

Aomori & Archaeology



Approximately 7½ Hours



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Your first stop on this comprehensive tour of Aomori will be at the **Sannai Maruyama ruins** that date back more than 4,000 years to the Jomon Period. An exhibition room holds various artifacts from the site that was revealed in 1992, during excavations for a baseball stadium's foundations. Continue to the **Aomori Natural Park** recreation area, which showcases the amazing, colorful Aomori Nebuta Festival. The term 'Nebuta' refers to giant, illuminated floats used in the procession, of which ten are on permanent display. See the *Experience Show* and try festival dancing, as well as handling the Nebuta. After **lunch** at a local restaurant, visit the Showa Daibutsu (**Big Buddha**). At 70 feet tall, this landmark stands on Kuwabara Hill and is the city's symbol of wisdom, kindness and inner power. The statue weighs 220 tons. Transfer back to Aomori city to visit the ASPAM (**Aomori Shopping & Product Mansion**), a 15-story triangular building, where you can enjoy shopping for local specialty products.

Aomori Highlights



Approximately 3½ Hours



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Depart for Nebuta-no-le Warasse, a museum opened in 2011, which showcases the amazing, colorful Aomori Nebuta Festival. The term "Nebuta" refers to giant illuminated floats used in the procession, of which five are on display. Enjoy a short film of the festival of 2012. From here, continue to Showa Daibutsu—the Big Buddha—a 70-foot-tall, 220-ton landmark that

stands on Kuwabara Hill. It is the city's symbol of wisdom, kindness and inner power. After your tour, transfer back to the ship via downtown Aomori.

Hirosaki: the Castle Town



Approximately 7 Hours



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Drive 25 miles along National Highway Route 7 from Aomori to **Hirosaki** city, situated on the southern part of the Tsugaru plain and known for its castle, cherry blossoms and apples. Visit **Hirosaki Park**, the location of Hirosaki castle, and one of Japan's most famous cherry blossom spots (usually flowering at the end of April and beginning of May). The next visit, to Tsugaruhan Neputa Mura village, offers a glimpse of numerous **traditional artforms**. Follow the circuit through demonstrations on making the Neputa festival goldfish, Tsugaru ceramics and woodblock painting. Take in the live performances of Neputa music and the delicatesshamisen (three-stringed banjo-like instrument). Walk past the stands that sell locally grown vegetables, apples and handicrafts. **Lunch** will be served at a local restaurant; then, you'll head to the **Zenringai** area, where 33 Zen temples huddle quietly together. The atmosphere of this former Samurai town is quite compelling. You will visit the **Saishoin Temple**, with its 300-year-old five-story pagoda, before transferring back to the ship.