

Community, Matsuri, and Purpose in Life

There is scientific evidence that those who do volunteer activities are healthier.

Observational studies show that volunteering is associated with a reduced risk of functional decline, a reduced risk of hypertension, cardiovascular disease and cognitive impairment, and reduced mortality. ⁽¹⁾

However, is it simply that healthier people volunteer, or is it that volunteering is good for health? The challenge is to determine causality.

One study ⁽¹⁾ investigated the impact of volunteer activity over a four-year period. Participants were aged over 50 (average age 66) with 59% being women, 66% married. There was a control group who undertook no volunteering activity. The key conclusions were:

- 1) During the 4-year follow-up period, those volunteering 100 hours a year or more (versus zero hours a year) had a 44% reduced risk of mortality.
- 2) The following table, Fig.1, summarizes the health and well-being indicators that were monitored. The measures which improved are highlighted in grey. Improvements were clustered principally in “psychological well-being/distress” and “social factors” classifications.

Fig.1 All-Cause Mortality and Health and Well-being Indicators			
Volunteer group versus no volunteer activities group: improvements highlighted in grey			
All-Cause Mortality			
	Physical Health		Psychological Well-being/Distress
1.	Number of chronic conditions	1.	Positive affect
2.	Diabetes	2.	Life satisfaction
3.	Hypertension	3.	Optimism
4.	Stroke	4.	Purpose in life
5.	Cancer	5.	Mastery
6.	Heart disease	6.	Health mastery
7.	Lung disease	7.	Financial mastery
8.	Arthritis	8.	Depression
9.	Overweight/Obesity	9.	Depressive symptoms
10.	Physical functioning limitations	10.	Hopelessness
11.	Cognitive impairment	11.	Negative effects
12.	Chronic pain	12.	Perceived constraints
13.	Self-rated health		Social Factors
	Health Behaviors	1.	Loneliness
1.	Binge drinking	2.	Contact with children (less than once a week)
2.	Smoking	3.	Contact with family (less than once a week)
3.	Frequent physical activity	4.	Contact friends (less than once a week)
4.	Sleep problems		
Source: Volunteering and Subsequent Health and Well-Being in Older Adults, ⁽¹⁾ Conceptasia, June 2022			

Please note that there was no material impact in most physical health indicators. This includes the indicators for hypertension, heart diseases and cognitive impairment (Physical health indicators 3, 6, 11 respectively).

The observational studies noted above do appear to be capturing how healthier people do volunteer more. However, the study results above also support the notion that volunteering is good for health.

Ikigai increases longevity, hobbies even more so

A review ⁽²⁾ of over 1000 academic research studies over 1990-2020 looking at the relationship between exercise and mental health commented:

Physical health is clearly intertwined with mental health in a bidirectional fashion. Scientific evidence shows that changes in thinking patterns and behaviors affect neurological, endocrine, and immune systems. Conversely, disruption in these biological systems negatively impacts mental health.

With the intertwining of mental health and physical health, community activity, participation in local festivals, volunteering in general, has an overall beneficial effect.

In our third book, *Wellness Topics: Insights from Japan*, we investigated the causes of Japan's world-leading longevity. The very-first chapter looked at the importance of mental activity and health.

Ikigai, having a purpose in life, an age-old Japanese ideology, rose to global prominence with the international bestseller “*Ikigai – The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life*” by Hector Garcia and Francesc Miralles, published in 2016, English translation published in 2017. *Ikigai* Google searches (topic and search terms) have continued to rise since 2016 (source: trends.google.com).

The academic support ⁽³⁾ for *Ikigai* leading to a longer life, found that the mortality rate per 100 person-years was significantly reduced for those identifying as having a purpose in life, Fig.2.

	Study deaths	Person-years	Mortality rate
Neither	83	782.0	10.61
<i>Ikigai</i> only	56	1025.9	5.46
Hobbies only	18	469.8	3.83
Both	91	4184.7	2.17

Source: *Relationship of having hobbies and a purpose in life with mortality*, ⁽³⁾ Conceptasia, June 2022

The mortality rate was reduced even more for those with both *Ikigai* and hobbies. Interestingly, the mortality rate was lower for those with hobbies only versus *ikigai* only. The authors discussed possible explanations, with hobbies perhaps strengthening neural networks, and/or being the cause of physical activity, a higher quality of life etc.

One potential positive byproduct of the Covid-19 related lockdowns is people taking up new hobbies.

If so, the more the better.

A follow-up study to the one above, ⁽⁴⁾ found a “10% lower risk of death for 2 hobbies and 31% lower risk for 5 hobbies compared to zero hobbies”. Especially effective were hobbies that involved physical activity and/or social interaction.

Japan began a hiking boom in 2010, ⁽⁵⁾ which now is broadening into increased camping activity. ⁽⁶⁾

The following tables give an indication of how extensive Japan's festival activities are.

Matsuri: Japanese Festivals

The following tables are organized by region. The timing of festivals is sometimes the same date each year, e.g., April 14th for the Takayama Spring festival. Sometimes it is a set time, but the date varies, e.g., the third weekend in August. Sometimes, it is set year by year.

1. Hokkaido: Hokkaido
2. Tohoku: Aomori Iwate Miyagi Akita Yamagata Fukushima
3. Kanto: Ibaraki Tochigi Gunma Saitama Chiba Kanagawa (ex Yokohama), excludes Tokyo
4. Chubu: Niigata Toyama Ishikawa Fukui Yamanashi Nagano Gifu Shizuoka Aichi (ex-Nagoya)
5. Kansai: Mie Shiga Kyoto Hyogo Nara Wakayama, excludes Osaka
6. Chugoku: Tottori Shimane Okayama Hiroshima Yamaguchi
7. Shikoku: Tokushima Kagawa Ehime Kochi
8. Kyushu: Fukuoka Saga Nagasaki Kumamoto Oita Miyazaki Kagoshima Okinawa
9. Tokyo, Yokohama, Osaka, and Nagoya

Please see Fig.12 for a map of Japan showing the above regions and prefectures.

Fig.3 Hokkaido: Hokkaido			
	Name/City	Prefecture	Dates (approximate)
1.	Sapporo Snow Matsuri	Sapporo	February, early
2.	Hokkai Bon Odori	Sapporo	July 15-17

Source: Conceptasia, June 2022

Fig.4 Tohoku: Aomori Iwate Miyagi Akita Yamagata Fukushima			
	Name/City	Prefecture	Dates (approximate)
1.	Aomori Nebuta matsuri	Aomori	August 2-7
2.	Sendai Tanabata Matsuri	Miyagi	August 6-8
3.	Kanto Matsuri	Akita	August 3-7
4.	Nebura	Aomori	August 2-7
5.	Hirosaki Neputa	Aomori	August, first week
6.	Yokota Kamakura Matsuri	Akita	
7.	Fujiwara Autumn Matsuri	Iwate	November 1-3

Source: Conceptasia, June 2022

Fig.5 Kanto: Ibaraki Tochigi Gunma Saitama Chiba Kanagawa (ex Yokohama), excludes Tokyo			
	Name/City	Prefecture	Dates (approximate)
1.	Kanamara, Kawasaki	Kanagawa	April
2.	Kumagaya Uchiwa Matsuri	Saitama	July 19-23
3.	Ojima Neputa Matsuri	Gunma	August 14-15
4.	Chichibu Yomatsuri	Saitama	December 2-3
5.	Kawagoe Matsuri	Saitama	October, mid

Source: Conceptasia, June 2022

Fig.6 Chubu: Niigata Toyama Ishikawa Fukui Yamanashi Nagano Gifu Shizuoka Aichi (ex-Nagoya)

	Name/City	Prefecture	Dates (approximate)
1.	Takayama Spring Matsuri	Gifu	April 14-15
2.	Takayama Autumn Matsuri	Gifu	October 9-10
3.	Honen, Komaki	Aichi	March
4.	Yotaka Tonami Toyama	Toyama	June
5.	Nozawa Fire Matsuri	Nagano	January 15
6.	Wajima Grand Fire Matsuri, Noto Peninsula	Ishikawa	August 22-25
7.	Toba Fire Matsuri, Nishio	Aichi	February, middle
8.	Hida Furukawa Kitsune Fire Spring Matsuri	Gifu	April 2 nd Saturday
9.	Hida Furukawa Kitsune Fire Autumn Matsuri	Gifu	August 2 nd Sunday
10.	Yoshida Fire Matsuri, Fujiyoshida	Yamanashi	August, late
11.	Omizu Okuri, Obama	Fukui	March 2

Source: Conceptasia, June 2022

Fig.7 Kansai: Mie Shiga Kyoto Hyogo Nara Wakayama, excludes Osaka

	Name/City	Prefecture	Dates (approximate)
1.	Kyoto Gion Matsuri	Kyoto	July (whole month) Main parade (17, 24)
2.	Aoi	Kyoto	May 15
3.	Jidai Matsuri	Kyoto	October 22
4.	Miki Autumn Harvest Matsuri	Hyogo	October
5.	Himeji Nada no Kenka	Hyogo	October 14-15
6.	Nara Wakakusa Yamayaki	Nara	January 4 th Saturday
7.	Daimonji/Kyoto Gozan Okuribi	Kyoto	August 16
8.	Kurama Fire Matsuri	Kyoto	October 22
9.	Omizutori Todaiji	Nara	
10.	Nachi Fire Matsuri	Wakayama	July 14
11.	Oto Fire Matsuri, Shingu	Wakayama	February 6
12.	Wakakusa Fire Matsuri	Nara	January, 4 th Saturday
13.	Shunie, Omizutori Fire Matsuri	Nara	March 1-14

Source: Conceptasia, June 2022

Fig.8 Chugoku: Tottori Shimane Okayama Hiroshima Yamaguchi

	Name/City	Prefecture	Dates (approximate)
1.	Hadaka	Okayama	February

Source: Conceptasia, June 2022

Fig.9 Shikoku: Tokushima Kagawa Ehime Kochi

	Name/City	Prefecture	Dates (approximate)
1.	Tokushima Awa Odori	Tokushima	August 12-15
2.	Kochi Yosakoi Matsuri	Kochi	August

Source: Conceptasia, June 2022

	Name/City	Prefecture	Dates (approximate)
1.	Nagasaki Lantern Festival	Nagasaki	Early February
2.	Dontaku	Fukuoka	May 3-4
3.	Hataka Gion Yamakasa	Fukuoka	July
4.	Nagasaki Kunchi (Suwa Shrine)	Nagasaki	October 7-9
5.	Hifuri Shinji Fire Matsuri, Aso	Kumamoto	March, middle
6.	Kanoukaen Fire Matsuri, Unzen	Nagasaki	March, middle
7.	Oniyo Fire Matsuri, Kulume	Fukuoka	January 7

Source: Conceptasia, June 2022

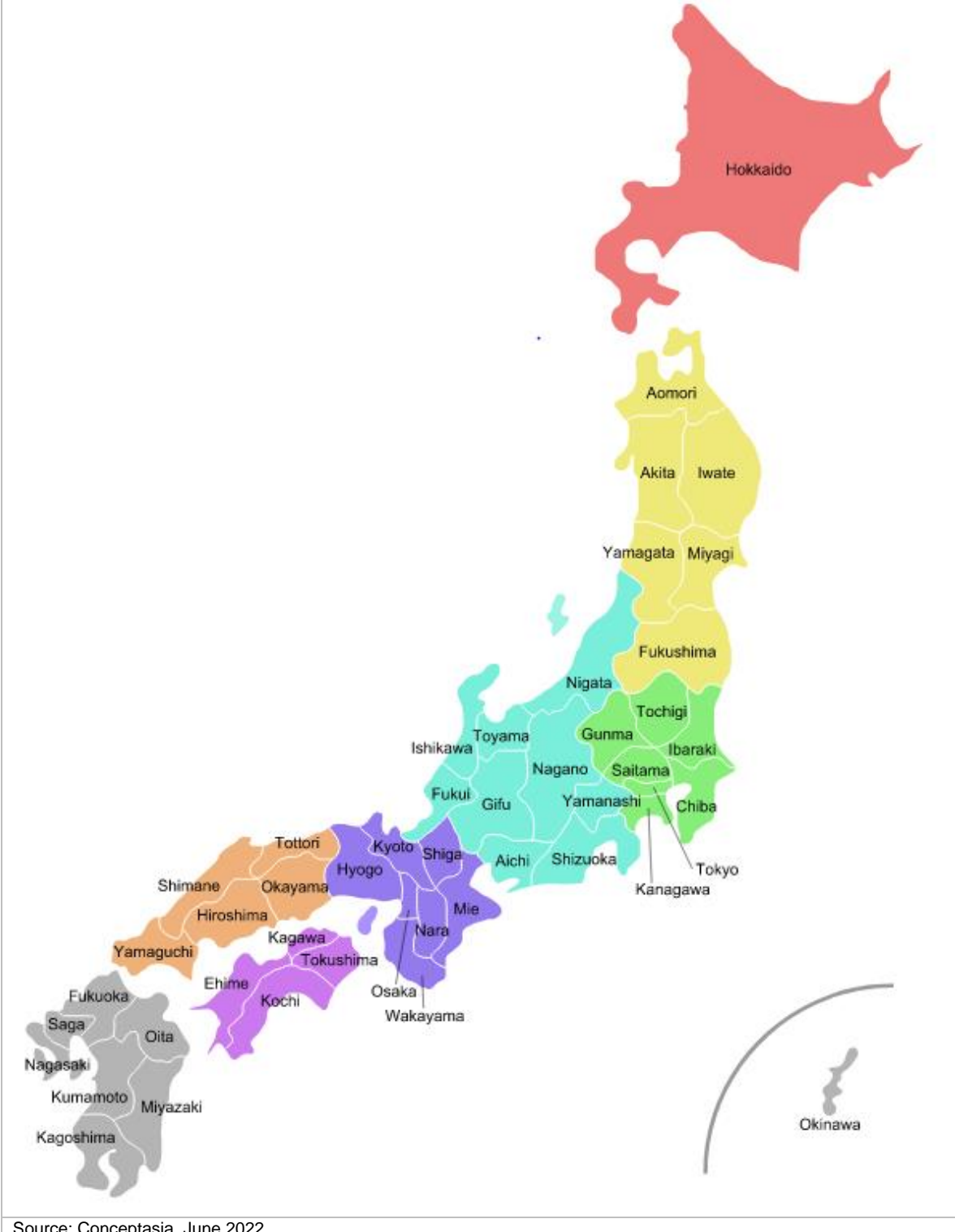
The last table lists the leading festivals in Japan's largest four cities of Tokyo, Yokohama (Kanagawa prefecture), Osaka, and Nagoya (Aichi prefecture).

Our focus is wellness-orientated adventures and, thus, is avoiding Japan's biggest urban areas. These largest festivals are outstanding events, and easy to recommend on a stand-alone basis. The many other regularly held festivals in these largest four cities are not included below.

	Name/City	Prefecture	Dates (approximate)
1.	Osaka Tenjin Matsuri	Osaka	July 24-25
2.	Asakusa Sanja Matsuri	Tokyo	May, third weekend
3.	Kanda Matsuri	Tokyo	May, early/mid
4.	Sanno	Tokyo	June
5.	Asakusa Torinoichi Matsuri	Tokyo	November (4, 16, 28)
6.	Asuta Nagoya	Aichi	June
7.	Nagoya, Sakae	Aichi	
8.	Kishiwada Danjiri	Osaka	

Source: Conceptasia, June 2022

Fig.12 Map of Japan, by region and prefectures



Source: Conceptasia, June 2022

References:

- 1) *Volunteering and Subsequent Health and Well-Being in Older Adults: An Outcome-Wide Longitudinal Approach*, by Eric S Kim, Ashley Whillans, Matthew T Lee, Ying Chen, and Tyler Vanderweele, 2020
- 2) *Move Your Mental Health, A review of the scientific evidence on the role of exercise and physical activity on mental health*, by John W. Brick, mental foundation, May 2021
- 3) *Relationship of having hobbies and a purpose in life with mortality, activities of daily living, and instrumental activities of daily living among community-dwelling elderly adults*, by Kimiko Tomioka, Norio Kurumatani, and Hiroshi Hosoi, March 5, 2016
- 4) https://www.jages.net/library/pressrelease/?action=cabinet_action_main_download&block_id=4030&room_id=549&cabinet_id=253&file_id=9296&upload_id=11909
- 5) *Trends in Japan 2010: Yama boom*, Japan Times, 20 December 2010
- 6) <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/tv/bizstream/20210410/2074099/>