

Yamanashi Picks of 2022: Samurai, Grape Pizza, & Nanbu Tea



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In this age of the Internet, posting to Instagram or Facebook whenever we do something worth sharing has become the standard norm. Even the utmost social media recluses are no exception, still managing to update their followers with the occasional photo montage showcasing their recent shenanigans.

This year, I've decided to embrace this trend by taking my most iconic "Yamanashi" moments of 2022, those that brought me joy or left a significant mark in my memory, and curate a digital scrapbook to share with the world. Pretty special, right?

HISTORY



▲ Suisha-no-Sato Park, Jigenji Temple, & Yatsugatake Long Riding (Hokuto City)

Koshu Kaido – Tracing the Steps of Samurai of Centuries Past

Yamanashi is brimming with gorgeous landscapes; arguably the most famous being the five-storied red "Chureito Pagoda" with the Mt. Fuji back-drop seen on Japan posters across the world. If you'd rather take the road less-traveled—one shaped by the footsteps of the brave samurai who once walked the very same path centuries ago—then I recommend taking the ancient military road "Koshu Kaido" leading to Hokuto City.

This year, I took a samurai-themed trip to Hokuto, where I indulged in world-class sake and traditional Japanese sweets at a samurai post town (Daigahara-juku), explored ancient temple grounds, and finished off the day by riding horseback into the sunset (literally). That was my two-day itinerary, but I still feel like there's so much of this historical city left to explore.

CULTURE



▲ Princess Koihime, Lord Shingen (Goto Junpei) & Yamamoto Kansuke (Mitani Masato)

Shingen-ko Festival - The Annually Resurrected Hero

This world-renowned festival comes only once a year to transport you back in time to a feudal Japan, so you can witness the resurrection of military warlord and local hero, Takeda Shingen. Through a series of parades and theatrical performances spanning over three days, the legacy of Lord Shingen is celebrated to the fullest by locals and visiting guests alike.

Famous comedians Junpei Goto and Mitani Masato brought a comedic twist to this year's (2022) pre-battle reenactment, retelling the "bromantic comradery" between Takeda Shingen and his strategic advisor, Yamamoto Kansuke. After this humorous interaction, a passionate battle cry reverberated through the Maizuru castle grounds, signaling to all that the main event of the Shingen-ko Festival was about to begin. At first, it was hard for me to wrap my mind around a festival that holds the Guinness World Record for "Largest Samurai Parade in the World," until the troops of over 1000 handsome samurai began to march by right before my eyes, adorned in exquisite, vividly-colored armor. Words alone truly don't do it justice, and I cannot urge you enough to come, get a front-row seat, and experience this cultural phenomenon yourself.

Get the latest info on this year's festival here:

<https://www.yamanashi-kankou.jp/shingen/english/about.html>

FOOD



▲ Grape Parfait and Pizza at Katsunuma Engawa Teahouse (Koshu City)

Grape Pizza – Cursed? More Like, “Where Have You Been All My Life?”

Is there a strange food combination you fancy that may garner some side eyes if you were to eat it in public?

The photo featured above, is a pizza with grape toppings (no, your eyes aren't playing tricks on you). Do not, however, be quick to judge this dish at face value, because nothing could prepare you for the culinary genius behind this unlikely flavor combination.

I encountered this cheesy delight at a small, local café just a few vineyards away from Katsunuma Budokyo Station. “Katsunuma Engawa Teahouse” takes the sweet tanginess of Yamanashi’s popular “Kyoho” and “Shine Muscat” grape varieties, and pairs it with a trifecta of blue cheeses. As a cheese fiend myself, this pizza had me watering at the mouth.

Oh, and don't worry if you're not brave enough to order the grape pizza, because you can always settle for a delicious, swirl of grape parfait goodness, or one of the many other options on the menu.

SOUVENIR



▲ Kai-no-Kirameki Tea by Nanbu (Released 2022)

Kai-no-Kirameki Tea - A New and Luxurious “Nanbu” Flavor

Now that you’ve reached the end of my blog post, I shall send you off with a memorable and delicious souvenir.

“Kai-no-Kirameki” is an entirely new, luxury-grade tea that just launched this year (2022), made from carefully selected tea leaves cultivated in Nanbu Town, Yamanashi. Nanbu is known for their cultivation history dating back to the Heian period (794–1185), and foggy climate, which happens to be very well-suited for tea plants. Nanbu’s new Kai-no-Kirameki flavors, “Tenshi” and “Shiratori,” come in strong with a rich flavor and aroma, then leave you with a refreshing, clean aftertaste. The first time I had the chance to try the tea was at a formal work event. When pegged against the other beverage options that lined the tables, many even high-profile brands, Kai-no-Kirameki was a clear guest-favorite.

Amongst the vast array of award-winning wines and sake produced in Yamanashi, this non-alcoholic, Halal-friendly beverage is a breath of fresh air and a step in the right direction of developing products that cater to a wider range of people and lifestyles.