

YAMANASHI'S KYOUTOU REGION

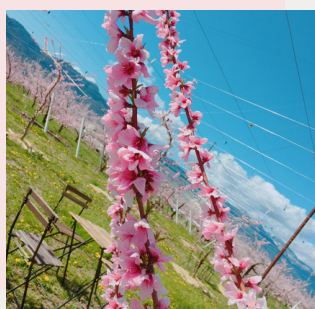
Japan's Hidden Valley of Blossoms, Grapes, and Wine



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It's been over a year since I first moved to Yamanashi, and I've had the incredible opportunity to explore many of its hidden gems. But there's one place that truly stole my heart: the Kyoutou region. This land of rolling hills is a paradise for lovers of fresh fruit, delicious wine, and breathtaking landscapes.

The Kyoutou region boasts a rich history of fruit cultivation, dating back around 1,300 years. It's even considered the birthplace of Japanese grape cultivation! The secret to its success? A unique and innovative cultivation system that's perfectly adapted to the region's distinctive topography. This system was recently recognized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS), an honor reserved for traditional agricultural practices of exceptional cultural and environmental value. To learn more about the GIAHS designation, check out our Brazilian colleague's article ([Portuguese](#)) or the FAO's official website ([English](#)).

Join me on a journey through the seasons as I share my personal highlights of this captivating region.



Spring Japan's Peach Blossom Paradise

Fuefuki City, nestled in the Kyoutou region, boasts a remarkable claim to fame: it's the undisputed champion of peach production in all of Japan. While many tourists flock to witness the ethereal beauty of cherry blossoms, Japan's lesser-known cousin, the peach blossom, offers an equally breathtaking spectacle.



Imagine, if you will, entire fields awash in a vibrant, deep pink hue. This is the enchanting tapestry that paints Fuefuki City come spring. For an unforgettable up-close encounter with these floral wonders, I recommend a visit to "Café Couleur" - a charming restaurant nestled amidst its own peach orchard. Here, you can savour a delectable meal surrounded by the blossoms' captivating beauty.

But the visual feast doesn't end there. From the "Fruits Line", a winding rural road carved into the mountainside, you'll be treated to a panoramic vista of the Kofu Basin, adorned in a mesmerizing sea of pink. As if this wasn't enough, the majestic snow-capped peak of Mount Fuji serves as an awe-inspiring backdrop, completing the picture-perfect scene.

Adored by cyclists and motorcyclists alike, the Fruits Line is an absolute must-do for any visitor to Fuefuki. As you cruise along this scenic route, you'll be transported to a world reminiscent of Southern Italy, with its winding roads and rows upon rows of grape vines. It's the perfect setting for a romantic escape or a solo adventure of self-discovery.



Kyoutou isn't just a spring dream; it's also Japan's Grape Kingdom. In summer, this picturesque region offers a unique and captivating sight - residential buildings intersected by a patchwork of grape fields, each utilizing every precious inch of land for optimal grape production. It is as if every home has its own personal vineyard.



Overhead pergolas adorned with vibrant emerald leaves offer a canopy of shade, while clusters of grapes in a rainbow of colors hang like jewels. From the delicate taste of "Koshu" to the juicy sweetness of "Kyouhou", a diverse array of indigenous grape varieties thrives in this fertile land.

But the experience doesn't end with admiring the view. In summer, many farmers open their orchards to the public, offering an unforgettable grape-picking adventure. Imagine yourself lost beneath a tapestry of vines, dodging head-sized bunches of grapes and searching for the perfect specimens to fill your basket.

One particular variety, the "Shine Muscat", reigns supreme among Japanese grapes. This exquisite green variety boasts seedless, candy-sweet grapes with an edible skin, each offering a burst of honeyed sweetness. Forget diamonds, these grapes are the ultimate luxury gift in Japan!

Prized for their exquisite taste, they can sell for hundreds of dollars, but are often found for a more affordable 3,000 yen a bunch (around \$21US).





From November onwards, you'll be captivated by the sight of rows of vibrant orange "dots" hanging from bamboo poles, adorning the facades of houses and even adorning the clotheslines of apartments!

Both sweet and astringent varieties exist. While the sweet variety can be enjoyed fresh, the astringent persimmon undergoes a month-long drying process that transforms its flavor, revealing its hidden sweetness. The "Koshu Hyakume," a giant red-hued persimmon weighing on average an impressive 375 grams, is a favourite for drying. Some specimens can even reach a staggering 500 grams!



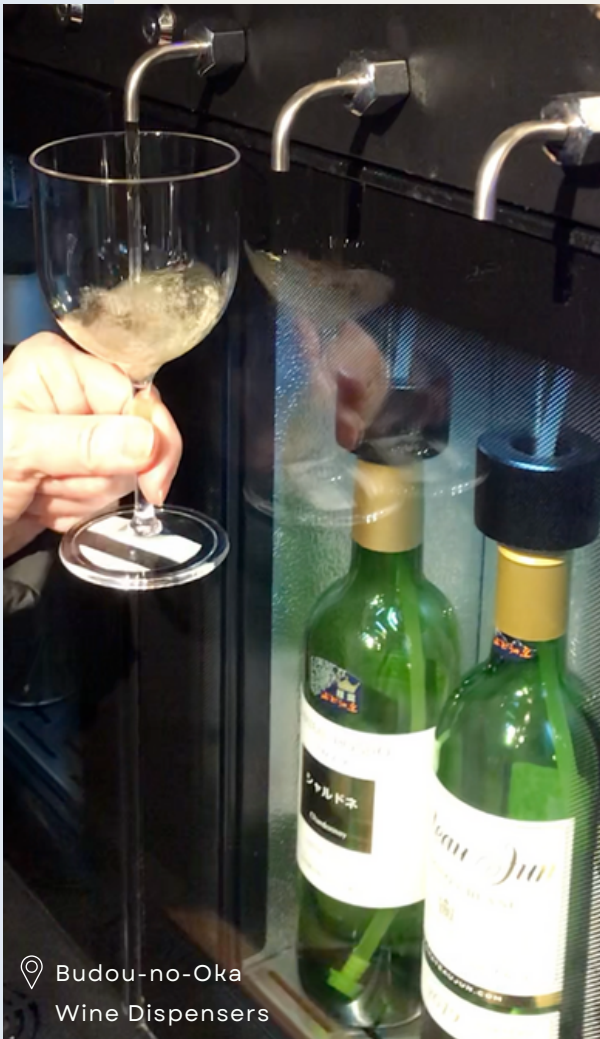
While Kyoutou is renowned for its delectable peaches and grapes, did you know it also holds a hidden autumn gem – the persimmon? In the Kyoutou region, a centuries-old tradition of drying persimmons thrives.

For over 400 years, families in Kyoutou have harnessed the region's ideal climate to create this unique delicacy. Gentle mountain breezes and abundant sunshine combine to produce the perfect conditions for drying persimmons.



One of my top picks for soaking in the vibrant autumn scenery is Moshi Moshi House. This beautifully preserved "tsukiage-style" thatched-roof house, situated in Kamijo Village, offers a glimpse into a bygone era. In 2015, Kamijo earned the prestigious title of "Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings" from the Agency for Cultural Affairs. Moshi Moshi House, with its few remaining brethren, stands as a testament to a vanishing way of life, a reminder that beauty often lies in the whispers of the past.

Known as the "Wine Prefecture" since 2019, Yamanashi boasts the most wineries in all of Japan, and Kyoutou holds the lion's share, with over 60 wineries calling this picturesque region home. But the story of Kyoutou's wine culture goes back far beyond recent accolades. Against all odds, this region has nurtured a vibrant wine scene since the late 19th century, overcoming challenges such as a humid climate unsuitable for traditional grape varieties and a population unfamiliar with this foreign beverage.



📍 Budou-no-Oka Wine Dispensers

I hope this article captures the essence of my love for the Kyoutou region. I encourage you to visit this special place and experience its wonder for yourself!



📍 Budou-no-Oka Terrace

Local vintners selected grape varieties like "Koshu" and innovated with techniques like the "Koshu-style trellis" to thrive in the region's unique environment. This dedication resulted in distinctive Japanese wines that reflected local palates and the region's terroir, establishing a unique winemaking legacy.

For an immersive experience, embark on a journey to Katsunuma town, the undisputed wine capital of Japan. Here, you'll find the majestic "Budou-no-Oka" (Grape Hill) and its unique treasure: a row of wine dispensers offering a tantalizing array of local wines at an affordable price. For just 100 yen, you can indulge in a tasting adventure, discovering the nuanced flavors and distinct personalities of Kyoutou's wines.

As you sip your wine on the terrace overlooking the sprawling Kofu Basin, let the breathtaking views and the crisp mountain air wash over you. During winter, witness the majestic Southern Alps draped in a pristine blanket of snow, creating a picture-perfect backdrop to this enchanting wine country.