-long wisteria trellis in Kasukabe, “City of Fuji”

Located about 35 kilometers from Asakusa, or about 30 minutes by Tobu limited express train, Kasukabe City is referred to as the “City of Fuji” (literally “City of Wisteria”) famous for wisteria blossoms.

Along the main “Fuji Dori” (“Wisteria Street”) that runs from the west entrance of Kasukabe Station, a beautiful wisteria trellis extends over a total length of about one kilometer. Set along the sidewalks on both sides of the road, the wisteria trellis features 218 wisteria trees of seven varieties, entertaining the eyes of visitors every year.

Roughly classified, two types of wisteria are planted along Fuji Dori, one being Fuji, or *Wisteria floribunda*, which has many blossoms borne in long clusters, the other being Yama Fuji, or *Wisteria brachybotrys*, with short flower clusters. To secure safe walking spaces on the road, most of the clusters found here are about 60 centimeters long.

Here, visitors can find four varieties of Fuji: Murasaki Naga Fuji, Kokuryu Fuji, Kuchibeni Fuji, and Shironaga Fuji, all of which hang down in long clusters. These Fuji varieties altogether account for about 60 percent of the whole wisterias planted along the street. Among them, Kuchibeni Fuji is a very rare variety with pale red buds that turn white as they reach full bloom, leaving a lipstick-like color. On the other hand, Yama Fuji typically has flower clusters as short as 10 to 20 centimeters, while some species bloom large flowers despite such a short length. There are three varieties of Yama Fuji found here: white Shirokapitan, purple Murasakikapitan, and red Akakapitan. As said, a total of seven varieties of wisteria blossoms are arranged along the street. Planting such different types of wisterias, from the early-blooming to the late-blooming, makes a walking space where pedestrians can enjoy the difference in flower shape, color, and scent in each flowering season. Come and enjoy the about one-kilometer-long tunnel of wisteria!!

Kasukabe City Official Website: <http://www.city.kasukabe.lg.jp/multilingual/index.html>



[Kuchibeni Fuji]
Very rare wisteria variety



[Akakapitan]



[Fuji Dori]
About one-kilometer-long wisteria trellis



Ofuji Festival “Fuji no Hana Story” features the majestic beauty of wisteria

About 80 minutes from Asakusa by Tobu limited express train, Ashikaga Flower Park in Ashikaga City, Tochigi Prefecture is home to beautiful giant wisteria trees, called Ofuji.

The park’s symbolic Ofuji trees were transplanted by Konami Tsukamoto, Japan’s first female certified tree doctor. As the transplantation of Ofuji, then 130 years old, was unprecedented, this extraordinary project drew attention from all over the country to set the first successful precedent in Japan. The four Ofuji (three Noda Naga Fuji and one Yae Kokuryu Fuji) trees and an about 80-meter-long white Shiro Fuji wisteria tunnel are designated as prefectural natural monuments.

Ashikaga Flower Park creates a seasonal garden through a wide range of seasonal blooms and trees. The tale of “Fuji no Hana” (“Flowers of Wisteria”) features light pink Usubeni Fuji, purple Murasaki Fuji, white Shiro Fuji, and yellow Kibana Fuji, each with a little different flowering season, which unrolls a brilliant, living picture scroll of flowers. Fuji is said to be an ancient genus native to Japan, and it is sung in Manyoshu, an anthology of ancient Japanese poems.

Fuji bloom sequentially from Noda Fuji, one of the most famous Japanese wisteria species, to Usubeni Fuji, Murasaki Fuji, Naga Fuji, Yae no Fuji, and Shiro Fuji, giving rise to the color changes. Lastly, Kibana Fuji (*Leguminosae-Laburnum*) bloom, though it is said to be difficult to cultivate in Japan, allowing visitors to enjoy wisteria blooms for over one month.

The three giant wisteria trellises that cover the equivalent of 600 tatami mats, the Yae giant wisteria trellis, which is rarely seen in the world, wisteria trees tailored to garden shrubs, the about 80-meter-long wisteria tunnel of Shiro Fuji and Kibana Fuji, and wisterias mirrored in a pond during the night are breathtakingly, and almost otherworldly, beautiful.

The wisteria trellises transplanted ten years ago, which were 72 square meters size, have grown more than 10 times to about 1,000 square meters size, now being called the world’s most beautiful wisterias. We hope you enjoy this full vitality of wisterias and the beautiful and fantastic world.

Ofuji Festival “Fuji no Hana Story” is held between mid-April and mid-May, the best viewing time for wisterias.

Ashikaga Flower Park Official Website: <https://www.ashikaga.co.jp/english/index.html>



[Wisterias lit up]



[Kibana Fuji]

<Information about recommended sightseeing areas along the Tobu Railway lines>

The Tobu Railway Group is a major Japanese corporate group consisting of approximately 90 companies. The group has the longest operating distance in the Kanto area, covering many tourist spots, including Asakusa and Tokyo Skytree®; Nikko and Kinugawa Onsen, home to a World Heritage Site and hot springs; Tatebayashi and Ashikaga, known for beautiful blooming flower fields; and Kawagoe, where the atmosphere of the Edo era still lives on. Explore destinations around Tobu Railway Group at Tobu Japan Trip: <http://www.tobujapantrip.com/en/>

*Please refer to the website on the right for other media materials and images. Mynewsdesk: <https://www.mynewsdesk.com/tobu-railway>