

Envisioning ONE ASIA: Looking to the Future - The Shared Future of Asia and Japan -



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Guided by the respective slogans “IMAGINE ONE ASIA” and “IMAGINE ONE HEART,” the 20th Asian Games (Aichi-Nagoya 2026) and the 5th Asian Para Games will bring together athletes from across Asia. The Asian Games, Asia’s largest sporting event, will take place over 16 days beginning September 19, featuring 43 sports contested across 53 venues. The Asian Para Games, the first to be held in Japan, will follow on October 18, with 18 sports contested across 19 venues over seven days.

The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA), which organizes the Games, is committed to bringing people together across languages, cultures, and borders and passing international friendship and peace on to future generations. Aichi-Nagoya 2026 aims to harness the power of sports in the hope that people living in an increasingly diverse society can move toward the future by envisioning their own “ONE ASIA.” The slogans also express the hope that everyone involved in the Games, including athletes, officials, volunteers, and spectators, will come together through shared time and space, experiences, and emotions.

Middle Eastern Countries Also Taking Part

Aichi-Nagoya 2026 announced its bid 10 years ago and began preparations in earnest seven years ago, when the organizing committee was established. Thanks in part to their world-class industrial strength, Aichi Prefecture and Nagoya City have strong ties across Asia and a vibrant sports culture. Working together as one region, they aim to provide athletes from across Asia with an environment where they can perform at their best, while promoting sports and international exchange and developing people through hosting the Games.

The Games will welcome approximately 15,000 athletes and team officials from all 45 countries and regions represented in the OCA. Israel, which has long-standing tensions with Iran, was originally a member of the OCA but was excluded in 1981 and later joined the European Olympic Committees. Participants will include Middle Eastern countries and regions such as conflict-affected Palestine and Iran; Southeast Asian countries including Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar, and Singapore; and South Asian countries including Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The Inaugural Games in New Delhi

According to Yasuhiro Nakamori, Acting Director General of the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Organizing Committee, the first Asian Games were held in New Delhi, India, in 1951, shortly after World War II. A total of 11 countries, including Japan, took part in the inaugural Games, which were founded in the hope of rebuilding ties among Asian nations torn apart by the war and contributing to

peace. Since then, the Games have continued to uphold the ideals of promoting international peace and friendship among nations through sports and are generally held every four years. Japan first hosted the Asian Games in 1958, when the third edition was held in Tokyo, and hosted them again in Hiroshima in 1994. Aichi-Nagoya 2026 will be the third Asian Games held in Japan and the first in 32 years.

Not a Single Piece of Trash: Japanese Volunteers Earn Praise

At the 1994 Hiroshima Games, the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, all of which had gained independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union, made their first appearance at the Asian Games. Cambodia, still rebuilding after its civil war, also sent a delegation for the first time in 20 years.

The Hiroshima Games saw a number of incidents. During and after the Games, more than 10 athletes and members of the media from several countries, including Iran and Bangladesh, temporarily went missing. They were believed to be seeking work in Japan and intending to remain in the country illegally. There was also an incident in which some Central Asian athletes sold their gold medals to raise money to move to Russia. In addition, Chinese female track-and-field athletes and swimmers were stripped of gold and silver medals after doping violations came to light.

The Games had their share of problems, but there were positive developments as well. One groundbreaking initiative was the “One Community Centre, One Country” international exchange program, which was carried out with the active involvement of Hiroshima residents and later became the model for the “One School One Country” initiative at the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics.

Another striking sight was that of local spectators and volunteers thoroughly cleaning up the venues before leaving. Newspapers across Asia reported on their efforts, running stories with headlines such as “Not a Single Piece of Trash” and expressing admiration for the Japanese participants. Southeast Asian journalists may have been particularly impressed by the volunteer efforts

of Hiroshima residents and their desire to “show visitors from overseas a beautiful city.”

Promoting Friendship Through Exchange

Earlier this year, Nagoya City launched its Friendship Program to deepen residents’ understanding of diversity and raise awareness of an inclusive society through lectures on three themes: “Learning About the Games,” “International Understanding,” and “Understanding Disabilities.” Former and current athletes, including former Japan national table tennis team member Minami Ando, gave talks and hands-on instruction on the enjoyment of sports and the importance of an inclusive society, with the aim of generating greater interest in the Games.

At elementary schools and ward offices in Nagoya, Tomohiro Kato, who had previously been dispatched to East Timor as a Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), spoke to elementary and junior high school students and children from overseas about agriculture and traditional industries in Asia.

Exploring New Sports, Including Padel

Traditional Asian sports such as *sepaktakraw* and *kabaddi* will be among the highlights of the Games, along with several unique sports making their debut.

First is combat sports, which draw on traditional Eastern martial arts and include disciplines such as *jiu jitsu*, *kurash*, *kenpo*, *wushu*, and mixed martial arts (MMA). Another is *padel*, which combines elements of tennis and squash. Originating in Mexico in 1969, *padel* has since become popular around the world and is a game of strategy and technique.

Tegball, which originated in Hungary in 2012, combines table tennis and soccer. Players use only their feet and head and must return the ball to the opposing side within three touches, requiring skill, agility, and concentration. The sport is said to have spread to 150 countries.

Another new event is freestyle BMX, which was also contested at the 2024 Paris Olympics and is hugely popular among young people. Riders perform jumps, spins, and other tricks, competing on difficulty and originality.

Esports, which were also included at the previous Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, are attracting attention as well.

Southeast Asian Athletes in the Spotlight

Southeast Asian athletes will be among those to watch at the Games. Indonesia, for example, is a badminton powerhouse, where the sport is often regarded as the national sport. At the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, Susi Susanti won Indonesia's first-ever Olympic gold medal in the women's singles, while Indonesian players swept the men's singles podium, taking gold, silver, and bronze. More recently, Indonesia has produced many badminton stars who have become national icons and role models for children. The secret to the country's success is comprehensive government support and a well-established system for identifying and developing talented young athletes.

Basketball is hugely popular in the Philippines, with both the men's and women's teams among the very best in Asia. Boxing, baseball, and soccer also enjoy strong followings.

Malaysia, like Indonesia, is a badminton stronghold and has produced many internationally competitive players. In field hockey, Malaysia has rivalries with Pakistan and India.

Soccer is the most popular sport in Singapore. Badminton and swimming are also popular, and Joseph Schooling's remarkable gold-medal victory in the men's 100-meter butterfly at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics remains a proud moment in the nation's sporting history.

Southeast Asian athletes have honed their skills through competition with one another at a regional multi-sport event held every two years. At the Aichi-Nagoya Games, they are expected to give Japan, China, and South Korea

some tough competition, particularly in soccer, badminton, field hockey, and table tennis.

Cruise Ship to Serve as Athletes' Village

One distinctive feature of Aichi-Nagoya 2026 is the decision to forgo construction of an athletes' village in an effort to keep costs as low as possible. Instead, the *Costa Serena*, a 110,000-ton Italian-flagged cruise ship, will be used as accommodation for team delegations. The ship will be moored at Nagoya's Kinjo Pier, providing accommodation for several thousand people.

Another first for the Games is a mobile accommodation facility developed as a new model offering excellent accessibility. The organizing committee is proud that the facility can also be put to a wide range of uses after the Games. Very few competition venues have been newly built, with IG Arena (Aichi International Arena) being one of the exceptions. Most stadiums and gymnasiums are existing facilities that have been upgraded for use during the Games. Paloma Mizuho Stadium in Nagoya, the main venue for the Asian Games and the site of the opening and closing ceremonies, has been renovated to provide seating for 30,000 spectators.

Inspiring Children

Kosei Inoue, chef de mission of the Japanese delegation, spoke about the significance of the Games being held in Japan.

"Hosting the Games in our own country gives us an opportunity to bring the value of sport directly to society. Above all, I want children to see top-level competition firsthand," he said. *"Seeing elite athletes, including those representing Japan, compete at their best should inspire children to take on challenges of their own."*

Inoue added with conviction, *"I hope that seeing the athletes take on challenges will bring Japan together, and that their passion will unite Asia as well."*

Ever Onward

The Games will be Japan's largest international multi-sport event since the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, held in 2021. They will provide visitors from Southeast Asia and other parts of the world—as well as residents of Nagoya and Aichi Prefecture, and communities throughout Japan—with an ideal opportunity to experience firsthand the energy and excitement of world-class athletes in action.

At venues throughout the Games, spectators are also expected to see Japanese athletes interacting with their counterparts from across Asia, regardless of who wins or loses. Promoting friendship and peace is one of the OCA's core ideals, while the athletes themselves will embody the spirit of its motto, "Ever Onward."

We can look forward to a truly memorable Games.

By Soichi Hori for Jiji Press

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International Affairs Division, Jiji Press

global-connect@grp.jiji.co.jp

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Press kit

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A flame-lighting ceremony for the 20th Asian Games (Aichi-Nagoya 2026) is held in Nagoya on August 22, 2026. (c) Jiji Press

2.



The Italian cruise ship Costa Serena, which will be used to accommodate athletes for the 20th Asian Games (Aichi-Nagoya 2026), is seen docked in Tokyo on January 23, 2026. (c) Jiji Press

3.



The reconstructed Paloma Mizuho Stadium is seen on April 18, 2026. (c) Jiji Press

4.



Nagoya Castle's main tower is seen on March 30, 2022. (c) Jiji Press

5.



The men's team final of the sepaktakraw event during the Hangzhou 2022 Asian Games in Jinhua in China's eastern Zhejiang province on September 29, 2023. (c) AFP=Jiji

6.



A padel player competes during an exhibition tournament in Banda Aceh on May 23, 2026. (c) AFP = Jiji