



Participants of the World Cosplay Summit pose for the press in front of Nagoya Osu Kannon Temple that was built during the Kamakura Period (1192 -1333).



A gun toting robot leads, a samurai follows and in between, strides a European girl resplendent with her space age suit and blue hair. Every July, Nishiki Street in the heart of Nagoya is transformed into another world. Starting at Sunshine Sakae, a red carpet is laid out and contestants of the World Cosplay Summit parade in the costumes of their favourite Japanese *anime*, *manga* or video game characters.

Nagoya is often overlooked as merely a gateway to the Chubu region of Japan. Whilst the World Cosplay Summit is a spectacle not to be missed, you'll find fun for the family in Nagoya all year round!

A CASTLE TO EXPLORE

Which child wouldn't want to be king or queen of the castle? Nagoya Castle may not be in its original state – few castles were built with an elevator – but, it is still very much a symbol of the city. Rebuilt in 1959 after burning to its foundations in a World War II bombing raid, it is now a museum. Hands-on exhibits allow you to try pulling one of the huge stones used

From castles to cosplay, Nagoya has many playful offerings for a fun family vacation.

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FOR

ALL



CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: The Nagoya Castle – a symbol of the city, this iconic building was constructed in 1612 on the orders of Tokugawa Ieyasu to ward off attacks coming from Osaka and to secure an important position on the Tokaido route; *katsudon* is a rice and meat cutlet dish popular throughout Japan but in Nagoya, the *miso-katsudon* reigns supreme; visitors to Nagoya Castle watching a samurai performance. Aichi Prefecture where Nagoya is located is widely recognised as one of the most renowned birthplaces of samurai warriors.



IMAGE: IMAGINE

“TRY TO CATCH ONE OF THE FIVE FREE KARAKURI PERFORMANCES NEAR THE TEMPLE. THESE AUTOMATA TELL THE STORY OF TOKUGAWA MUNEHARA, THE FORMER OWARI CLAN RULER OF NAGOYA, WHO’S RENOWNED FOR HIS FLAMBOYANT CLOTHES AND UNIQUE APPEARANCE.”

to construct the ramparts, and this experience comes complete with a gauge to show your strength. Nice one, dad!

A pair of golden dolphins (*kinshachi*) made from 44kgs of gold on the roof are meant to protect the castle from fire. In Japanese mythology, these creatures are able to summon water. Your children, though, will more likely be interested in having their photograph taken sitting astride the replica on the fifth floor.

Construction on Nagoya Castle began in 1612 on the orders of Tokugawa Ieyasu, once he became *shogun*. His ancestral family home was Nagoya and the castle was one of the finest in Japan. It was used temporarily by the Emperor after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, and was the first castle to be declared a national treasure in 1930.

Castle keeps in Japan were not usually used as residences but for defence. In an ambitious USD147 million project, the

Hommaru Palace – the former residential area of the complex – is being rebuilt using traditional techniques and materials.

Last year saw the first section opening to the public. On entering, you will be greeted by the subtle aroma of *hinoki* or cypress wood used for the columns and beams. The palace is being reconstructed using historical records. In the *Omote Shoin* (Main Hall), there are magnificent gilded screen paintings of tigers, pheasants and pine trees. The second section is set to open in 2016 and the remainder in 2018.

Keep an eye out for the *Omotenashi Bushotai*, a performance troupe decked out in suits of armour inspired by the Warring States period, some 400 years ago. The actors impersonate six famous generals and four foot soldiers. There are always at least two around

to greet castle visitors, and on weekends, they often perform fight scenes, dances and skits. Not only are the actors good looking, but they also speak in ancient Japanese!

CLOTH TO CARS!

While Nagoya was previously famous for the Tokugawa clan, in modern times, it's become known as a centre of industry and the birthplace of Toyota. Housed in the original factory, the Toyota Commemorative Museum of Industry and Technology with its interactive exhibits will engage all members of the family.

“Our museum has over 4,000 machines and items. Almost all of them are still working,” Narita Toshihide, the museum curator,



IMAGE: NAGOYA TOURISM

explains to me. Toyota was originally a textiles company. Spinning machines were imported from the UK, but Toyoda Sakichi invented his own weaving machines.

Exhibits include the Japanese indigenous *garabo* spinning machine. “*Gara* means the sound of the machine. It was invented in 1873 by Gaun Tokimune,” says Narita. Remarkably these rattling spindles are still in limited use today. With many of the exhibits, you are able to touch the threads or cloth produced, and most of the operators speak English.

An air horn sounds in the hangar-like second building dedicated to automobiles. Narita introduces me to the Model AA – Toyota’s very first car. “It has an air horn, as in 1936, there were many animals on the road.” Emphasis here though is on the development of technology rather than a

collection of old cars. Part of a production line is recreated, complete with working robots. Upstairs, exhibits demonstrate how various technologies, such as the brakes and steering in your car, work.

LOCAL BITES

Aichi Prefecture, of which Nagoya is the capital, is famous for the production of red *miso* in towns like Hatcho. Not surprisingly, this fermented soy bean paste features heavily in local cuisine. Traditionally, it is made by pressing soy beans and salt in a cedar vat with stones and fermenting it for around two years.

Katsudon, a popular national dish of breaded pork cutlet, is transformed into *misokatsu* in Nagoya, courtesy of a smothering of semi-sweet red *miso* sauce. *Misonikomi*

udon comes piping hot in an earthen bowl and contains flat *udon* noodles simmered with meat and vegetables in red *miso*.

You need to eat *hitsumabushi*, a dish of grilled eel over rice, in three different ways, explains my waitress Wada Yasumi in Hanba Honten. First, you mix the eel and rice, and eat some just as it is. Next, you add condiments such as seaweed, *wasabi* and pickled vegetables, and enjoy the mixture. Finally, you add the condiments and rich broth provided. Each has its own taste for you to savour.

Nagoya is famous for its *kochin* chickens, a breed native to the area and raised free range. *Tebasaski*, deep fried chicken wings are sure to be a hit with the family.

Children will also no doubt love *temmusu*, small seaweed-wrapped balls of rice stuffed with a piece of prawn *tempura*. In the Gomitori



chain of *izakaya* (something like a pub), they are made to look like faces with the addition of peas for eyes. It's not unusual for families to bring children to an *izakaya*; there are many family-friendly ones with separate smoking and non-smoking sections.

COSPLAY SCENE

Nagoya is also known for its cosplay scene. "When people hear cosplay, they think of Nagoya as a very important place," says Oguri Tokumaru, CEO of the World Cosplay Summit. Since 2003, the World Cosplay Summit has become the culmination of events across the globe. 2014 will see teams from more than 20 countries and areas around the world, including Malaysia and Thailand, participating in the finals, which will happen in the middle of the year.

The second Saturday of the event is not to be missed. Firstly, there is a street parade. Hundreds of cosplayers join forces with contestants to walk the red carpet on Nishiki Street downtown. Last year, even Nagoya's mayor, Kawamura Takashi, got in on the act, appearing as 18th century *daimyo* (feudal lord), Tokugawa Munehara. Following the parade is the championship where each country's contestants do a short cosplay performance for the judges. Contestants are judged on their performance and costume. The winning pair gets to return as guests to the summit the following year.

DIVERSE SHOPPING

"Nowadays, many young people abroad learn about Japan and Japanese culture through *anime* and related forms of pop culture,"

explains Tokumaru. For many fans, the Osu shopping district has become famous thanks to the parade on the Sunday after the championship and the pictures of cosplayers in front of the Osu Kannon Temple.

However, the area makes an interesting place for families to visit at any time. Try to catch one of the five free *karakuri* performances near the temple. These automata tell the story of Tokugawa Munehara, the former Owari clan ruler of Nagoya, who's renowned for his flamboyant clothes and unique appearance. Only six minutes long, the mechanised puppet show will captivate children and adults alike.

The Osu shopping area is an eclectic mix of small shops selling everything from cameras to toys. But it is most famous for its *moe*- ('adorable', used to describe fictional



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Japanese youth are totally enamoured by cosplay and spend thousands of yens to dress up in weird and wonderfully creative costumes; the Toyota Commemorative Museum of Industry and Technology in Nagoya houses over 4,000 exhibition pieces that chronicles the technological wizardry of the Japanese automotive industry; one of modern Nagoya's must-visit spots, the Sunshine Sakae building also houses a Ferris wheel and is surrounded by fashion stores, cafés, restaurants and ramen bars.



IMAGE: NAGOYA TOURISM



characters) themed shops, such as maid cafes. The J-pop group, Osu Super Idol Unit, consisting of 12 girls, is also based in the area and gives regular performances.

Part of the fun here is exploring. Many of the shops are hidden upstairs, and this unique area offers interesting places to stumble upon like *Manga-kisa*, a *manga* (Japanese comic) library that also offers instruction on *manga* illustration.

ALL ABOARD!

The SCMaglev and Railway Park is sure to bring out the inner boy in dad. Who wouldn't enjoy driving a *shinkansen* bullet train? The emphasis is on speed, and upon entering, you are greeted by the world's fastest train, the MLX01-1 Maglev, which reaches speeds of a blistering 581kms per hour. Alongside it is the 300X *shinkansen*, formerly the fastest electric train, and the class C62, the world's fastest narrow gauge steam locomotive.

You can see the evolution of the *shinkansen*, the world's first modern high speed trains, from the original Series 0 to the 1997 era Series 700. However, you are likely to pay little attention as you head directly to the HO gauge model railway diorama. It is centred around a model of Nagoya station complete with JR Central Towers. Shows last 20 minutes and represent a day in the life of the railway. Many Japanese landmarks are represented and the attention to detail is astounding with features such as fire engines rushing to deal with a fire in Yokohama's Chinatown.

The highlight, though, has to be the simulators. In the Maglev exhibition, you



“WHILE NAGOYA WAS PREVIOUSLY FAMOUS FOR THE TOKUGAWA CLAN, IN MODERN TIMES, IT’S BECOME KNOWN AS A CENTRE OF INDUSTRY AND THE BIRTHPLACE OF TOYOTA. HOUSED IN THE ORIGINAL FACTORY, THE TOYOTA COMMEMORATIVE MUSEUM OF INDUSTRY AND TECHNOLOGY...”

can experience a simulated ride on the train. At first the ride seems quite rough until the wheels rise and it starts levitating. This year, Japan Railways is set to start construction of a Maglev line between Tokyo and Nagoya. Due to open in 2027, trains will travel at a maximum speed of 505kms per hour and do the journey in 40 minutes.

For most Japanese, there is a long daily commute on suburban trains like the Series

313. In the simulator zone, you can try your hand at being a train crew and making announcements along with opening and closing the doors at the station. You can also try your hand (decided on a lottery system and at extra cost) at driving one of these trains; if you are lucky, it'll be the N700 *shinkansen*! “Don't let the speed go above 270kms per hour,” warns museum curator Takagi Kaori as I whizz past Mount Fuji en route to

The Osu Kannon temple grounds are also famous for its flea market that is held every 18th and 28th of the month, with over 60 stalls selling anything from clothes to souvenirs, food items and second hand goods.

Nagoya station. Controlling the speed using a combination of the power and brake levers is not as easy as it looks, particularly when trying to bring the train to a stop at the correct place on the platform!

STRIKING ARCHITECTURE

The Sakae area in Nagoya's Naka-ku ward is not only home to upmarket shopping, but also some of Nagoya's most iconic architecture. The Sunshine Sakae building with its distinctive Ferris wheel is the starting point of the Nishiki Street cosplay parade. It is also home to the SKE48 idol group, an offshoot of the famous AKB48; SKE stands for Sakae. They give regular performances in their own theatre in the building. There is also CospRex, a studio where you can dress up as your favourite characters and have your picture taken.

Nagoya TV Tower is hard to miss, and when lit up at night, makes a striking focal point. Built in 1954, it was the first such structure in Japan, and resembles the Eiffel Tower. In the 1964 science fiction film *Mothra vs. Godzilla*, the giant dinosaur-like creature, Godzilla, attacks Nagoya and destroys the tower.

Underneath is a subterranean labyrinth of shops and restaurants, and just nearby, is Oasis 21, where the Cosplay Championship has been held since 2006. Topping the spaceship-like structure is the Galaxy Platform, a roof covered in water to help cool the building.

No matter how old your family members are and whatever their tastes, Nagoya is bound to have something to interest everyone. With Legoland set to open around 2016, the city will only get better as a family destination. 

 **GETTING THERE** AirAsia X flies to Nagoya from Kuala Lumpur. Go to www.airasia.com for details.

