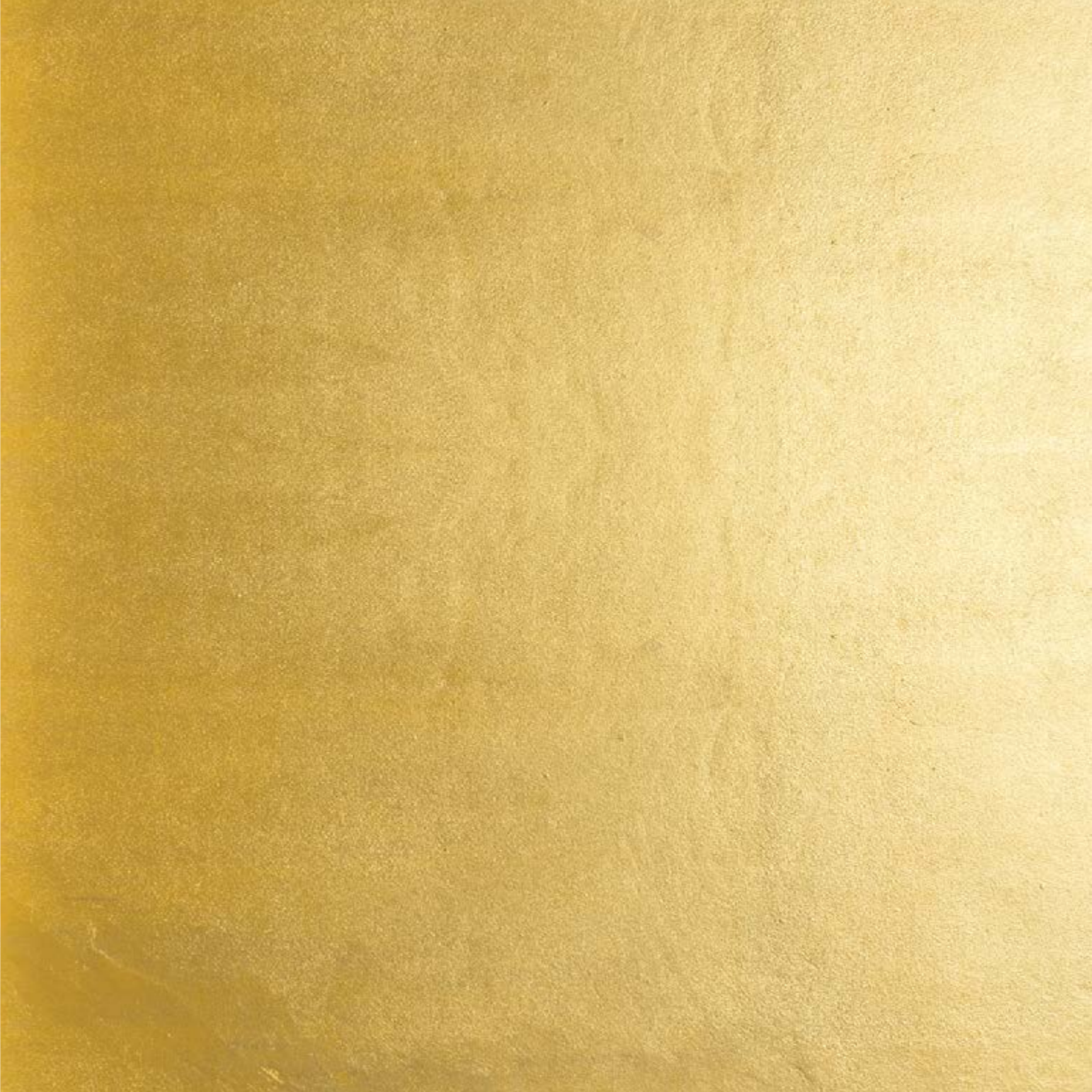


JAPAN



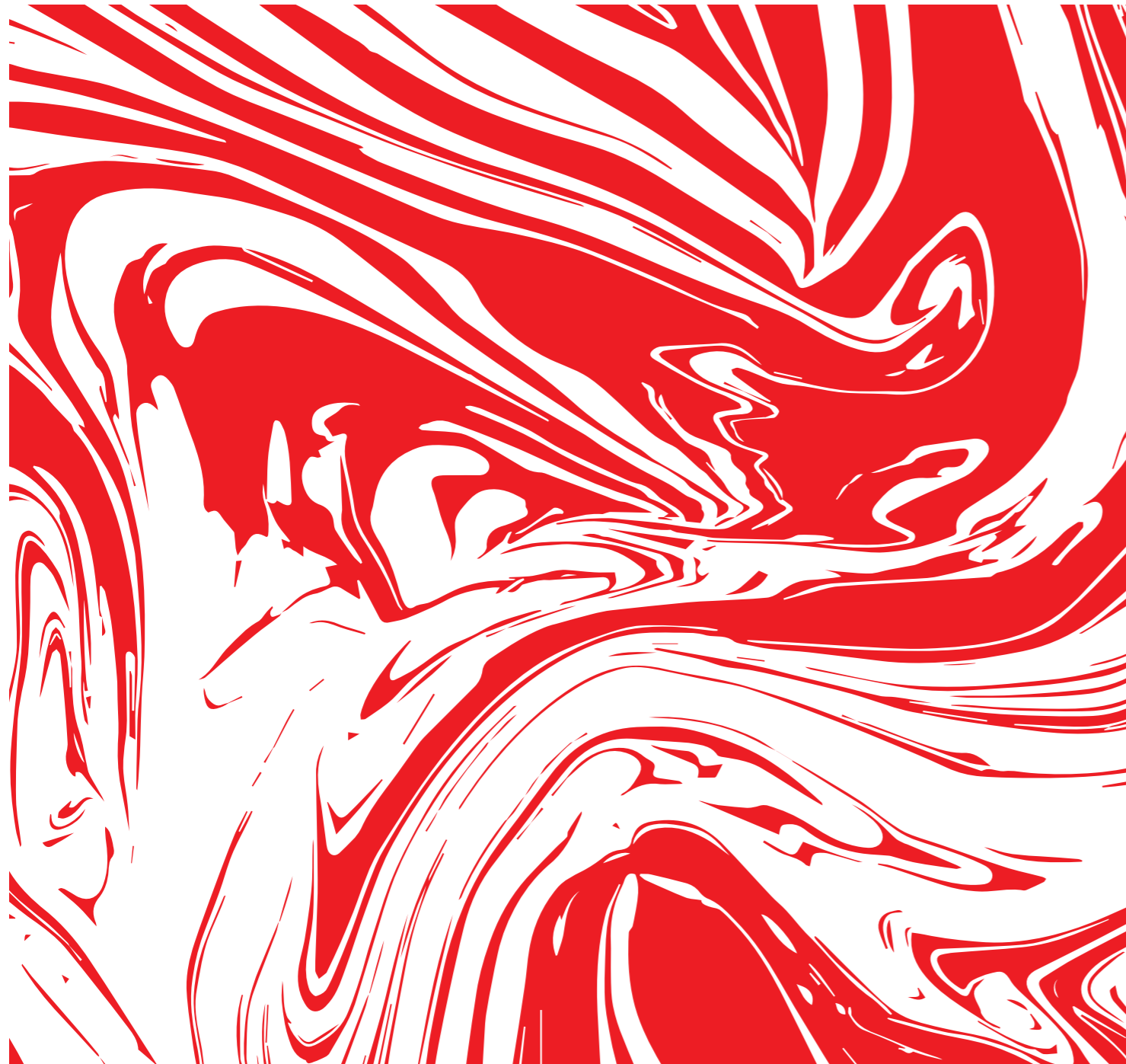


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概要

OVERVIEW

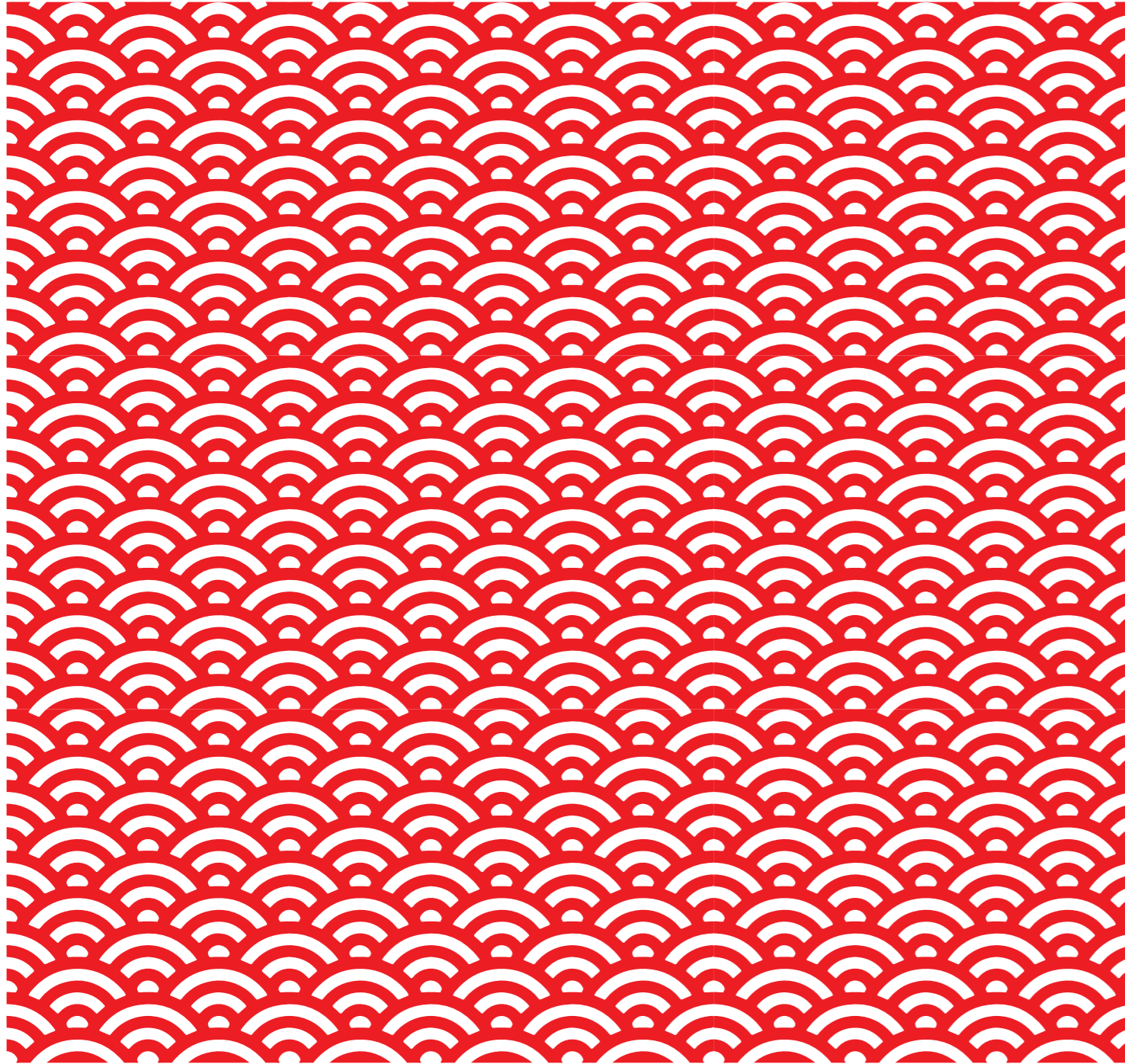
So you're thinking of going to Japan? That's great! Japan is a very beautiful, modern and historically rich country. With the magnificent harmony of modern and historic traditions, Japan is certainly a unique place but there are some things that you're going to want to know first and that is exactly what you're going to learn by reading this book.

You've probably heard or seen things about Japan before but how much of it is true?

There are many aspects of Japanese culture which are the same as our own but there are also many that are quite different from our own and it's these differences that can catch people out while they are visiting this amazing country.

Some of the cultural difference you will notice immediately but some will only become more apparent over time. This book will try to explain as many of these cultural traditions as possible so that you can be confident in your travels.

Now if you're worried about any of the differences, there is no need to be. As a tourist, the Japanese are very understanding that you may not be aware of their traditions and so you will often be given the benefit of the doubt but there are some very important ones that you should definitely know.



日本

JAPAN



On a map, Japan may seem like a small country but it is actually made up of over 6850 islands. The four largest islands are Honshu, Hokkaidō, Kyushu and Shikoku, which make up about 97% of Japan's land mass. The four main islands are divided into 47 prefectures across 8 regions. Throughout this book you will see the word prefecture a lot, but simply a prefecture is Japan's version of our counties.

Later in this book we'll take a look at each region and each prefecture to see what each has to offer but first we'll look at some of the cultural differences that you should know before you go.

日本語

LANGUAGE

People think that finding their way around in Japan will be very daunting, and so usually rule it out as a holiday destination. Their main concern is the language barrier which is understandable but in most of Japan's major cities you can easily get around without knowing any Japanese. All road signs and most pedestrian signs are written in both Japanese and English, and some also have Chinese and Korean. Even most tourist spots will have information in English as well as Japanese.

Although you can get around most major cities without knowing Japanese, it may be helpful to know at least a little bit. If you are forced to ask for directions, it might take you a while to find someone who speaks enough English to help but if you ask a stranger for help, they will usually try to help if they can. This really only applies to major cities though, as you venture further into the rural areas of Japan there will be less people who know English to help you. If you do decide to head into rural Japan, you will need to know at least a little bit of the language.

The following are some useful phrases that you should know, just in case.

| JAPANESE | PRONUCIATION | TRANSLATION |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Konnichiwa | Co-nee-chi-wa | Hello |
| Yōkoso Irasshai Irasshaimase | Yo-co-so Ee-ra-shy Ee-ra-shy-mass | Welcome. (Mostly used in shops and restaurants when you enter, you don't need to reply to this.) |
| Hai | High | Yes |
| ie | Ee-ay | No |
| Eigo wa dekimasu ka? | Eh-go wah day-key-mah-sue ka? | Do you speak English? |
| Nihongo wakarimasen. | Nee-hon-go wah-ka-ree-ma-sen. | I don't understand Japanese. |
| Kitta Ireland shusshin desu. | Key-ta Eye-ru-rando shoe-shin dess | I'm from Northern Ireland. (You may be asked where you are from by cashiers at stores marked 'Tax-Free'.) |
| NG | En-gee | This isn't a phrase, per say, but when combined with crossing your arms into an 'X' in front of your chest, it's a way all-purpose way to show that you don't understand, aren't interested or just saying no. |
| Eki wa doko desu ka? | Ay-key wah doo-ku dess ka? | Where is the station? (You can easily swap out the first word in this sentence for other places if you need to.) |
| Kouban wa doko desu ka? | Koo-ban wah doo-ku dess ka? | Where is the Police box? (Police boxes are everywhere in Japan. They are small office like areas with a few police officers who are there to help people with things such as lost items.) |
| Kutsu daijyoubu desu ka? | Ku-sue die-joe-boo dess ka? | Are shoes okay? (If you're not sure whether you need to take off your shoes before entering somewhere, you should ask this.) |
| Arigatou gozaimasu | Ah-ree-ga-toe Go-za-ee-mass | Thank You. |



Sanjusangen-do, Kyoto



Uchiwa Fan



Ryoan-ji, Kyoto



Japanese Crane, Hokkaido

気候 CLIMATE

Japan is one of the few places that has very extreme climate differences. Depending on where you are in the country the climate can differ drastically from somewhere else in the country.

Spring
In the Spring the weather is quite mild. As the weather starts to get warmer the humidity also starts to increase. The spring weather starts to hit the country at different times for different regions, southern regions will be the first to experience it, starting as early as February in the most southern regions whereas the most northern regions might not only start to experience it in May. With this weather comes the Spring cherry blossoms, if you visit during this time you will often see a Sakura forecast which follows the regular weather forecast.

Summer
In the Summer the heat and humidity increase drastically, mainly peaking in August with many places experiencing temperatures above 30° Celsius. Southern regions are usually the warmest with Okinawa peaking at the mid to high 30's. The regions which are farther north don't get as warm as

this and the Japanese often take advantage of this by taking holidays in the north to escape the heat. In the Summer the humidity is also very high peaking in the 80-90 percent range.

Autumn
In the Autumn the temperature starts to drop, along with the humidity. Due to the north being the coldest areas the Autumn weather will often hit these areas first. During this time, the leaves start to change to beautiful oranges and vivid reds and is often a must see at this time of year.

Winter
In Winter some of the country will experience snowfall with the heaviest in the northern regions and the south experiencing very little. The northern regions will experience the snow for the longest with some regions only thawing out in April or May.

Due to these drastic differences in climate you can experience something different in every part of Japan at any time of the year.

日の出と日没

SUNRISE AND SUNSET

12

What catches a lot of people off guard is that the Japanese days seem quite short, in regards to sunlight. What is actually happening is, Japan has a very early sunrise which can happen as early as 4:30 in the morning during the peak summer months which dwindles to around 6:50 during the winter months.

During the winter months the sun usually sets between 4 and 5 in the afternoon and extends to 7 at the latest during the summer months.

Compared to our longer day time hours this can make the day seem much shorter but much of the Japanese population are early risers because of their early sunrise, with many people already making their way to work as early as 5 in the morning.

Another quick note is that Japan is one of the few countries that doesn't use daylight savings and so sometimes the time difference between the UK and Japan can change from 8 hours to 9 hours.



Hemiji Castle, Hemiji, Hyogo

13

| | JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEPT | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|----|--------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|---|-----|---------------|----------------------|------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----|
| 01 | New Year Day | | | | Golden Week | | | | | | | |
| 02 | | | | | Golden Week | | | | | | | |
| 03 | | Bean Throwing Ceremony | Doll Festival | | Golden Week / Constitutional Memorial Day | | | | | | Culture Day | |
| 04 | | | | | Golden Week / Greenery Day | | | | | | | |
| 05 | | | | | Golden Week / Childrens Day | | | | | | | |
| 06 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 07 | | | | | | | Star Festival | | | | | |
| 08 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 09 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 11 | | National Foundation Day | | | | | | Mountain Day | | | | |
| 12 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 13 | | | | | | | | Lantern Festival | | | | |
| 14 | | | | | | | | Lantern Festival | | | | |
| 15 | | | | | | | | Lantern Festival | | | 7-5-3 Festival | |
| 16 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 17 | | | | | | | Marine Day | | | | | |
| 18 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 19 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 20 | | | Veral Equinox Day | | | | | | | | | |
| 21 | | | Veral Equinox Day | | | | | | | | | |
| 22 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 23 | | | | | | | | Autumnal Equinox Day | | Labour Thanksgiving Day | The Emperors Birthday | |
| 24 | | | | | | | | Autumnal Equinox Day | | | Christmas | |
| 25 | | | | | | | | | | | Christmas | |
| 26 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 27 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 28 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 29 | | | | Golden Week / Showa Day | | | | | | | | |
| 30 | | | | Golden Week | | | | | | | | |
| 31 | | | | Golden Week | | | | | | Halloween | | |

国民の祝日

NATIONAL HOLIDAYS

Taking note of Japan's national holidays can help you plan out trips and what you wish to see more thoroughly as they will effect what is happening and when. Also, during some of these holidays many companies may be closed an so the amount of people you see on the street will increase drastically, especially at popular spots. Certain spots will have a huge increase of people during certain times as well, such as shrines during New Year's, as many people attempt to get their blessings for the year and also get their yearly fortunes.

Opposite you can see all of Japan's national holidays and other important national holidays and when they happen. Feel free to use the calender to help plan your dream trip.

*Some holidays have not been marked on the calender, they will be listed here:

- Second Monday in January: Adults Day
- Third Monday of July: Marine Day
- Third Monday of September: Respect for the Aged Day
- Second Monday of October: Health and Sports Day

Please Note: The Equinox holidays usually happen on one of the two days listed, never both. Also if you plan to travel to Japan for Golden Week, aim to arrive before that week as the holiday becomes troublesome for travelling.

マナー MANNERS

Japan is quite a conservative country and the Japanese are known to be polite people, although there will obviously be exceptions to this but this usually applies to most people.

A phrase you will hear very often in the country is 'すみません' or 'Sumimasen' pronounced 'Sue-mee-ma-sen.' This phrase essentially means 'I'm sorry' or 'Excuse me,' you would hear it most often in crowds of people. If you bumped into someone by accident or needed to alert someone that you wanted to pass, this is the phrase you would use. The phrase is also used if you wish to get someone's attention and so is one of the most useful phrases to learn.

Something that often catches people off guard in Japan is the genkans. A genkan is an entrance way to a house or establishment where you must remove your shoes. For travellers, this can be an intimidating experience because it can be hard to tell when you need to remove your shoes, as not every establishment has a genkan and others are not at the entrance. A simple rule of thumb to tell whether you should take off your shoes or not is the step. At a genkan, there will be a step up into the entrance and this is your first indication to remove your shoes. Another indication is the presence of tatami flooring (Tatami flooring is made of a type of dry straw which is very fragile and wearing shoes on this flooring can damage it).



Mobile Phone sign on Japanese Train



Shoes at a Genkan



Washing Station outside a Temple



列車 TRAINS

If you are travelling around, the best way will be by train. Japan is well known worldwide for its punctual trains, so you can always be sure that the trains will be on time when you need them.

Although the trains are the most convenient form of travel, the maps and ticket system can be very confusing if you're approaching it for the first time. For regular tickets, the easiest way to buy tickets is from a ticket vending machine. These machines are quite similar to those that you can find on the London Underground; they also have English language options so you don't need to worry about language barriers. Before approaching the ticket machine, you need to check the map for your desired destination. On the map, there will also be numbers beside station names, these numbers are the price of the ticket from the station you

are currently at to that station. You will need to remember this number as this will be how you buy your ticket. Once you get to the machine you will be met with a screen full of numbered buttons, these are the ticket prices and the reason you need to remember the number beside your destination on the map. Once you push one of the buttons then you insert your money into the machine and receive your ticket. Although this doesn't sound hard when you are in a busy train station and not sure what to do it can be very daunting.

Another way that you can get through stations with less hassle is to get an IC card. You can get these from any station from one of the cashiers at the windows. These cards are very handy and save you a lot of hassle. The IC cards work much like an Oyster card as you scan them as you pass through

the gates at the station and your travel expense is automatically taken from the card without you needing to work it out. An IC card costs about 500 yen for the card and then you add an amount of money to it. You can easily top up the cards at the ticket vending machines as well. You can also use IC cards with vending machines and in Convenience Stores, so if you're worried about carrying around a lot of money you can add more money to your IC card and have one less worry whilst you travel.

For tourists, there is a third option for train tickets. You can pre-purchase a JR Rail Pass before you leave for Japan. This option can only be bought outside Japan so you must buy it and receive it before you leave, it's best to sort this at least a month or two before you leave as they can time to arrive in the post. The Rail Pass is a fairly big

expense but if you plan on travelling around a lot, it is usually worth the expense as train tickets can really eat into your budget if you don't plan ahead.

One really important thing to note is that trains, and most other public transport, are usually very quiet. Talking on the phone whilst on the train is actually frowned upon, whilst on the trains you will see notices which show a phone with a cross through it and this is what it refers to. Talking loudly on trains is also frowned upon and so when on public transport try to keep your conversations quiet. The reason for these rules is to ensure you don't bother the people around you and so it is best that you respect these rules and be considerate to other commuters.



Tokyo Metro Train



Woman entering Taxi in Shinjuku, Tokyo

タクシー TAXIS

If you decide not to travel around using public transport and use taxis instead there are a few things you should know about Japanese taxis. As usual, they will undoubtedly be more expensive than public transport, and depending on your journey they can be quite expensive. In most cases, they are the same as anywhere else in the world except for a few things. When you first approach the taxi, don't immediately try to open the door. Most taxi

doors in Japan open and close automatically but if they don't the driver will usually get out and open it for you.

In Japan, a taxi isn't thought of as how we think of taxis. The drivers often wear driving gloves and help you with luggage, much like high class drivers of the western world.

トイレ TOILETS

Now you may be thinking 'Why would I need to know anything about the toilets? They're just toilets, aren't they?' You're half right. In most restrooms in big cities they will have western styled toilets but they will also have traditional squat toilets and you're not fond of squat toilets you should learn how to avoid them. Most toilets will have a sign outside the cubicle telling you which toilet is in that cubicle; this is the easiest way to tell which is which.

Even with the western styled toilets there are two types, the regular toilets and the most intimidating washlets. The washlets are a special kind of toilet with a built-in bidet which are quite popular in Japan due to how clean they are. For people who have never used them before they can be quite intimidating because of the amount of buttons, which can be either to the side of the seat or on a separate panel on the wall. All of these buttons have an icon on them as well as Japanese and English so figuring out what each do shouldn't be hard.

Also due to the water taxes and conservation efforts in Japan all toilets have two flush types, a big flush and a small flush. All the handles will have two symbols on them to tell you which is which. The big flush option will look like 大 and the small flush option will look like 小. It won't really matter that much which you use at the time but due to water conservation efforts in Japan it would be considerate to use the right one.

Another quick note about public bathrooms is that they often won't have hand dryers or paper towels, this is because Japanese people carry around a small hand towel or handkerchief at all times. Although it may seem inconvenient to tourists it is one of the smaller cultural differences that no one tells you about.

Scan the QR code on the opposite page to see a short video about how the Washlets work.





Japanese Futon in a Ryokan

ベッド BEDS

If you are staying in hotel this won't affect you very much as most hotels have western styled beds but if you are considering staying in a ryokan the beds will be different. In accommodations, such as ryokans and temples the sleeping arrangements can differ to that of western styled hotels. Places such as these will more than likely have traditional Japanese bedding which consists of a type of futon which normally rests on a tatami floor. Unlike western futons, a Japanese futon is more like a thick quilt that is used as the base of the bed, this is what you would lie on with a thinner quilt on top which you

use as a duvet. Most people will immediately think this type of bedding is uncomfortable because it is on the floor but it is actually quite comfortable and you wake up feeling very refreshed after sleeping in this type of bed.

If you chose to use AirBnb be aware that the bedding can be either western or Japanese depending on where you stay, these places can have either western beds or Japanese beds depending on the size and type of house/apartment you stay in.

温泉

HOT SPRINGS

Hot Springs, or Onsen, are some of Japan's most popular pastimes and are enjoyed by both natives and tourists alike.

Many people can find onsen very intimidating as you mainly bathe with strangers and there are some things that you have to do before entering the actual bath.

Firstly before entering the changing room you should remove your shoes. After this you will then begin to take off your clothes. Most of these changing rooms are usually a large room lined with lockers or baskets, depending on where you go, and there are no cubicles for you to undress in.

You enter the onsen completely naked, with nothing but your towel, you are often supplied with two towels. One towel is for drying yourself when you get out of the onsen and the second is known as a modesty towel, some people use this one to cover themselves if they are shy but they are mostly just used to wipe yourself whilst in the onsen.

The most important thing you should note is that you must wash yourself before entering the bath. When you enter the bathing area you will find sitting height showers, you use these to wash your body and hair. If you get into the onsen before washing it is considered very rude, as in Japan they use the onsen bath to relax rather than to wash themselves.

If you have long hair you will need to tie it up before entering the water as it is considered rude if your hair touches the water.

Another important note is that due to Japan's views on tattoos, you may be refused entry to an onsen if you have one, although some are becoming more relaxed to the idea but they may direct you to a private bath.

If you wish to try onsen but are too shy to bathe with other people you may be able to reserve a private bath, this is mostly only available in Ryokans so it would be best to check before you go.



Hot Spring Bath, Kurokawa Onsen, Kyushu



Sushi



Japanese Barbecue



Traditional Japanese Meal



Takoyaki

レストラン RESTAURANTS

Japan has a very expansive food culture and is a must for anyone interested in trying new foods. Due to the seasonal aspect of some of Japan's best dishes you can come at any time of the year and get a new surprise, even if you have been to the country before.

Here you will be blown away with the huge selection of food places, you can find great food in the most unexpected places. Even places like Convenience Stores have great, proper meals. People assume that the food from Convenience Stores will be bad because they assume that it's just like the pre-packed and microwavable meals here but in reality, they are really tasty and surprisingly fresh.

One major note about restaurants in Japan is the way you are seated and how you order from waiting staff can be quite different. In some places when you enter the establishment you will see a small stand with some pages on it, in this situation you

write your name and the number of people to be seated on it and when a table is available for your group the server will call your name. In regards to ordering your food, unlike here where the servers come to your table, in Japan the servers often won't approach your table unless called. In this situation, you will either have to call over the server but calling out to them by saying 'Sumimasen'. In some places, you will find a button on your table, if you push the button it will alert the server that you want their attention.

Every prefecture has its own specialty dish, and sometimes it will be subdivided into city specialties. These specialties can be found in most restaurants in those prefectures and cities, you should always take the opportunity to try these specialty dishes as they are often some of the best dishes you will try whilst you are there.

ポケット無線LAN

POCKET WI-FI

As you may know, it will be almost impossible to use the internet on your phone whilst abroad, especially if you are on the move a lot. It can also be hard to find free, open wi-fi connections so you can't always rely on these. Although a lot of the prefectures are bringing in city or prefecture-wide free wi-fi for tourists to use, this isn't always reliable and can be restrictive to your needs.

To put your mind at ease there is a service that is available to everyone and is very simple to use. Pocket Wi-fi is essentially a small, portable router that you carry around with you so that you can always get connected, especially when you need it. For best results and deals you can arrange the Pocket Wi-fi to be delivered to the airport for the day you arrive. Once you pick up the pocket wi-fi all

you have to do is follow the enclosed instructions and you are ready to go. With this service you are also supplied with a return envelope, so when you're done with it all you have to do is place it in the envelope and post it back.

When ordering your pocket wi-fi you will be presented with a choice of plans and rental times, because you are technically renting the device you can only have it for set amounts of time.

Another option would be to buy your own so you don't have to worry about returning it but this is usually the more expensive option for short stays, make sure you weigh up your options before buying your own out right as renting may be cheaper and more convenient than buying.



A couple of Mascots at the yearly Mascot Festival



マスコット MASCOTS

Something you will notice fairly quickly in Japan is their love of mascots, like Pikachu, from Pokémon to the group of characters representing the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. A lot of companies will have a mascot that they use for marketing but there are

also mascots for cities and prefectures. Every prefecture has its own mascot and you can often find souvenirs of these mascots in their home prefectures. They are quite popular among travellers, even Japanese travellers.

日本は高価ではない？

ISN'T JAPAN EXPENSIVE?

The simple answer is, not really.

Currently Japan costs about the same as most other long distance holidays, the idea that it's expensive comes from Japan's Bubble Economy in the 80's. During this time, it was very expensive to travel to Japan and it was also expensive just being there but the economy has mostly stabilised and prices have dropped. The thing that will eat into your budget the most is probably travel, as the trains can become quite expensive if you're moving around a lot but there are deals that you can get as mentioned before on page 20.

The myth of Japan being expensive is so wide spread that it can be hard to counteract at this point but due to the increased efforts of tourism in Japan it is actually getting easier to find good deals and with the efforts increasing in the run up to the 2019 Rugby World Cup and the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, you can bet that those deals will become more popular and hopefully more widespread.



View of Mt Fuji from Yokohama



PLACES TO VISIT



北海道

HOKKAIDŌ

北海道

HOKKAIDŌ

Separated from Honshu by the Tsugaru Strait, Hokkaidō is the second largest island and the largest prefecture, you can guarantee that there is plenty to and see here. Hokkaidō boosts a harmonious blend of nature and city life, with the two often converging to create a beautiful environment.

With so many national parks, it's not surprising that Hokkaidō is a popular sightseeing area with visitors consisting of both the natives of Japan and tourists from far and wide. The prefectures alluring beauty can be enjoyed all year round. Hokkaidō is considered the most balanced seasonal prefecture, from its deep green Summers to the pure white Winters, Hokkaidō is natural wonderland at any time.



Japanese Crane at Sunset



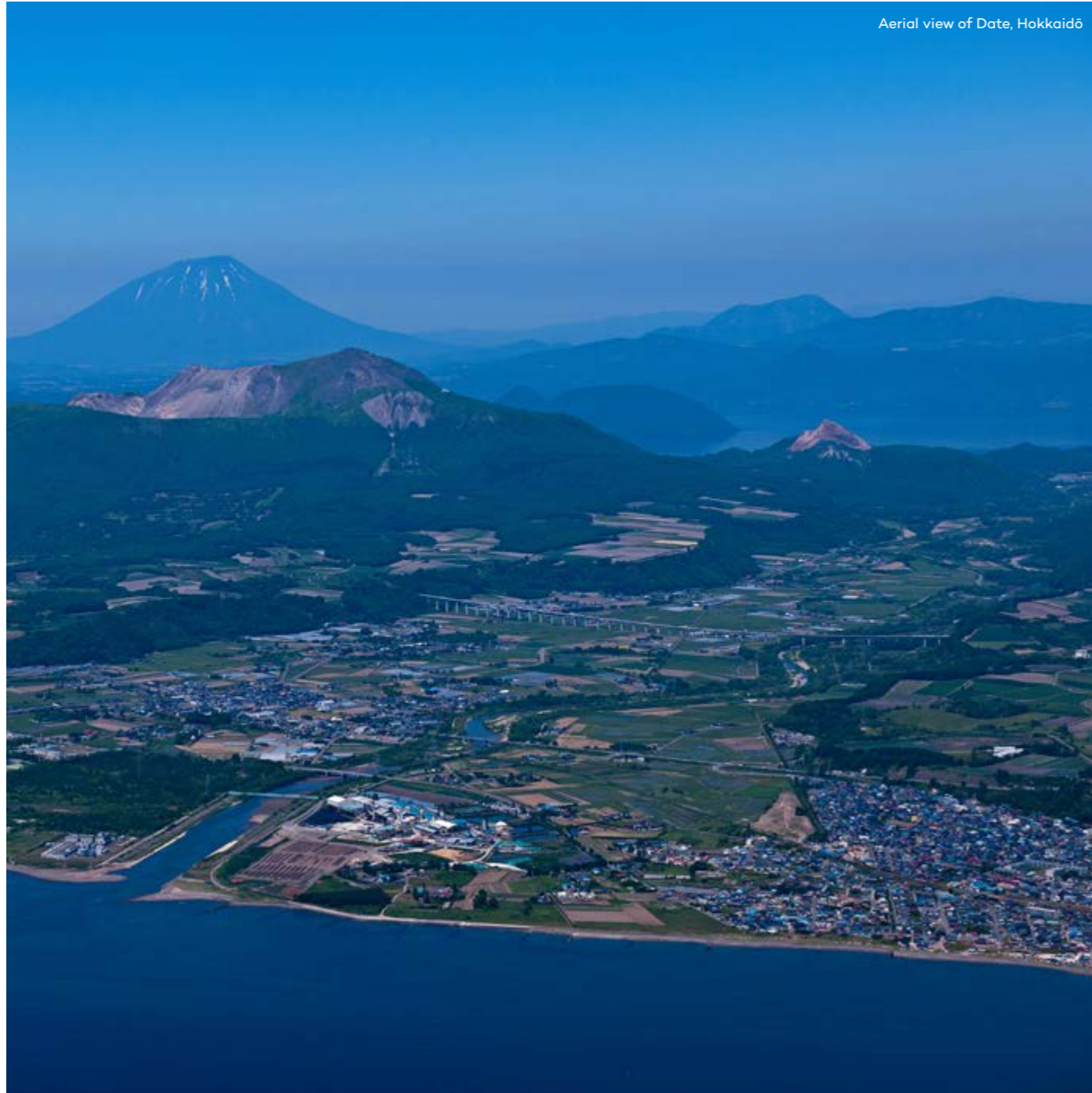
Hell Valley , Noboribetsu



Ryokan in Jozankei



Winter Festival, Sapporo



夏 SUMMER

In the Summer, Hokkaidō has some of the most enjoyable weather in Japan, with its warmth and low humidity you can enjoy most days unhindered by the weather.

If you're looking for a place to relax and enjoy amazing picturesque views, Hokkaidō is the place to do it. Due to its wide and straight roads with beautiful views surrounding you on all sides, driving

holidays have become very popular in Hokkaidō, so much so that you can easily find recommended driving routes with some of the best views around.

If driving isn't for you, you can enjoy the views in many other ways. From hot air balloon and plane tours to rope ways and boat tours, there are so many ways to enjoy the magnificent scenery that Hokkaidō has to offer.

冬 WINTER

With the ski season lasting on average from late November to mid-April and sometimes lasting as long as early May, Hokkaidō is a popular destination for skiers and snow boarders during the winter months. Housing, what is considered the 'powder capital' of the world one of the most popular international resorts in Japan, it isn't hard to see why it's so popular amongst skiers and snow boarders everywhere.

Don't worry if snow sports aren't for you, with so many other activities like drift ice sightseeing and bird watching you'll never be stuck for something to do.

To top it all off, spend time taking in the sights of the amazing snow sculptures at the Sapporo Snow Festival, a festival where people build the most extravagant snow sculptures they can. The festival attracts hundreds of professional and amateur snow artists every year, creating an amazing atmosphere which anyone can be a part of.



Aerial view of Sapporo, Hokkaidō



街の暮らし CITY LIFE

Among the spacious natural environments, you can find the buzzing life of cities and towns. With Hakodate in the South and Sapporo in the centre, you will find cities filled with rich and diverse cultures. With mixtures of Western styled cities and traditional Japanese cities there are plenty of new and familiar experiences you can enjoy in the many cities and towns scattered across Hokkaidō.

Due to Hokkaidō's cultural diversity, there is a lot of events that happen throughout the year that can be exciting for everyone. With new experiences around every corner you'll find something exciting to do almost everywhere.

列車に乗る

TAKE THE TRAIN

48

Hokkaidō is currently connected to Honshu by an underwater train tunnel but there are also plans to connect Hokkaidō to Russia via Sakhalin Island

through another underwater tunnel. This means you could get from London to Japan, solely by train.

Trans Siberian Railway



49

Aomori City

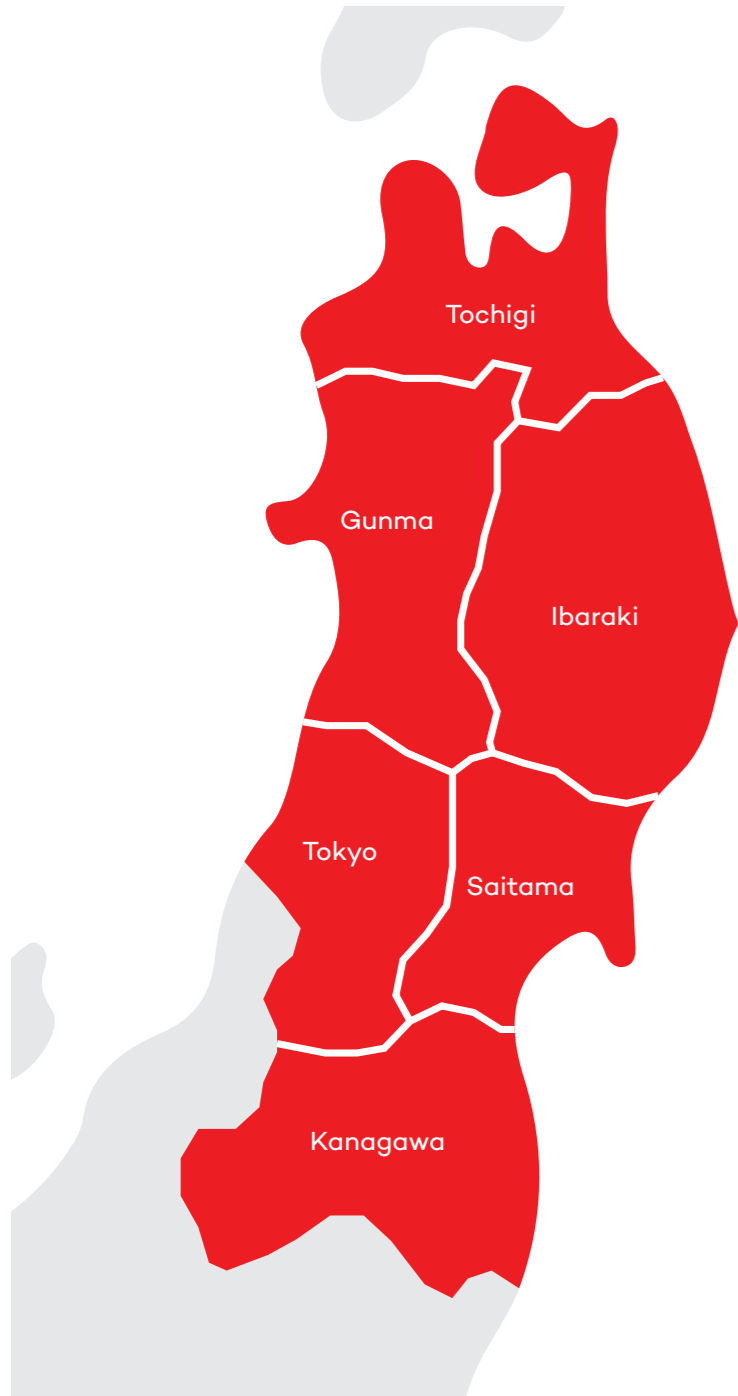


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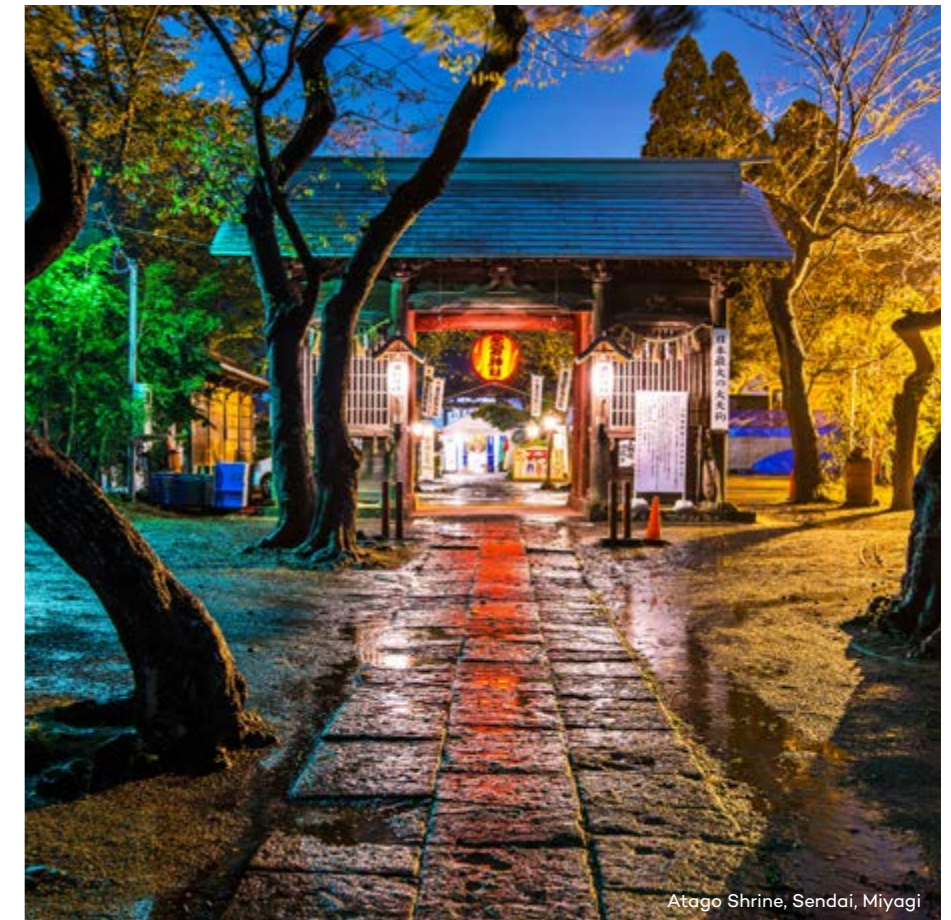
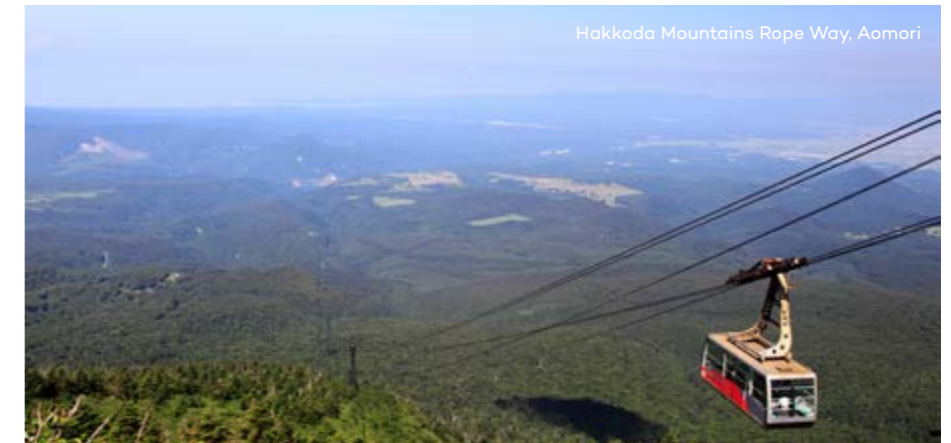
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東北地方 TŌHOKU



At the top of the main island Honshu lies Tōhoku. The area is well known as remote and scenic with a harsh climate with a well-established tourism industry. The region consists of six prefectures; Akita, Aomori, Fukushima, Iwate, Miyagi and Yamagata. As the northern regions were the last areas of Japan to be occupied it is considered the least developed region of Japan, hence the vast amounts of rural areas and more traditional towns.

In 2011 Tōhoku suffered the worst earthquake to hit Japan to date, which also triggered a devastating tsunami. Although there was significant damage to a large portion of North Eastern Japan, the areas have mostly recovered with few lingering effects being seen in the area today.





Taiko Drummers, Akita Kanto Matsuri Lantern Festival



Statue of Princess Tatsuko, Lake Tazawa

秋田県 AKITA



Kansagu Ukiki Shrine, Lake Tazawa



Ugo-Nakasato Train Station, Akitanairiku Sen Train Line

Akita is yet another one of Japan's many rural prefectures, filled with natural beauty. Including the deepest lake in Japan, Lake Tazawa and Lake Towada, known for its mystic beauty. There is also the mesmerising Oga Peninsula, with its enchanting and colourful sunsets, as well as the scenic Hachimantai Plateau, and Mt. Chokai, also known as Dewa (Akita) Fuji.

Akita is home to some of Japan's more interesting festivals, such as Kamakura Festival in Yokote City. The Kamakura festival consists of hundreds of snow huts and miniature snow huts which are lit up with candles inside them. It is undoubtedly a beautiful and interesting experience.

For another amazing experience, you could join in the Namahage-Sedo Festival in Oga City. The festival takes place in mid-February and has relatives of the citizens come down from the mountains dressed as red and blue ogre-like creatures to make sure children are working hard and being diligent. The costumes can be scary at first glance but the tradition has gone on for so long that all the residents look forward to it every year.

If you recognised this prefecture as the name of the breed of dog, that is because this prefecture is where the breed originated and is named after it.

青森県

AOMORI

Also known as the Apple Prefecture, Aomori is famous for its bountiful apple and other fruit orchards. Aomori is the only prefecture to produce its own cider, as other prefecture import it from overseas, so if you are interested in Japanese alcohol Aomori cider is a must try.

Along with areas of abundant natural beauty, Aomori is home to one of Japan's most famous festivals, the Aomori Nebuta Festival. You've probably seen photographs of this festival before without even knowing it. The paper coated, wooden and bamboo structures are illuminated and paraded through the city of Aomori. The brightly coloured structures are a sight to behold, representing historical figures as well as animals and other

beasts. The festival has set itself apart from many others in the country, and is now regarded as one of the four largest festivals in Tōhoku, with the rest consisting of the Akita Kanto Lantern Festival in Akita City, the Sendai Tanabata Star Festival in Sendai City, and the Yamagata Hanagasa Flower Hat Festival in Yamagata City.

Aomori is also home to many cultural and art museums, with many showing strong roots in Japanese history and culture but some also showcase the countries interest in western styled architecture and culture.



Aomori Apples



Monument on the summit of Mt Iwaki



Hirosaki Castle



Aomori Nebuta Festival Float



Sazae do Sazae Hall, Aizuwakamatsu



Red Bridge, Tadami River



Ozegahara National Park



The Fukushima Samurai, The first day of Soma Nomaai

福島県 FUKUSHIMA

As the third largest prefecture and with its proximity to Tokyo, Fukushima enjoys a large variety of seasonal events and activities, as well as strong cultural and historical traditions which are still practiced today.

With its modern and well connected transport links Fukushima has become a well industrialised prefecture whilst still retaining a lot of its natural beauty, meaning it has the best of both. With

cities like Aizuwakamatsu you can experience the charm of Edo period buildings, such as the castle, storehouses, merchant buildings and samurai houses, adorning the streets along with modern buildings.

Fukushima is also boasts a thriving sake brewing industry due to its high-quality water, rich rice production and other seasonal fruit farms which combine to create amazing tastes.

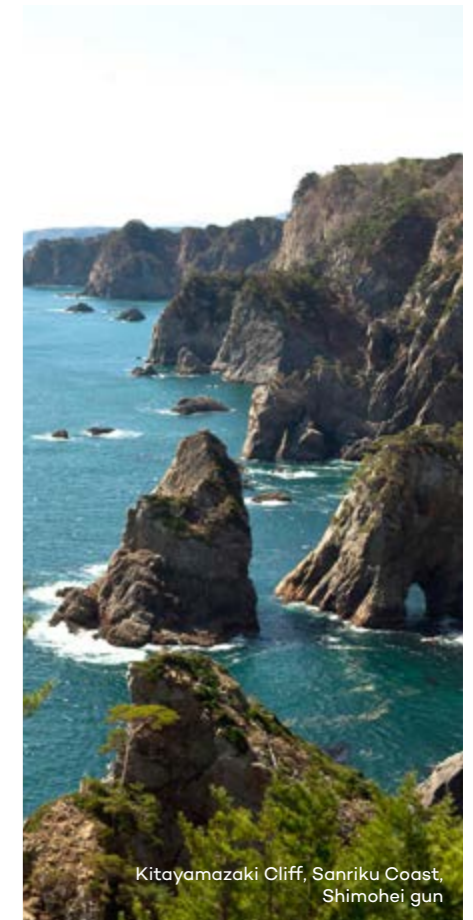
岩手県

IWATE

Iwate boasts an impressive coast line which stretches along the eastern side of the prefecture, facing the Pacific Ocean. The coast line consists of long stretches of dynamic cliffs which are contrasted by the calming Jodo-ga-hama beach at Miyako City.

Along the coast line there are many amazing and natural ports which provide an abundance marine produce and with a number of restaurants in the vicinity you can enjoy the freshest of catches at any time.

Along with the beautiful coast line you can visit the amazing Chūson-ji, which can be found in Hiraizumi. The temple is one of Japan's historical heritage sites which boasts a truly unique building. Also known as the Golden Hall, the wooden temple has a beautifully decorated exterior. Coated entirely with gold leaf and accentuated with imported mother-of-pearl, you can guarantee this temple will dazzle.



Fox Village, Zao



Mt Zao and Crater Lake



宮城県 MIYAGI



Coast of Matsushima



A Slope Car, Funaka Castle Ruin

With many geographical characteristics, Miyagi is home to Matsushima, one of Japan's most beautiful sites, Zao's rich natural environment and Minami Sanriku Kinkasan Quasi-National Park that leads to the saw-toothed Sanriku Fukko National Park.

Matsushima Bay is regarded as one of Japan's three most scenic sites and in 2013 joined the Most Beautiful Bays in the World Club. The bay is scattered with around 260 small and larger islands with the views changing from season to season. The bay is can be seen in all its panoramic glory from one of the four views, Ogi-dani, Tomi-yama, Otaka-mori, and Tamon-zan.

The area also host one of Japan's busiest and famous festivals. Gathering a crowd of more than two million people every year, Sendai City's Tanabata Festival is one of the biggest there is.

Miyagi has also gathered a lot of internet attention from one of its more unique attractions. The Zao Fox Village, located outside Shiroishi, at the foot of Mt. Zao, has attracted the attention of people across the world as it provides an up close and personal experience with some Japan's foxes. With more than a hundred foxes roaming freely around the forest park you can guarantee an interesting and exciting experience.

山形県

YAMAGATA

Yamagata is a historically rich prefecture, with many cities still showcasing that history with temples, shrines, castles and traditional lacquerware and die-cast arts and crafts traders. The prefecture is also blessed with many natural scenic points, such as the Mogami River which flows into the Sea of Japan. The Mogami River runs through the Shonai Plain, which is home to many of Yamagata's tastiest specialties. With the abundant farms producing high quality rice, local sake, cherries, grapes and Shonai Persimmons, which are all nurtured by the prefecture's clear water and air, the prefecture is known for its tasty specialties.

With such parks as Bandai Asahi National Park and Zao, Chokai and Kurikoma Quasi-National Parks, more than fifteen percent of Yamagata's land consists of national parks. With these parks, the prefecture has one hundred or so onsen and events like the Yamagata City's Hanagasa Festival (Flower-Adorned Hat festival) there is plenty to do and see within Yamagata. With such vast outdoor space, you can take part in many exciting activities like paragliding, skiing and trekking as well.



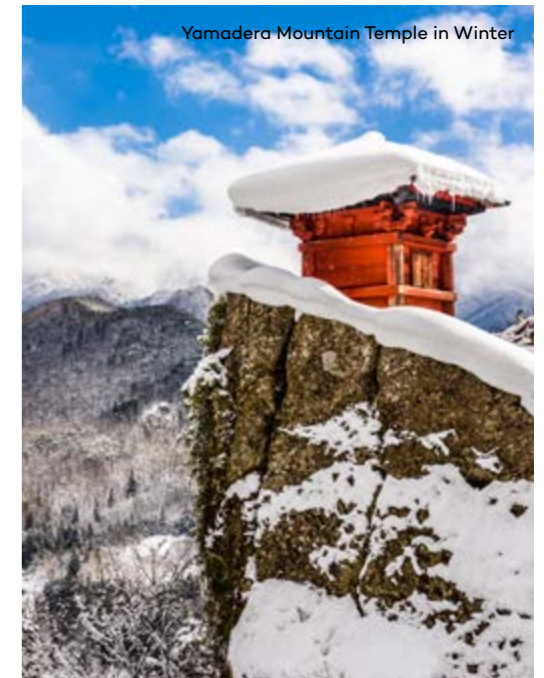
Mount Haguro, Dewa Sanzan, Tsuruoka



Yamadera Mountain Temple



Daizumoriyama Nature Park

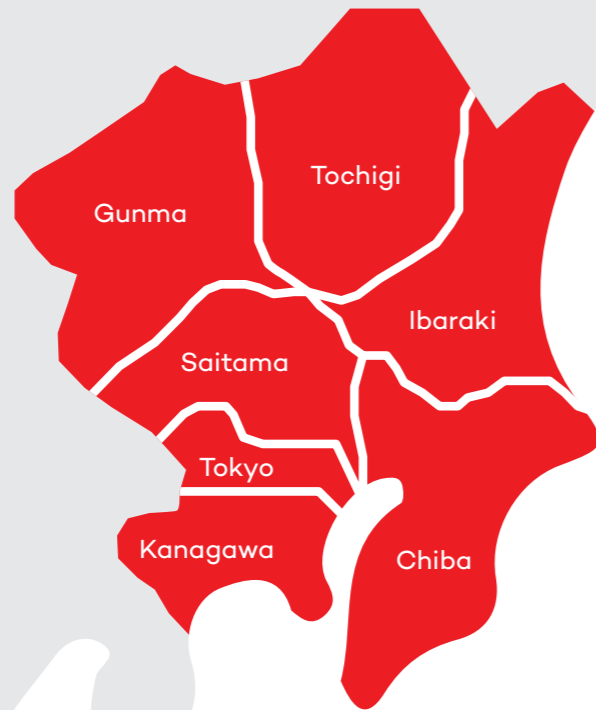


Yamadera Mountain Temple in Winter

Sensō-ji Temple, Asakusa, Tokyo

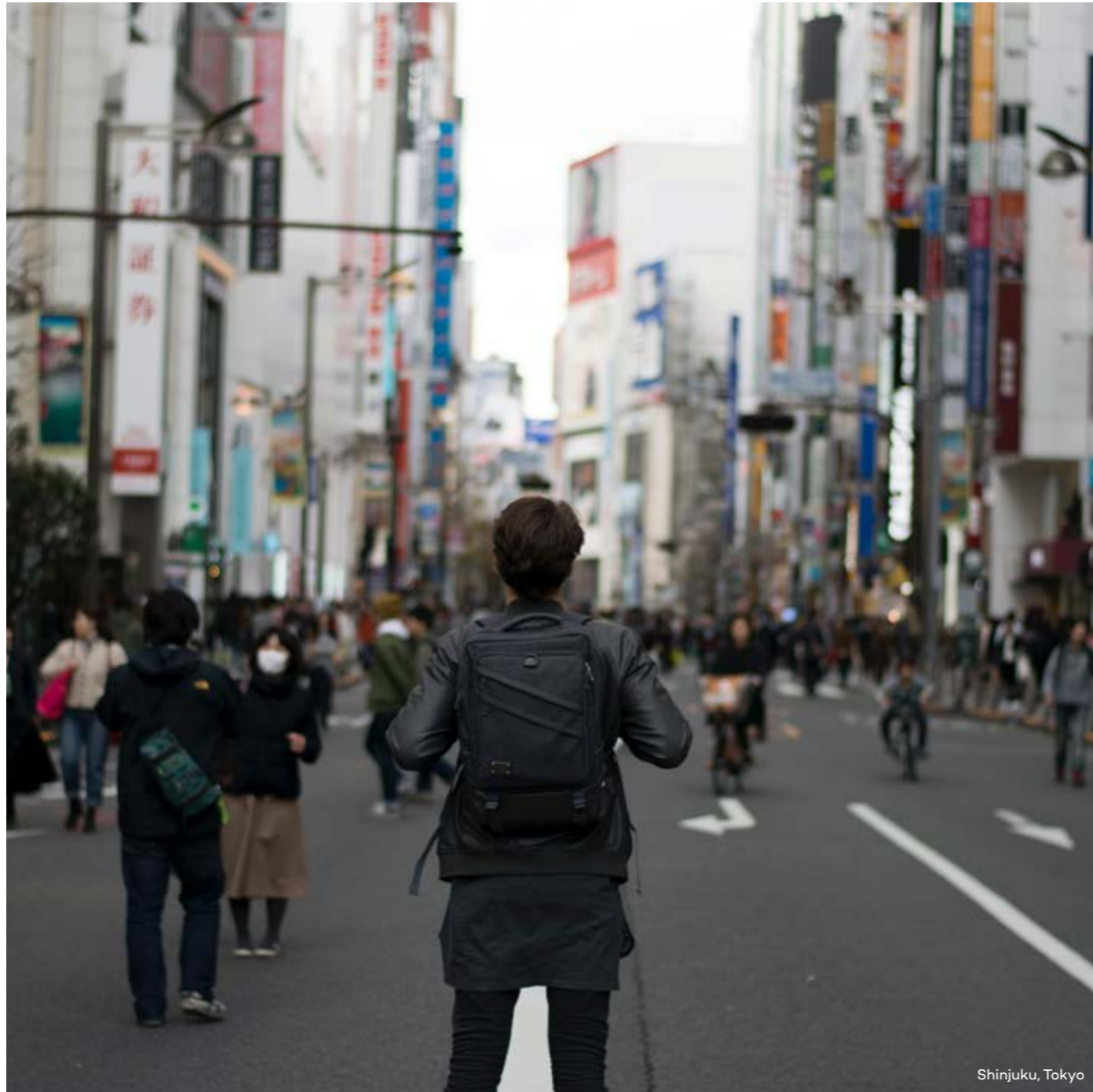


関東地方
KANTŌ



The Kantō region sits close to the heart of the Honshu Island and consists of seven prefectures: Tokyo, Saitama, Chiba, Kanagawa, Gunma, Tochigi and Ibaraki.





Shinjuku, Tokyo

東京 TOKYO

Yōkoso (ようこそ) to the Japanese capital, where tradition and modern customs combine to create a unique city experience.

Covering an area of 2188km², crossing four prefectures and with a population of 13.62 million people, Tokyo is the most densely populated city in the world and you can expect to experience a great variety of things here. From the bright neon lights and bustling streets of the Sci-Fi-esque cityscapes to the vast open spaces of the Imperial Gardens and Yoyogi Park, there is so much to see and do in Tokyo alone.

For easy navigation, Tokyo can be broken up into several areas. Each of these areas are well known for certain things, and so depending on which aspects of Tokyo you wish to visit, you can have your own unique experience whilst in the city.

For the most varied experience it's best to visit as many of these areas as possible but choosing your own adventure is also part of the fun.

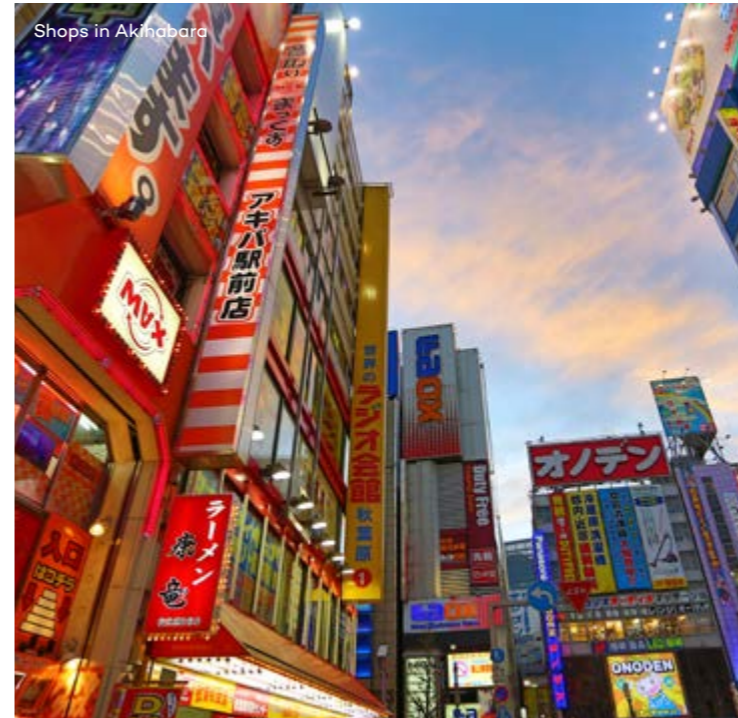
秋葉原

AKIHABARA

For those interested in gaming, anime and 'otaku' culture, you need not go further than Akihabara. Akihabara is a shopping district in Chiyoda Ward of Tokyo city, it is home to many arcades, themed cafés, the AKB48 theatre, as well as video game, anime, manga and electronics stores. The atmosphere in Akihabara differs slightly from other areas in Tokyo, it appeals to Otaku culture and this can be seen even before leaving the train station, with product advertising replacing people with anime and manga characters.

For those interested in Otaku culture Akihabara is a must see but if you feel that something is

missing from your Akihabara adventure you can always stray away and head towards Otome Road in Ikebukuro. Otome Road is recognised as the women's otaku town, to correspond with Akihabara which is mainly aimed towards a male audience. Although, if you are looking for more vintage collectables and experiences, and are willing to travel farther afield, you can head over to Nakano. Here you will find Nakano Broadway, a shopping centre filled with small shops aimed at vintage collectors and other various anime and manga stores. You will also find Nakano Sun Mall, a vintage covered arcade.



Shops in Akihabara



Arcade



Second-Hand Anime Figures for sale



Maid Dreamin Waitress



Lanterns outside Sensō-ji Temple



Sensō-ji Temple, Asakusa

浅草 ASAKUSA



A Meiko (Trainee Geisha)



Hanayashiki, Asakusa

Historically Asakusa was known as one of the major entertainment districts but over time has been overtaken by Shinjuku, though that has not stopped Asakusa from establishing itself as a must see for most tourists and natives alike. With Sensō-ji and other religious establishments in the area, there are frequent matsuri (祭) which see the temple grounds filled with food and entertainment stalls and a buzzing energy which fills the air.

Although it is no longer a major entertainment district, it still sticks to its roots and offers some more traditional forms of entertainment such as Hanayashiki, which claims to be the oldest amusement park in Japan, there is also a theatre which specialises in showcasing classic Japanese films. Asakusa is also Tokyo's oldest Geisha district and still has many working Geisha.

原宿 HARAJUKU

Considered to be the youth culture and fashion district of Tokyo, Harajuku is overflowing with clothing boutiques, filled with the latest Japanese fashion. One of the most famous streets in Harajuku is Takeshita Street which houses some of the more unique, independent and trend setting fashion shops in Harajuku and caters mainly to teenagers. Moving out towards Omotesandō you can find the more luxurious clothing stores, this street is also considered an 'Architecture Showcase' thanks to flagship stores of Louis Vuitton, Prada and Tod's.

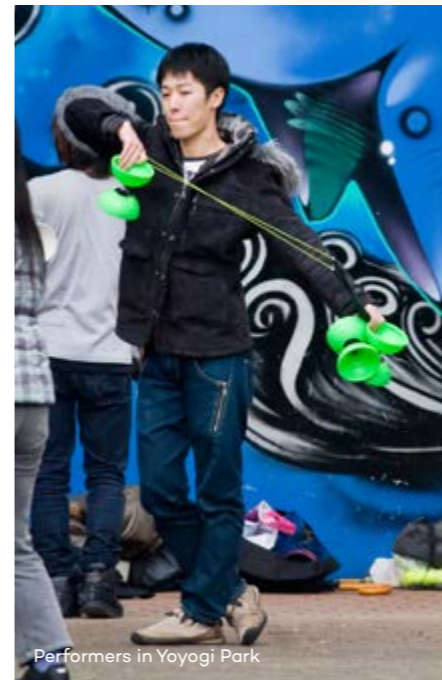
Yoyogi Park can also be found in the Harajuku area and can be a welcome break from the hustle and bustle of the busy shopping streets. On Sunday's the park attracts an array of street performers as well as gatherings of Japanese Street Fashion and subculture fans. In the Spring, it attracts thousands of people for hanami, a very popular spring time event where people watch the Cherry Blossoms.



Shops on Takeshita Street



Takeshita Street Entrance



Performers in Yoyogi Park



Crepe Stand, Harajuku



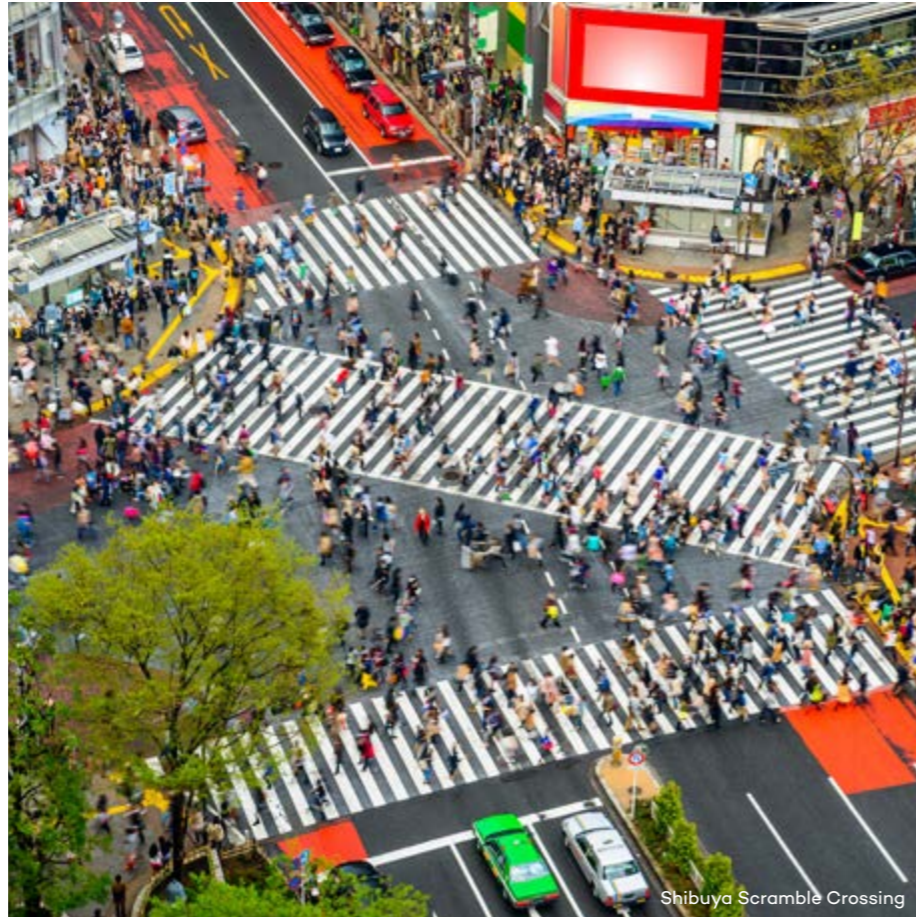
One Piece Shop, OIOI



Shibuya 109 Building



Hachiko Statue



Shibuya Scramble Crossing

渋谷 SHIBUYA

After leaving the 8th exit of Shibuya Station you will come across the statue of Hachiko, the famous dog who waited at the station for his deceased master every day. You will then approach what Shibuya has become famous world famous for, the Shibuya Scramble Crossing. As it also encompasses Harajuku, Yoyogi and Omotesandō it is known to be the fashion centre of Japan, mainly aimed towards young people. Shibuya is home to many big department stores such as OIOI (pronounced 'Ma-ru-ee'), as well as shopping centres like the Shibuya 109. Although it is known as the fashion centre, Shibuya has also been slowly attracting more merchandising stores which appeal to mainstream culture. Some of these stores include: 'It's Demo', a store which often involves itself in collaborations with brands such as Disney and Pokémon to produce 'cuter' merchandise which appeals more to women.

'The One Piece Store', this store is a fairly new addition to Shibuya. Opening in Shibuya's OIOI department store, it became the number one place to obtain One Piece related merchandise all year round.

'Disney Store', as you would think the Disney store houses all the Disney merchandise you could want, although there are a few other Disney stores in Tokyo the one in Shibuya is the biggest outside of Tokyo Disney, taking up four floors in a fantastically decorated store. It undeniably makes itself known amongst the other stores in Shibuya.

新宿 SHINJUKU

The largest entertainment sector in Tokyo but is also home to most of the city's administration buildings. During the day, it is awash with office workers, students, tourists and shoppers but during the night is when Shinjuku really comes alive. In areas like Golden Gai you can find something similar to a culture quarter, full of bars and clubs where musicians, artists, journalists, actors and directors gather.

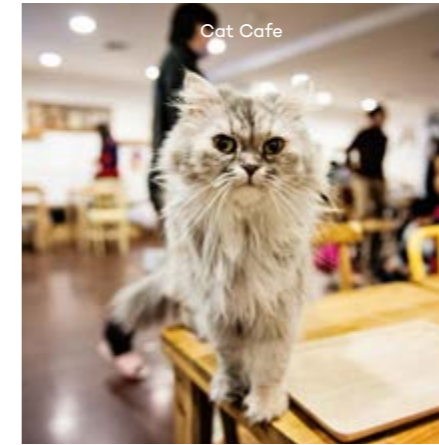
Shinjuku is also the economic hub of Tokyo, with the headquarters of many large companies occupying the area. Some of these companies also use the opportunity to create themed shops and cafés in the area, much like the Square Enix café at the

foot of the Square Enix office building, and more extravagant places like Robot Restaurant. Recently there has been a surge in different types of themed cafés which have also appeared in the area, a lot of which have animal themes such as Cat, Owl and Goat cafés. For these types of cafés, it is best to do some research into which cafés treat the animals best.

Due to the large volume of tourists in the Shinjuku area, many more western styled stores and food restaurants have popped up over the years, with fast food giants McDonald's leading the charge and other family restaurants like Jonathan's and Gusto following close behind.



Robot Restaurant



Cat Cafe



Godzilla Head



Entertainment District, Shinjuku

Foot of Tokyo Sky Tree



銀座 GINZA

Wako Department Store



Adding to the already numerous shopping areas, Ginza is a high-end shopping area with a high

concentration of western stores and is considered one of best places in Tokyo to buy luxurious goods.

築地市場

TSUKIJI FISH MARKET



Fresh Sushi at Tsukiji Market

Considered the best place to enjoy fresh sea food Tsukiji Fish Market is a treat for those who enjoy trying new foods. Although they also offer fruits, vegetables and flowers, sea food is undoubtedly what the market is famous for. Different types

of sashimi are most popular here, you can watch as your food is prepared and then brought to your table as an elaborate and delicious display. Itadakimasu (いただきます).

皇居

IMPERIAL PALACE



View of the Imperial Palace from The Imperial Palace East Gardens

The Imperial Palace grounds sit right in the heart of Chiyoda ward, which used to be the very centre of Tokyo City but as the city has grown it now sits further to the East. The grounds are a large park-like area and although a lot of the palace complex is off-limits, as this is the Emperor's home, tours can

be reserved that will take you around the viewable areas. The Imperial Palace East Garden, as well as the main park is also open to the public, without need for reservations. There are also bike rentals available within the park and so you can take a leisurely ride around the park on a nice day.

六本木ヒルズ ROPPONGI HILLS



Spider Sculpture, Mori Tower

Roppongi Hills sets itself apart from other areas in Tokyo with its amazing public art and sculptures. The area is also well known for its 54-storey office,

shopping, dining and entertainment complex, Mori Tower. Mori Tower also houses the Mori Art Gallery and Tokyo City View observatory.

三鷹の森ジブリ美術館 GHIBLI MUSEUM



Robot from Laputa, Studio Ghibli Museum

A culmination of the animated works of master animator Miyazaki Hayao, the Ghibli Museum showcases these works in an immersive and interactive environment which will make Ghibli fans of all ages feel like a kid again. Moreover, there is also a 20-minute original animated short which

can only be viewed at the museum. If this piques your interest, it is a must to book the tickets a few months in advance as there is a limited number of visitors per day and the tickets sell quite quickly and can be hard to get closer to the time of arrival.

東京タワー TOKYO TOWER



Tokyo Tower, Minato Ward

Although it is still a beloved symbol of the city, Tokyo Tower has become somewhat of a tourist trap. Even though it no longer offers the best views of the city, it has tried to stay relevant in recent years

by adding an Aquarium to the first floor and very recently opening a One Piece related theme park, called 'Tokyo One Piece Tower', on the third floor.

東京スカイツリー TOKYO SKY TREE



Tokyo Sky Tree, Sumida Ward

The Tokyo Sky Tree is essentially the newest model of Tokyo Tower. When it opened in May 2012, it was the world's tallest free standing tower, offering the best and most breathtaking views of Tokyo. At peak visibility, it is possible to see the whole way out

to Mt. Fuji, and during the night the true beauty of Tokyo shows itself.

谷根千 YANESEN



Yanaka Ginza shopping district, Taito-ku

Yanesen refers to the areas Yanaka, Nezu and Sendagi, taking the first part of each neighbourhood to form the name, Ya-Ne-Sen. These neighbourhoods largely remained untouched by the bombings during World War II and so they have managed to retain a lot of their 20th century

characteristics. The area is full of shops and galleries which are owned by craftspeople who also reside in the area. These craftspeople attempt to keep traditional forms of crafts alive and so, you can get some very unique and traditional souvenirs from this area of Tokyo.

伊豆諸島 IZU ISLANDS



Hachijima Island

Although these islands sit off the coast of Izu, the islands are administrated by Tokyo. The islands are mostly occupied by resorts which often provide water sports. Due to the islands being surrounded by the Pacific Ocean fishing and water sports are the most popular pass times, with dolphin watching becoming more popular in recent times. The islands are also home to many ruins of temples and shrines, creating a contrasting atmosphere with the

beautiful flowery areas that can also be found on the islands.

All this is a small portion of what you can do in Tokyo, there is so much to do, that you could spend months in the city and still find new and interesting things to occupy yourself with. Look around before you go and when you arrive, explore and discover new things.



埼玉県

SAITAMA



There is often a joke made by the Japanese about Saitama, which is "Where is Saitama?" Due to Saitama being so close to Tokyo it is often mistaken as just part of Tokyo but there is a lot more to this prefecture than the parts that connect with Tokyo. As you move farther from Saitama City, you start to reach some of the more rural cities. Japan's rural cities have an allure unlike anything found in Tokyo. With the Spring comes the amazing views of Shibazakura Hill and the three thousand Cherry

Blossom trees in Gongendo Park, near Saitama City on the border between the Saitama and Ibaraki prefectures. Saitama City is also home to the largest Railway Museum in Japan and in Tokorozawa there is the Tokorozawa Aviation Memorial Park which is where Japan's first airport was located, the park is known as a relaxation spot for citizens, along with the museum the park also has a Japanese garden, many flowerbeds, a tea ceremony room and sports facilities.

千葉県

CHIBA

Chiba is one of the other prefecture which extends into Tokyo. The biggest tourist attraction in Chiba is, Tokyo Disney but it also houses a lot of museums like the National Museum of Japanese History. Chiba is also where Narita International Airport is and so a lot of people who arrive in Japan may pass by a lot of what Chiba has to offer and not even know it. Like the rest of the prefectures surrounding Tokyo, the farther you get from Tokyo the more rural the cities become. Chiba is no different and as you get farther from Tokyo you start to see a lot more farm areas, including a lot of strawberry, pear and other fruit farms, as well as dairy and other animal

farms. As well as the various farms, there are many sites to behold of the sea which sits either side of the Chiba prefecture.

From Chiba, you can also access Kanagawa by crossing Tokyo Bay, either by road or by Ferry. This accessibility makes Chiba a very interesting place to visit as it is connected to three other prefectures, meaning you can easily experience four prefectures in one trip.



Fruit Farming, Chiba



New Year Show at Tokyo Disney



Exhibit from National Museum of Japanese History



Shirahama Ama Festival at night, Minamiboso

Sea Paradise, Yokohama



A bowl of Ramen,
Shin-Yokohama
Ramen Museum



神奈川県

KANAGAWA



The Great Buddha, Kotokuin Temple, Kamakura



Symphonic Sculpture, The Hakone
Open Air Museum, Hakone

Kanagawa is a popular day trip location for many people staying in Tokyo, with the farthest reaches of the prefecture only a two-hour train ride away. A lot of the tourist attractions in Kanagawa are located near the capital, Yokohama, Hakone and Kamakura. Being so close to Tokyo Bay, Yokohama is home to the Yokohama Hakkeijima Sea Paradise which is Japan's largest collection of Marine Life. Sea Paradise also houses a small amusement park and large park areas which are freely accessible to the public, which makes the island a popular picnic area when the weather is good. Yokohama is also awash with many interesting museums and art galleries, for example the Shin-Yokohama Ramen Museum.

Kamakura is one of the most popular day trip locations for people visiting the area. It is here you can find the Great Buddha statue, an 11.3-meter-tall bronze statue which is considered one of Japan's national treasures. The area also has a lot of shrines and temples which attract a lot of visitors. One

of these temples, Hōkokuji Temple also has a beautiful Bamboo garden which hides a tea house and this experience is popular among visitors.

Hakone is another very popular area in Kanagawa, thanks to its views of Mount Fuji. Hakone has one of the most peculiar and interesting attractions in Japan. The Ashinoko Skyline is a road that leads up view point, from which you can see some beautiful views of Mount Fuji and Lake Ashi. The most interesting part of this road is that part of the road plays a melody as you drive over it. Hakone is also home to the Hakone Glass Forest, a large glass museum, visitors can also spend time at the museum's experience studio to create their own glass souvenir. Due to its many views of Mount Fuji, Hakone has become a popular spot to visit Onsen. Viewing the beautiful scenes of Mount Fuji while you relax in a hot spring has become a popular experience for many visitors to the area.

群馬県

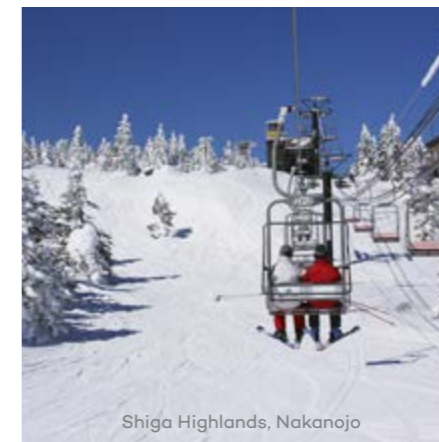
GUNMA

Gunma is known as the literal Heart of Japan, sitting directly in the centre of Japan's main Island, Honshu. To locals, Gunma is also known as the Onsen Country. It houses some of the best and varied onsen in the whole of Japan, with the high variety of water compositions and flow rates it isn't hard to see why Gunma's onsen are popular.

With its strong historical and cultural roots, Gunma has presented itself as a prefecture which is full of character, making it an extremely popular tourist destination in recent years. The prefecture is also

full of dynamic natural features; thanks to this it can grow a wide variety of ingredients. Gunma is the proud supplier of ingredients to the masses of the Tokyo Metropolitan Area. There are also many areas in Gunma which build up the experience of the food in Gunma, such as Maebashi TONTON Town and Takasaki Pasta Town.

Along with some other prefectures, Gunma is a popular ski and snow boarding area, with more than 20 resorts in the prefecture alone.





Shiobara dam, Nasu Shiobara



Kegon Falls, Nikkō

栃木県 TOCHIGI



Ninja Show, Edo Wonderland, Nikkō



Oya History Museum, Oya

Another of the many more rural prefectures, Tochigi has become a famous sightseeing spot but it's also unique in that it has a large number of ceramic artists, many of whom sell their pottery in the bi-annual markets, both of which gather thousands of visitors.

Tochigi is also known as an area with an abundance of nature, more than twenty percent of the total land of the prefecture has been designated as national parks. One of which is Nikkō National Park near the city of Nikkō. The park is also known for Kegon Waterfall, which has been recognised as one of Japan's three most beautiful waterfalls and the most famous of Nikkō's forty-eight waterfalls.

Nikkō is also home to one of Tochigi's more interesting attractions. For those interested in culture and history, a visit to the Edo Wonderland Nikkō Edomura cultural theme park is a must. The park recreates life and culture from the Edo period

showcasing architecture, speech and behaviour with many shows being performed to create a unique visitor experience.

In central Tochigi, there is another area to behold within Shiobara Valley. Also, known as a 'Sacred Place for Lovers' this bridge is the largest pier-less suspension bridge in Japan, with beautiful views of the valley below it is an amazing sight during all seasons.

If you've ever watched Japanese drama shows or seen some music videos this maybe a place you would recognize. The Oya History Museum is an old mine which has been converted into a museum with exhibitions showing the mines long history. Due to its atmosphere, the mine has often been used for films, music videos, concerts, theatre and, wedding and business functions.

茨城県

IBARAKI

Much like Tochigi, Ibaraki is also home to one of Japan's three most beautiful waterfalls. The Fukuroda Falls are famous as 'Four-Section falls', with the water flowing down a large rock face in four sections. The waterfall is a beautiful site during any time of the year, even during the winter when the frozen falls are illuminated creating a magnificent atmosphere.

Ibaraki is also home to Ushiku Daibutsu, it has been officially recognised, by the Guinness Book of World Records, as the largest standing Buddha figure. At 120 meters high, you can enter the statue via an elevator, and the surrounding area is filled with seasonal flowers creating a calming and beautiful atmosphere.

While visiting Japan, it will become immediately become obvious, that they have an affection for melon and melon flavoured things and due to Ibaraki's land and climate it is the top producer of melon, with the melon's grown there shipped all over Japan.

Another sight, which is similar to one found in Tochigi, is the Ryujin Big Suspension Bridge. This suspension bridge is the longest pedestrian bridge in Honshu, it passes over the Ryujin Gorge providing a beautiful panoramic view during any season.



Japanese Honey Dew Melon



Fukuroda Falls, Daigo



Ushiku Daibutsu, Ushiku



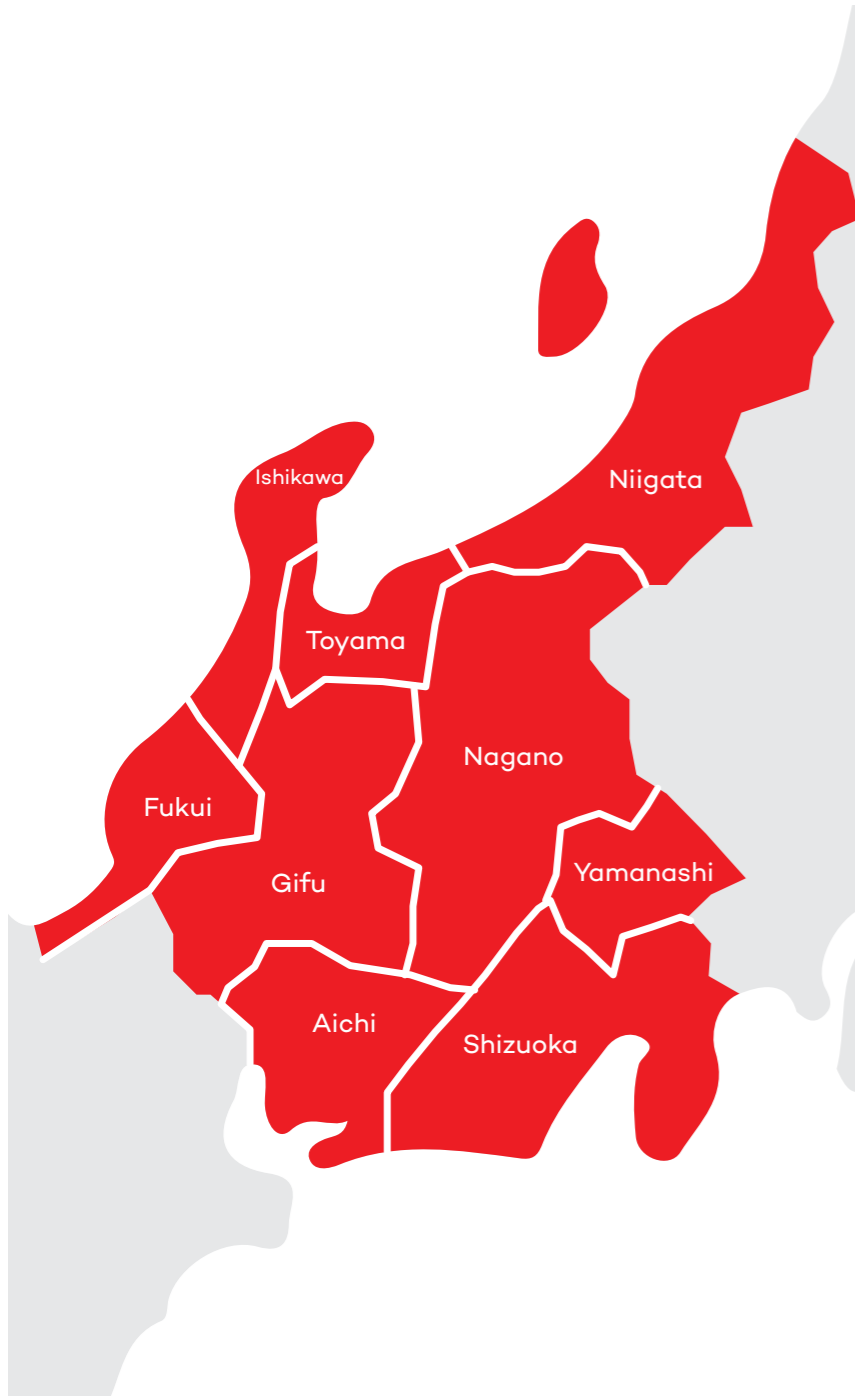
Ryujin Bridge, Suifu



Oasis 21 Shopping Centre, Nagoya, Aichi



中部地方 CHŪBU



As the widest region in Honshū, the Chūbu region encompasses a total of nine prefectures, Aichi, Fukui, Gifu, Ishikawa, Nagano, Niigata, Shizuoka, Toyama, and Yamanashi. The region is categorised by the high, rugged mountains, including the Japanese Alps, which divide the country into the Pacific Ocean facing side and the Sea of Japan facing side.

Due to the sheer size of the region and how geographically diverse it is, it is often subdivided into three sub-regions, which are referred to as Tōkai, Kōshin'etsu, and Hokuriku.

Chūbu is also home to Japan's most famous landmark, Mt. Fuji. Standing at 3776 meters tall, the mountain is the tallest in Japan and is listed as one of many Special Places of Scenic Beauty and with many interesting and beautiful places surrounding Fuji you can guarantee there will be plenty to see and experience in the Chūbu region.



View of Mt Fuji from Chureito Pagoda, Shimo-Yoshida

Honen Festival, Tagata Shrine, Komaki



Killer Whale Pike Model, Nagoya Castle, Nagoya



Nagoya Castle, Nagoya



View of Downtown Nagoya



愛知県 AICHI

Aichi sits right in the centre of Japan, with flourishing industry, arts and culture and an abundance of nature, Aichi has it all. The capital of Aichi is Nagoya, you may recognize Nagoya if you have ever seen a Godzilla movie as the city is featured often in the movies, mainly in the path of destruction but the city is very much intact and full of historical beauties like Nagoya Castle.

Aichi is full of UNESCO registered cultural heritage events, meaning that there is plenty to see and lots of culture experiences to have. With very recent addition of Legoland Japan, which opened just outside Nagoya City at the beginning of April 2017, you can guarantee some amazing family experiences as well.

Nagoya is a city rich with history, with many samurai heroes and the three unifiers of Japan being born in the city, there are many unique experiences which showcase this rich history, like the Hattori Hanzo and the Ninjas show which takes place quite often in the Nagoya Castle grounds.

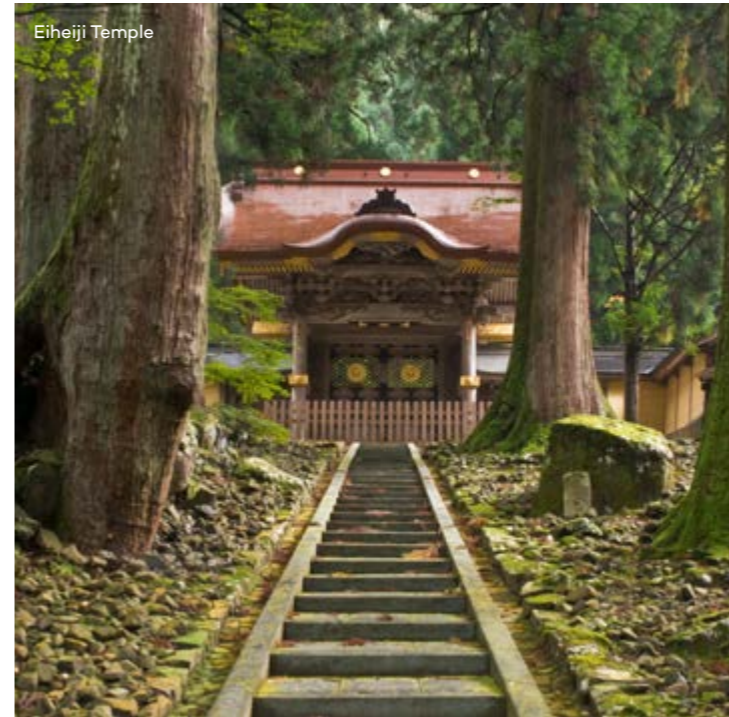
Aichi is also home to some of Japan's stranger festivals, with the Konomiya Naked Festival and the Honen Festival being the most famous and well noted, even outside Japan. The Konomiya Naked Festival takes place in the Konomiya Jingu Shrine, in the cold months of February. During the festival one man is chosen to be the 'Lucky Man', the Lucky Man then runs around the shrine grounds, naked, as he is chased by other participating men dressed only in white loin clothes. The Honen Festival has been recently showcased on the internet as one of Japan's weirdest festivals. The festival is a time for the people to pray for good harvest and the flourishing of all natural things but it attracts attention because all the prayers are dedicated to a giant carving of a penis. A new carving is made for the festival every year and carried by men of 'unlucky age' to shrine. Like all other festivals in Japan the streets are adorned with food and drink stalls creating an amazing and exciting atmosphere.

福井県

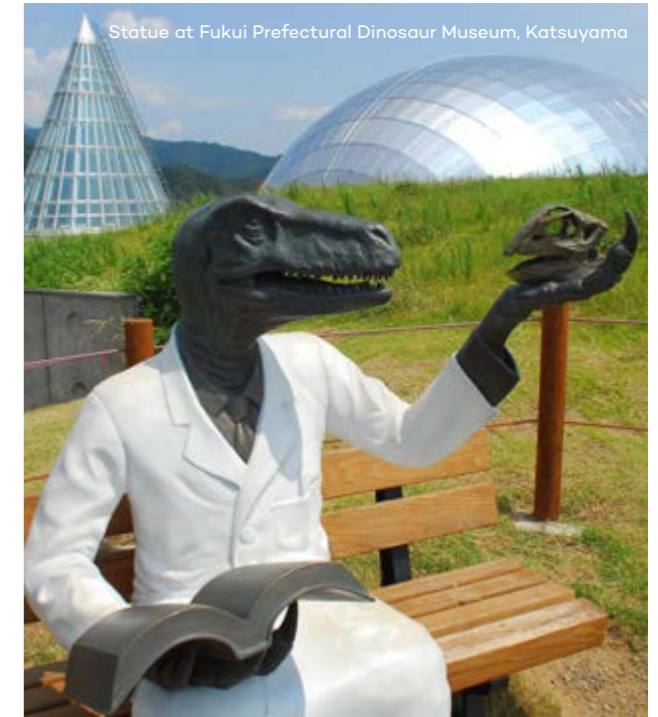
FUKUI

Home to the spirit of Zen, Fukui houses the Eiheiji Temple, one of the head monasteries of Soto Zen Buddhism in Japan. Visitors to Eiheiji Temple and Daianzenji Temple can experience the zazen practice, also known as 'sitting zen', meditating in the cross-legged posture. Here you can also find the Great Buddha of Echizen in Seidaiji Temple. The statue stands at 17 meters tall, with four supporting statues standing on either side and 1281 small Buddha statues are placed on the wall in the Great Buddha hall. Here you can also find a beautiful Japanese garden and an amazing five-storey pagoda which adds to the mesmerising and calming experience.

Fukui is also known for its experience in traditional Japanese arts and crafts, with pottery, paper making and lacquerware. As the home to artefacts like Echizen-yaki, one of the six oldest kinds of potteries found in Japan and Echizen-washi (Japanese paper) with a history dating back some 1500 years, the prefecture has a large collection of artefacts and fossils. The Fukui Prefectural Dinosaur Museum showcases many of the fossil which have been discovered in the area and is the hub of dinosaur fossil research in Japan.



Eiheiji Temple



Statue at Fukui Prefectural Dinosaur Museum, Katsuyama



Echizen Great Buddha, Seidaiji Temple

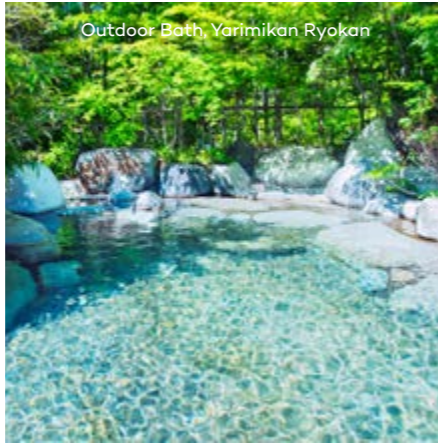


Freshly made Echizen-Washi, Sato

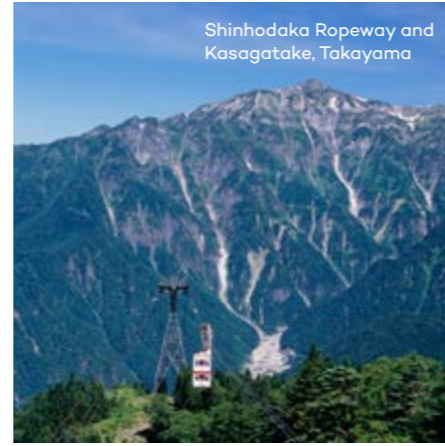
Wooden Floats,
Takayama Festival



Outdoor Bath, Yarimikan Ryokan



Shinhodaka Ropeway and
Kasagatake, Takayama



岐阜県 GIFU



Sightseeing Boat, Ena Valley

With more than eighty percent being occupied with forests, Gifu is brimming with an abundance of natural places. With Ena Valley, which is dotted with interesting rock formations, Gero Onsen, a popular spa which dates back to the 10th century, and many mesmerizing national parks, you will be amazed by the unmissable experiences and sights.

Along with its abundant nature, Gifu is scattered with bounds of historic towns, traditional experiences and plenty of exciting festivals, like

the gorgeous Takayama Festival. One of Gifu's most famous traditional experiences is traditional cormorant fishing, which has a 1300-year history in the area and takes place on the Nagara River between the months of May and October.

The Takayama Festival, which takes place in Takayama, is a 32 night long extravagant experience. The historic streets of Takayama come bursting to life during the festival, as it becomes the stage for the Gujo-odori dance.

石川県

ISHIKAWA

With a coastline that stretches to 580 kilometres in length, this long and narrow prefecture has some amazing contrasting topographies, creating some mesmerising views.

Due to its location, Ishikawa has managed to retain a lot of its samurai culture and heritage, it is represented most prominently in the Kanazawa Castle Park, located right in the heart of Kanazawa. Here you can see the different residences of the classes of samurai and visit Myoryuji Temple, also known as the Ninja Temple.

Relax at the gorgeous Katayamazu Onsen in Ishikawa, a beautiful lake side onsen which is unique

for its colourful views of the lake. Thanks to the constantly changing light in the area it is said that the lake changes colour up to seven times a day creating some greatly dynamic views which change throughout the day.

As of 2015 a newly added Shinkansen route has made getting to Ishikawa a lot easier, with a trip from Tokyo taking only two and a half hours. This opens the possibility to spend your time in Tokyo and then escape to the calming Ishikawa to relax for an overnight or weekend trip.



Kanazawa Lantern Festival, Kanazawa



Rice terraces, Shioyone Senmida



Kenroku-en Gardens, Kanazawa



Kenroku-en Gardens, Kanazawa

Hakuba Iwatake Lily Garden, Hakuba



Japanese Macaque in a Hot Spring, Snow Monkey Park, Yudanaka



長野県

NAGANO



Matsumoto Castle, Matsumoto



Matsumoto

Nagano is an inland prefecture and due to its location, which separates Kansai and Kanto, it is referred to as Japan's Roof.

Gathering droves of tourists during all seasons, Nagano is brimming with life and beauty. In the summer the prefecture becomes a flower paradise with the many blooming alpine plants. Its beauty is both grand and fragile, with the coming of winter the mountain resorts open their doors to the vast amount of skiers.

Nagano is also home to another of Japan's unique experiences. Housing the famous Nozawa and Shibu Onsens, both of which are well known for the amazing sight of monkeys bathing in the rock baths at Jigokudani Wild Monkey Park.

In the Matsumoto area of Nagano you can find one of Japan's national treasures. A five-storey tower, which can be found at the foot of Matsumoto Castle is listed as Japan's oldest castle tower. In the summer the castle holds the Taiko Festival and Takigi-Noh are held at the castle, attracting many visitors to the magnificent castle.

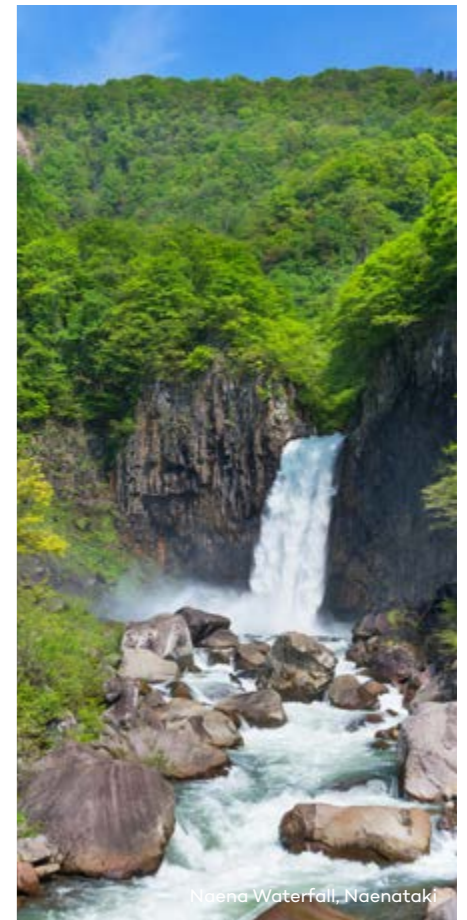
新潟県

NIIGATA

As the prefecture was previously used as a prominent port area between South Korea and Russia, Niigata has become Japan's gateway to Northeast Asia whilst still retaining its strong Japanese roots.

With the Sea of Japan running along its edge and the Shinano River coursing through the prefecture boasts extremely fertile land which gives the area great success with rice farming. Thanks to its successful rice farms Niigata is home to many of Japan's leading sake breweries, with many restaurants offering a traditional taste of Japan's seafood paired with savoury sake.

Another major attraction of Niigata is Sado Island, which is the largest island that isn't one of the four main islands. There was once a large amount of gold found on Sado Island which attracted many people to the island. The island's unique culture has flourished since with much of its tourism based around the gold mines, traditional arts and entertainment and the Toki-no-mori Park, one of the few places to see the Japanese crested Ibis, which is a protected species.



View of Mt Fuji, Fuji-Q Highland, Yamanashi



View of Mt Fuji, Taisekiji Temple, Fujinomiya



静岡県

SHIZUOKA



Shiraito Falls, Fujinomiya



View of Mt Fuji from a Rice Field outside Gotemba

Shizuoka is the home to Japan's most famous landmark, Mt Fuji. In Japan Mt Fuji is affectionately referred to as Fuji-san. So much of Shizuoka's attractions are located close to the base of Mt Fuji, meaning you can enjoy viewing it from every angle.

At Fuji's base you can find one of Japan's most famous amusement parks, Fuji-Q Highland. For families and thrill seekers alike this park is sure to entertain, with most of its rides breaking Guinness World Records on opening and one the longest haunted house attractions in the country, it's easy to see why it attracts so many people year round.

If amusement parks aren't for you, you can explore the rest of what Fuji has to offer. With many unique caves in the area and Fuji's Five Lakes, there is more to Mt Fuji than meets the eye. If you feel like a real adventure, you can climb to the top of Mt Fuji. With 2 day long tours taking place during Fuji's open months you can experience the unique view of watching the rising sun from the top of Mt Fuji.

You can also relax and view Mt Fuji from the comfort of a train, with a special train line that runs around Fuji, showcasing its best views. This route is called the Fuji-Kyu, which translates to View of Fuji.

富山県

TOYAMA

Toyama is a nature rich prefecture with a 3000-metre-tall mountain range and the Toyama bay. The prefecture has beautiful views throughout the four seasons.

The prefecture is also home to the World Heritage Gokayama Village in the 'gassho-zukuri' style, and Zuiryu-ji Temple (a national treasure). Gokayama Village has many houses which range in age from 100-400 years old. The houses are also noted as a structural marvel as they use no nails in their construction and yet stand at two to three storeys tall.

Toyama Bay benefits from the melting snow from the Tateyama mountain range, creating a rich environment for fish. The area boasts a lot of local specialties due to the abundance of fish in the bay, some of these are Yellow Tail fish, Firefly Squid and White Shrimp.

Thanks to the mountain range there are a few hidden scenic spots that can be enjoyed here, such as Kurobe Gorge. The gorge has many untouched forests which can be viewed from the special sightseeing train that passes through the gorge.





Temple near Kawaguchiko



Traditional Japanese Huts, Saiko Iyashi no Sato Nemba

山梨県 YAMANASHI



Lake Sai Bat Cave, Fujikawaguchiko



Twilight View of Mt Fuji, Fujikawa

Yamanashi is another prefecture with amazing views of Mt Fuji. Like Shizuoka Mt Fuji also falls within this prefecture but it also has other areas of natural beauty.

Fuji Goko and Shosen-Kyo Valley are just a few of the scenic spots here. Fuji Goko is a collective term for the five lakes along the Northern foot of Mt Fuji. As well as the lakes, there are a few interesting caves nearby such as Lake Sai Bat Cave and the Ice Cave. Lake Sai Bat Cave is a protected area to help the population in the cave recover after they were almost driven to extinction. Since it became

a protected area the bat population has steadily increased year by year. Whereas the Ice Cave is very cold all year long and so the interior is constantly covered in ice.

In the Shosen-Kyo valley there is an area known for its 'Warrior Pride'. The Kofu area gained a lot of attention in 2012 for their Koshu Battalion Deployment during the Shigen-ko Festival, they received a Guinness World Record for the largest gathering of samurai, more than 1000 people dressed as samurai marched through Kofu City.



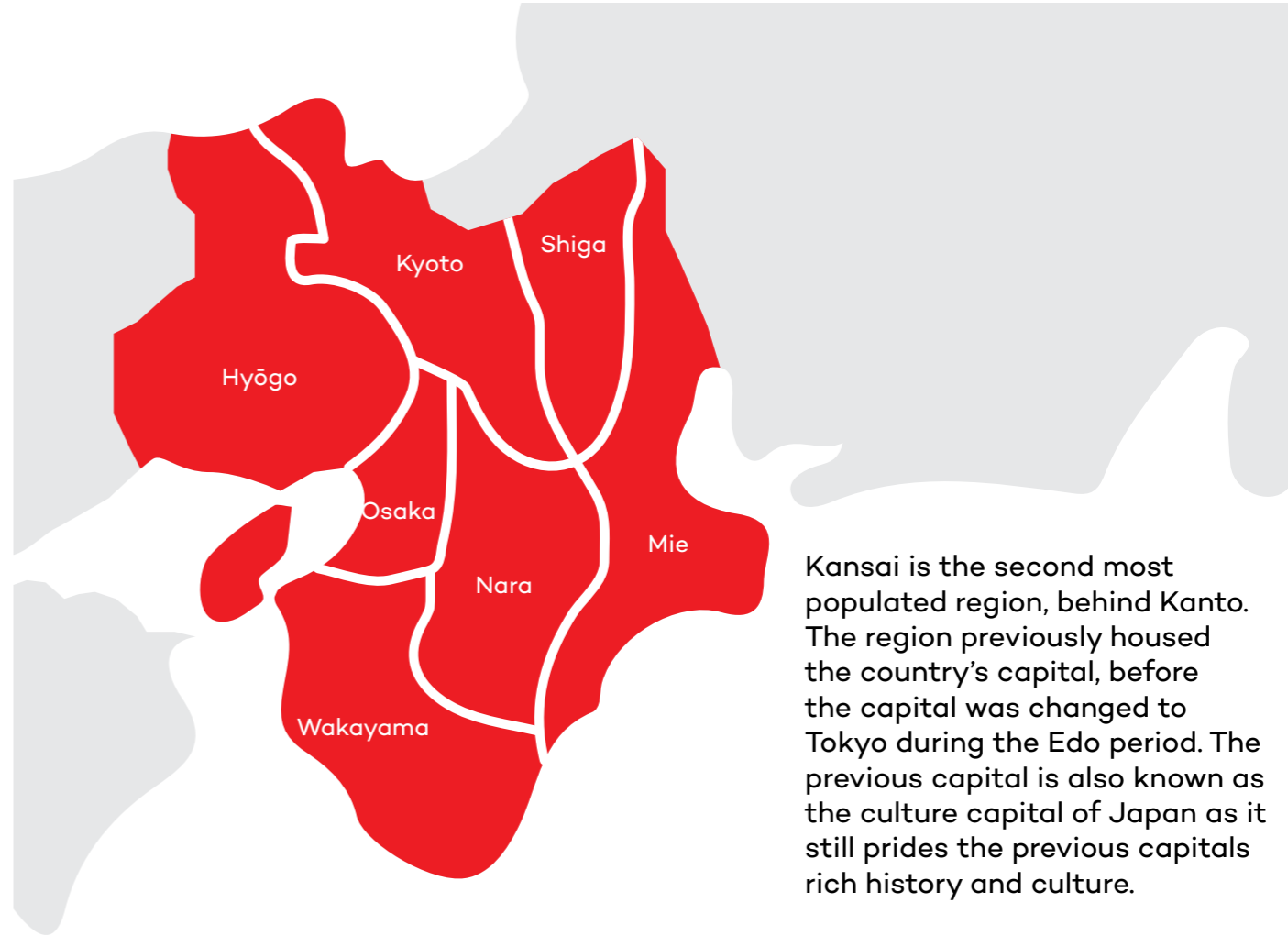
関西地方
KANSAI

Kiyomizu-dera Temple Gate, Kyoto





Bamboo pathway, Temple Garden District, Kyoto



Kansai is the second most populated region, behind Kanto. The region previously housed the country's capital, before the capital was changed to Tokyo during the Edo period. The previous capital is also known as the culture capital of Japan as it still prides the previous capitals rich history and culture.

The prefectures that make up the Kansai region are Hyōgo, Kyoto, Mie, Nara, Osaka, Shiga and Wakayama.

The Kansai region was previously known as the Kinki region and the two names are often interchanged but they both refer to the same collection of prefectures.

兵庫県 HYŌGO

Home of the world-famous Kobe city, famous for its Kobe beef, the city is also known as an exotic port within the country. The city also has some amazing sightseeing and shopping experiences, with the Kobe Harbourland sporting an impressive variety and number of shops, with over 200 stores specialising in clothing, gourmet foods and miscellaneous goods.

The prefecture also boasts Japan's first registered Cultural Heritage site, the pure white Himeji Castle. After a recent renovation, new life has been infused into site and the castle is considered one of the most beautiful in Japan.

Outside of the city, near Asago you can visit the ruins of Takeda Castle, also known as the Castle in the Sky. A castle that sits atop a mountain and during the fall and winter months a fog envelops the mountain, leaving only the castle to 'float' on top of the clouds.

For the adventurous sea farers, there is also the impressive, swirling currents of the Naruto Channel. The channel boasts the world's largest whirling current, with a diameter of 20 metres. The Naruto Whirlpools can be seen up close from a special boat tour which sails on the channel and close to the whirling currents.



Ferris Wheel, Kobe Port, Kobe



Port Kobe Bridge, Kobe



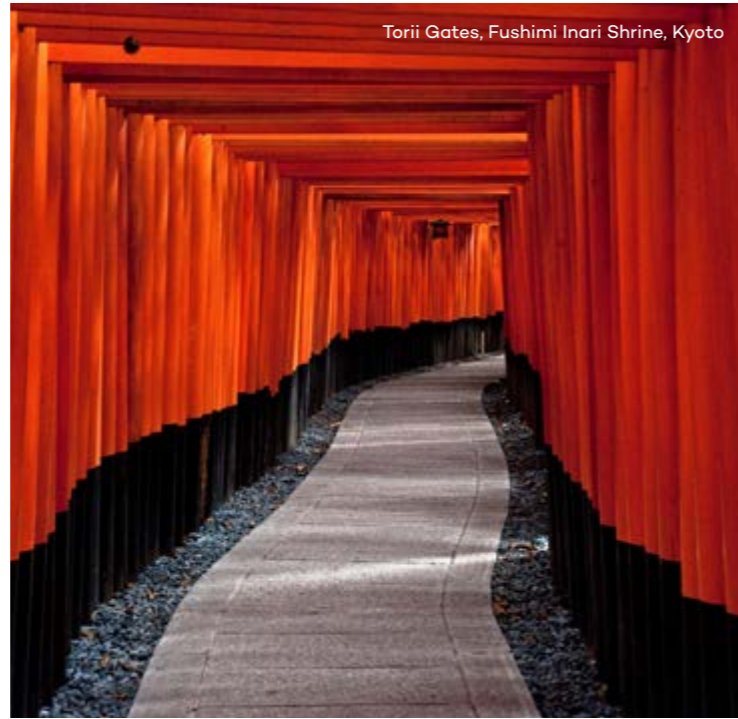
Takeda Castle Ruins, Asago



The Big Buddha of Hyogo, Kobe



Maiko (Apprentice Geisha), Gion Quarter, Kyoto



Torii Gates, Fushimi Inari Shrine, Kyoto

京都府 KYOTO



Eikando Gardens, Kyoto



Kinkaku-ji Temple, Kyoto

With a 1100-year history as the capital of Japan, Kyoto is a historic and cultural wonderland. With many temples and shrines built during its time as capital still there today you can experience a terrific historic atmosphere.

Kyoto City is home to many famous sights and events, which are famous even outside of Japan. One of the most famous is the huge bamboo forest on the outskirts of the city. The forest runs along the Katsura River which joins the Hozu-Gawa River, where every August approximately 1000 bright and

colourful lanterns are released down the river from a 17th Century style bridge.

The city also has many temples and shrines, the most famous of which is Kinkaku-ji. Also called the Golden Pavilion, the temple sits on the edge of a pond which reflects the glittering exterior of the golden building.

Kyoto has a thriving traditional arts and crafts sector, with traditional textile weaving and dying as one of the most popular experiences.

三重県 MIE

Mie is considered one of Japan's most special prefectures, with the famous Ise-Jingu shire residing within the prefecture. Amaterasu O-mikami is enshrined here. Amaterasu, or the Sun Goddess is a major deity in the Shinto religion and due to this the shrine gathers millions of worshippers annually. Just outside Ise city, you can also find the famous Wedded Rocks, a pair of rocks in the seas which are joined by a large shimenawa rope.

If shrines and temples don't interest you, you can always visit some of Mie's other attractions, such as the Iga-ryu Ninja Museum, Nagashima Spa Land and Suzuka Circuit.

The Iga Ninja are the most famous Ninja clan in Japan. The clan is well known for developing, what is

now known as Ninjutsu, or Ninja Arts. The museum showcases the history of the clan and has many shows and experiences which you can take part in.

For the thrill seekers, you can visit Nagashima Spa Land, which is considered one of Japan's greatest amusement parks. With many exciting rides and plenty of family areas the park is a fun experience for young, old and families alike.

The Suzuka Circuit is a racing circuit where there are frequent races and is also used for Formula 1 racing but also has an amusement park, restaurant and motor sport themed hotel.



Nagashima Spa Land, Kuwana City



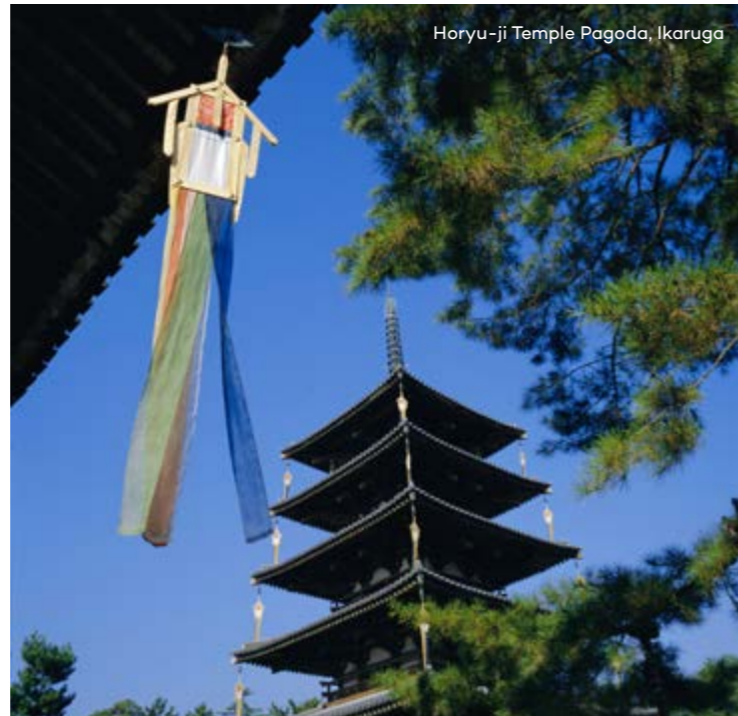
Uji Bridge leading to Ise-Jingu Shrine, Ise



Bowing Deers, Nara Park, Nara City



Horyu-ji Temple Pagoda, Ikaruga



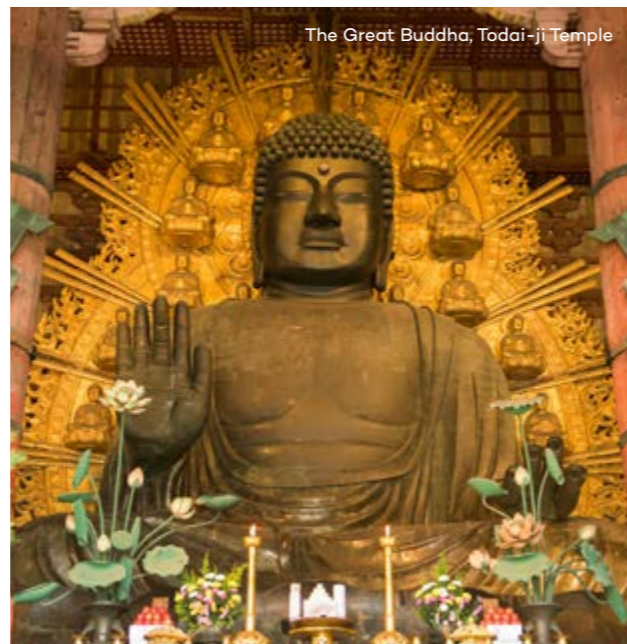
奈良県

NARA

Yoshinoyama, Nara



The Great Buddha, Todai-ji Temple



Nara has become very popular recently after videos emerged online of the Nara Park deers. In the park there are many deer that walk around freely and you can buy small biscuits to feed the deer but what has attracted a lot of people's attention is that all the deer will bow to you in return for a biscuit. They will only bow to people who they know have the biscuits.

The prefecture itself also houses a lot of shrines and temples including Todai-ji Temple, which has the world's largest gold and copper Buddha

statue enshrined in the Great Buddha Hall which is also the world's largest wooden structure, and the Horyu-ji Temple, which is the oldest Buddhist temple in Japan as well as the world's oldest wooden structure. The temple also holds many paintings and sculptures.

Yoshinoyama can also be found in Nara prefecture. Yoshinoyama is regarded as the best spot for viewing the spring cherry blossoms.

大阪府

OSAKA

Once affectionately referred to as Japan's Kitchen, Osaka is a popular foodie destination along with its many other attractions and is still known as the country's food capital. With such variety, abundant and tasty food the locals have coined their own term 'Kuidore', which means to eat oneself bankrupt. The city has over 100 Michelin-starred restaurants but you can also sample some of the city's best dishes from the locale fare down at the canals of Dotombori.

With Japan's largest complex, Expocity found in the city there is undoubtedly plenty to do in and around Osaka City. The Expocity has many fun and educational experiences for families, with the likes of the Orbi facility, an interactive facility which teaches children about nature through fun and entertaining experiences, and the Pokémon Expo

Gym, which immerses visitors in many fun Pokémon related experiences.

Much like many other cities in Japan Osaka also has Osaka Castle, which is considered a symbol of the city. During major refurbishment of the castle in 1997 the main tower of the castle was fitted with lighting making the castle a spectacular view during the day and even more so at night.

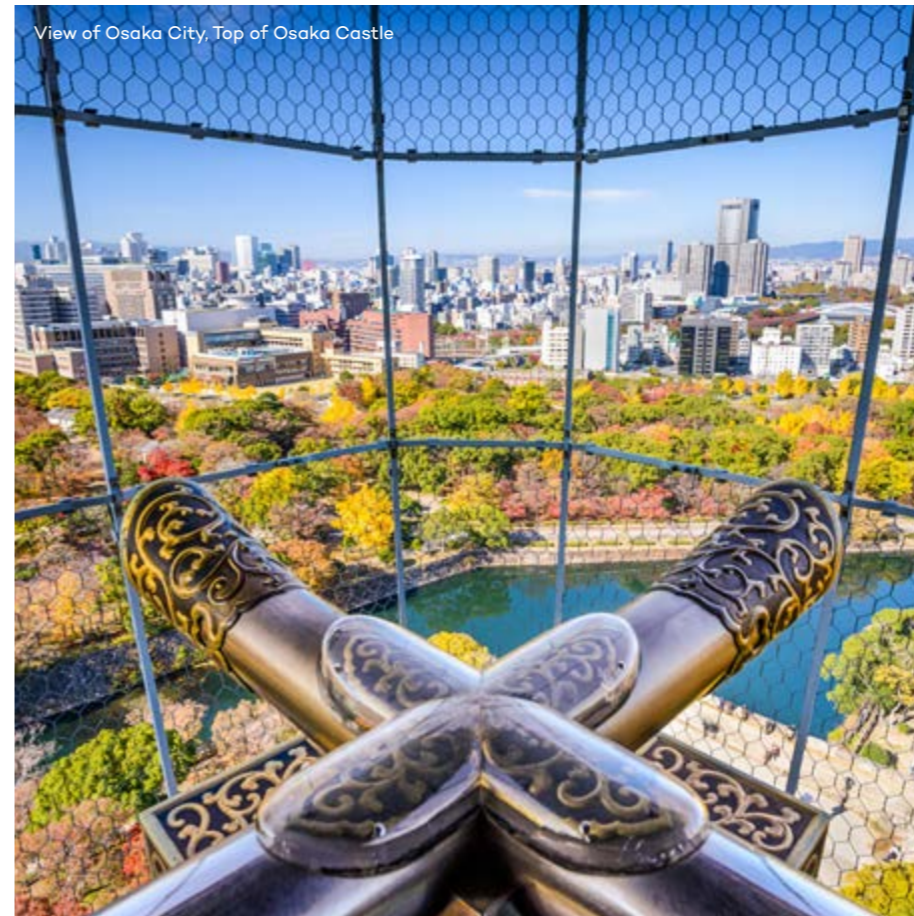
Osaka is also home to Universal Studios Japan which in the coming years is going to be expanding its attractions to include a Nintendo themed area, the new area is well anticipated by video game fans world wide.



Dotonbori, Osaka



Universal Studios Japan, Osaka

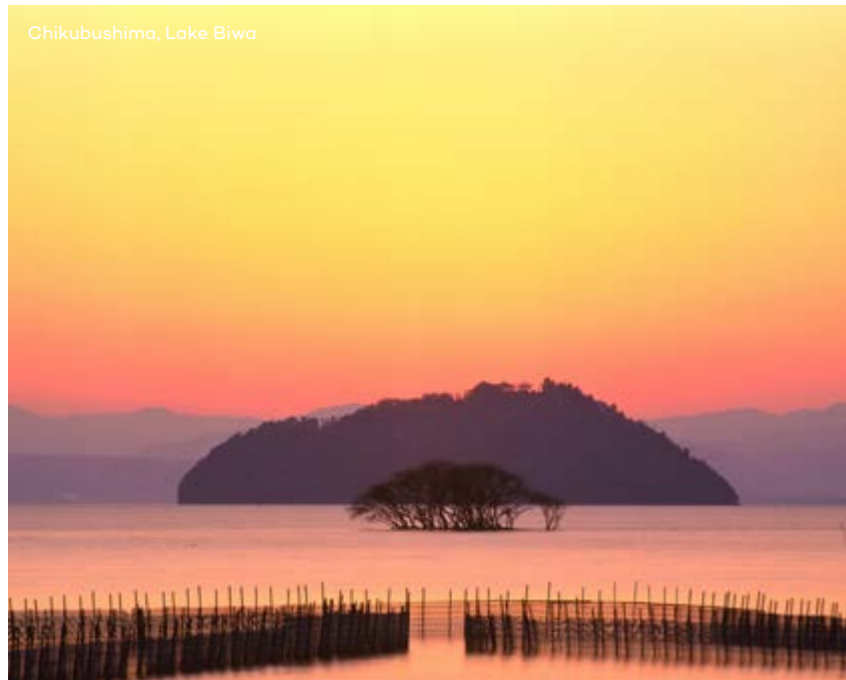


View of Osaka City, Top of Osaka Castle

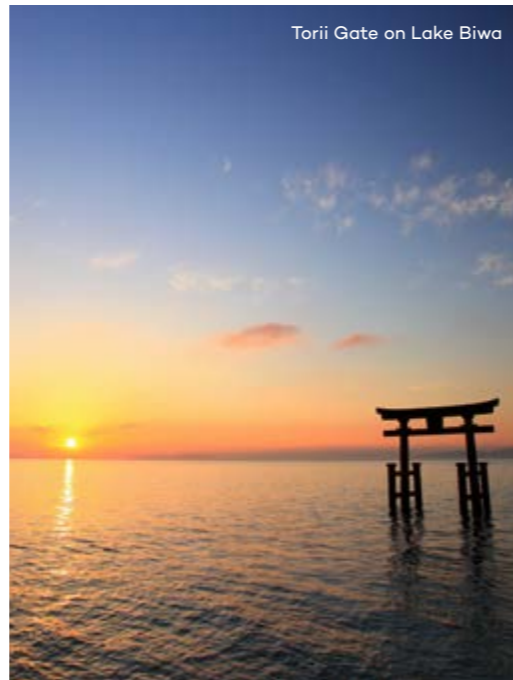


Osaka Castle

Chikubushima, Lake Biwa



Torii Gate on Lake Biwa



滋賀県 SHIGA

Pleasure Boat, Lake Biwa



Hikone Castle, Hikone



Being home to the largest lake in the country, Shiga's best sights and activities are mainly related to Lake Biwa or water.

With many boat tours and cruises on the lake you can enjoy all that the lake has to offer, from visiting Chikubushima to taking part in many swimming and water sports activities. Chikubushima is a small

island in Lake Biwa with two shrines, the island is said to be where the water god dwells and the shrines there are where the locals would pray to the water gods for safe passage.

The area is also one of the first places in Japan to have the water jet pack and jet blade water sports experiences, which can also be found on Lake Biwa.

和歌山県

WAKAYAMA



Buddha Statue at Okunoin, Koya-San



Koya Temple, Koya-San

In the Koya mountain range you can find the large Koya Temple, which is the centre temple of Shingo Buddhism in Japan. Whilst here you can watch the monks go about their training and daily chores, the temple is also the beginning and ending temple of an 88 temple pilgrimage you can take whilst in Japan.

Wakayama is also home to Shirahama Beach. The beach is more famously known for a small island

that you can see from it, known as Engetsu-to Island. The island is tall with a hole in the middle of it and many people gather to view the sunset which lines up with the hole in the island.

The prefecture is also home to Japan's most famous, free standing waterfall Nachi Falls.



Engetsu-to Island, Shirahama



Three Storey Pagoda, Nachi Falls

Torii Gate, Hiroshima Bay, Miyajima



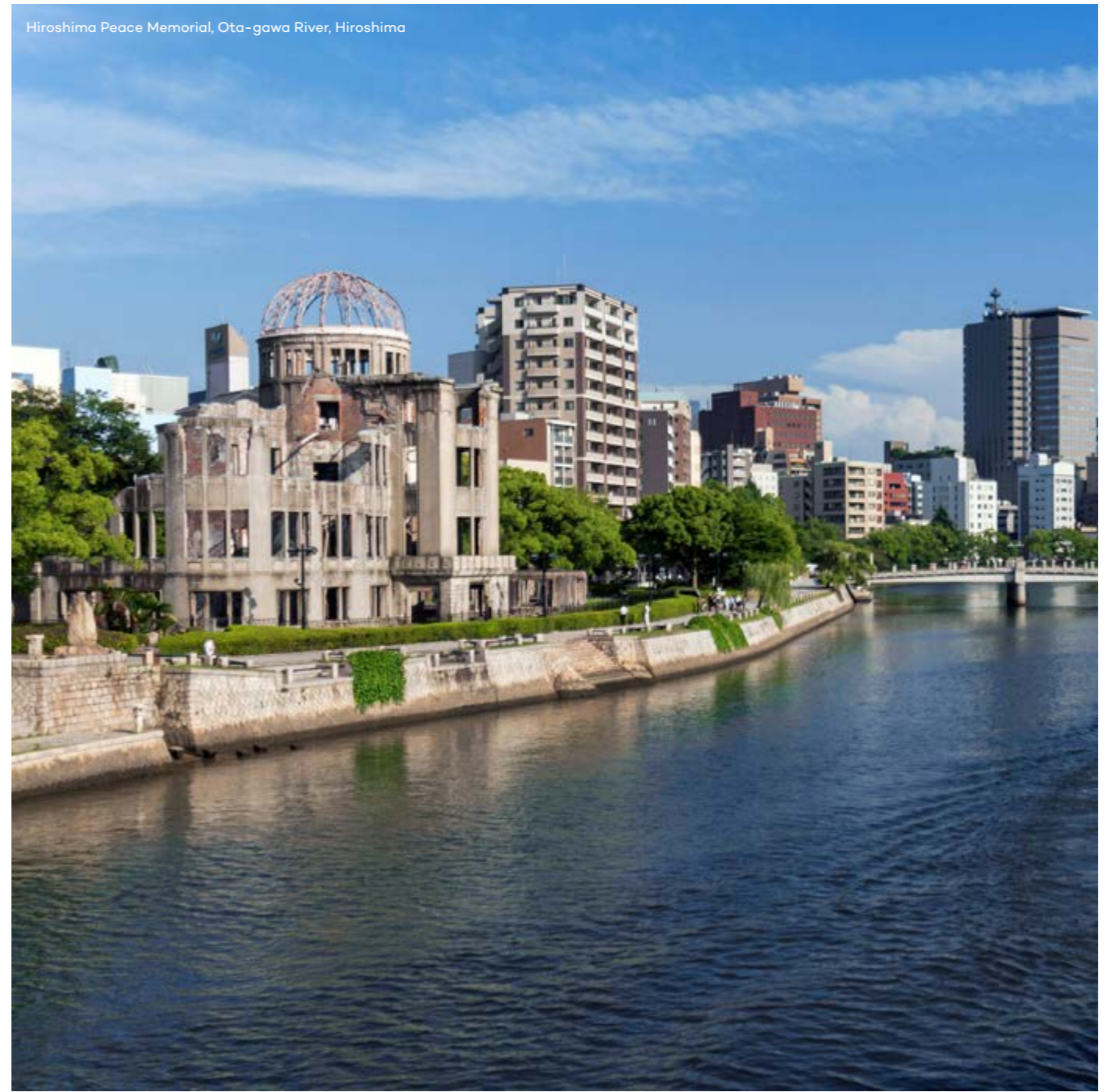
中国地方

CHŪGOKU



The last and most west region on the main island of Honshū, Chūgoku consists of Hiroshima, Okayama, Shimane, Tottori and Yamaguchi. With its beautiful rolling hills and mountain ranges which split the region into east and west, the region has some great mountain and sea views.

The region is home to one of Japan's more recent historic cities, Hiroshima. The city was devastated during World War II by an American atomic bomb but in the following years the city has been rebuilt and marked as a Peace Memorial City.



Hiroshima Peace Memorial, Ota-gawa River, Hiroshima

Yoshima Bay, Hiroshima



Onomichi, Hiroshima



広島県 HIROSHIMA



Hiroshima Castle, Hiroshima



Lanterns Released on Ota-gawa River, Hiroshima

Obviously, part of Hiroshima's must see attraction is the Hiroshima Peace Memorial (also known as the Atom Bomb Dome) and the site of the Hiroshima atomic bombing. The Peace Memorial is the closest building to the bombing site that was left, mostly standing and has now been reserved as a historic site. Every year during the anniversary of the bombing there is a lantern releasing event, where they release thousands of lanterns onto the river in front of the Peace Memorial.

Although the bombing site is what the city is famous for there is so much more to see, such as the Bihoku area. The Bihoku area is between the Chūgoku mountains, an area of abundant natural

beauty with Taishaku Valley, one of Japan's 100 famous views, the area is visited by most people in the autumn when the trees start to change colour. The area also has an amazing natural limestone bridge which crosses a small stream.

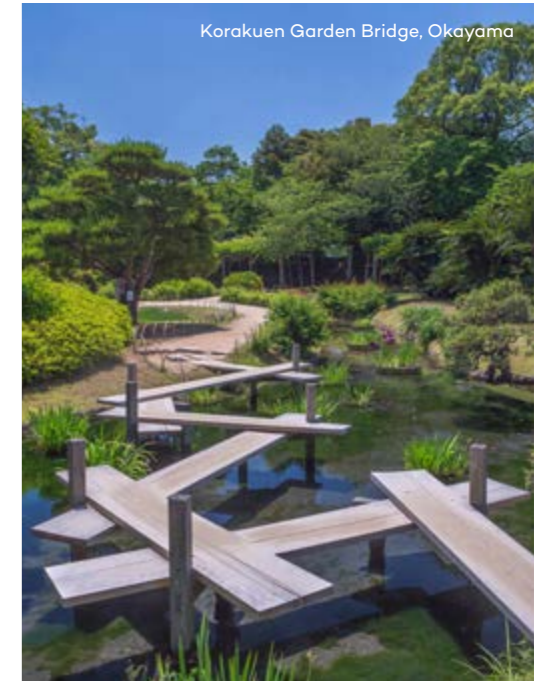
You can also visit Miyajima, where one of Japan's most famous shrine gates is located. This shrine gate is based in the water near the coast of Miyajima on Itsukushima Island. During low tide, it is possible to get up close to the shrine gate and get a better sense of its size.

岡山県

OKAYAMA



Famed Bridge and Canal of Kurashiki



Korakuen Garden Bridge, Okayama

Okayama is another of the many prefectures with amazing natural views and many culturally historic places like Bizen, which are still very much in touch with their roots. Bizen is the home place of Bizen-yaki, the oldest of the six ancient styles of ceramics and pottery which dates back more than 1000-years. Bizen is still bustling with many ceramic and pottery shops, many of the restaurants will serve dishes on Bizen-yaki dishes, and you can also learn more about this style in the Bizen Ceramic Art Museum.

Kurashiki is one of Japan's towns which has a very strong historic quarter which intersects beautifully with the modern industrial parts of the town, the town is also the largest industrial town in Japan.

The historic quarter of the town is a strong symbol of the town, with some of the buildings dating back to the 17th to 20th century. With many sightseeing boats passing along the river in the historic quarter, you can see many of the historic buildings and stone bridges. Kurashiki's historic quarter is unique compared to many others as it still has many businesses that still operate within the area, with many cafés and stores still operating there.

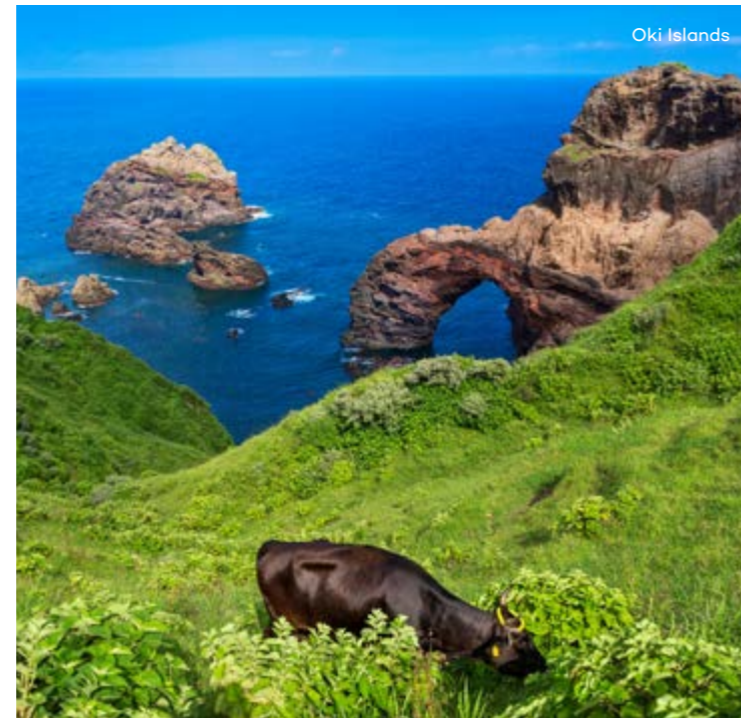
Okayama, much like many other places in Japan has its own famous castle but the Okayama castle is unique among the rest of Japan's castle as it has a black exterior, unlike most other castles which have white exteriors.



Setouchi, Okayama



Okayama Castle, Okayama



島根県 SHIMANE



Shimane's coast faces towards Korean Peninsula over the Sea of Japan and due to its connections with Korea and China, it used to be the cultural centre of Japan.

In this prefecture you can find the Izumo-Taisha Grand Shrine, in Izumo City. The existing shrine sanctuary was built in the 18th century, which is said to be the 25th reconstruction, the shrine is also home to one of Japan's largest shrine gates and a huge sacred straw festoon that is 13 meters long, 9 meters in girth, and weighs 5 tons.

Due to the marine traffic from Korea and China, Mihonoseki was pivotal in directing marine traffic. The lighthouse in the area was built from stone in the 19th century. The area also has pleasure boat tours that you can view the beautiful coast from.

Off the coast from Mihonoseki, you can visit the Oki area which is an archipelago consisting of 184 islands of varying size. The islands have irregular coastlines with uniquely shaped rocks, some of which can reach up to 257-meters-high. The islands are also home to the remains of some long-lost temples and shrines.

鳥取県

TOTTORI

Tottori is home to some of the greatest contrasting views in Japan, with the lush spring greenery, tinted leaves in the autumn and the vast Tottori Sand Dunes, this prefecture will undoubtedly take your breath away.

The Tottori Sand Dunes are Japan's largest dunes (about 16 kilometres from east to west and about 2 kilometres from north to south), and have been formed on both sides of the mouth of the Sendai River.

New sightseeing spots and museums hosting works by Japan's famous cartoonists from Tottori are very popular. The Gosho Aoyama Manga Factory is a museum exhibiting materials related to the author

of 'Detective Conan', a comic loved around the world. The Mizuki Shigeru Museum hosts the works by Shigeru Mizuki, author of 'Gegege-no-Kitaro', a representative 'yokai' (specter) manga in Japan. These museums are always crowded with people of all ages. The bronze statues of yokai standing in various locations throughout the area are also extremely popular.

In Tottori's flatlands, you can also find many ancient ruins, dating back to 400 and 300 AD, as well as many other castle town ruins in other places in the prefecture.



Uradome Beach, Iwami



Tottori Sand Dunes along the Sea of Japan



Tottori Skyline



Oyama, Tottori

Senzaki, Nagato



Kintai Bridge, Iwakuni



山口県 YAMAGUCHI



Torii Gates, Motonosumi Inari Shrine



Rocky Coast on the Sea of Japan, Omijima Island

Yamaguchi City is situated in the centre of the prefecture. Since it imitated Kyoto, the then capital of Japan in the mid-14th century, it was called the "Kyoto of the West," and the city prospered. Every summer the Yamaguchi Gion-matsuri Festival is held there, an event that echoes Kyoto's famous Gion-matsuri Festival. Due to its location on the western most edge of the Honshū island, the prefecture was involved with a lot of traders and visitors from the Korean Peninsula.

The Boyo-shoto Islands, that are strung between Yamaguchi and Ehime, belong to Seto Inland Sea National Park. Various islands on the moderate inland sea, a winding coastline, white sand and green pine trees are mingled among terraced fields and houses, creating attractive scenery.

Hagi, which overlooks the Sea of Japan, is a former castle town of Hagi Castle, established in the early 17th century. The city still features ancient paths and storehouses with walls covered with square tiles jointed with raised plaster, a style known as 'namako.'

Shimonoseki, situated on the westernmost tip of the prefecture, faces the island of Kyushu's Moji Port with the Kanmon Strait in between, and is connected to the neighbouring island by the 3,461-meter-long Kanmon Tunnel (780 meters of which runs beneath the sea).

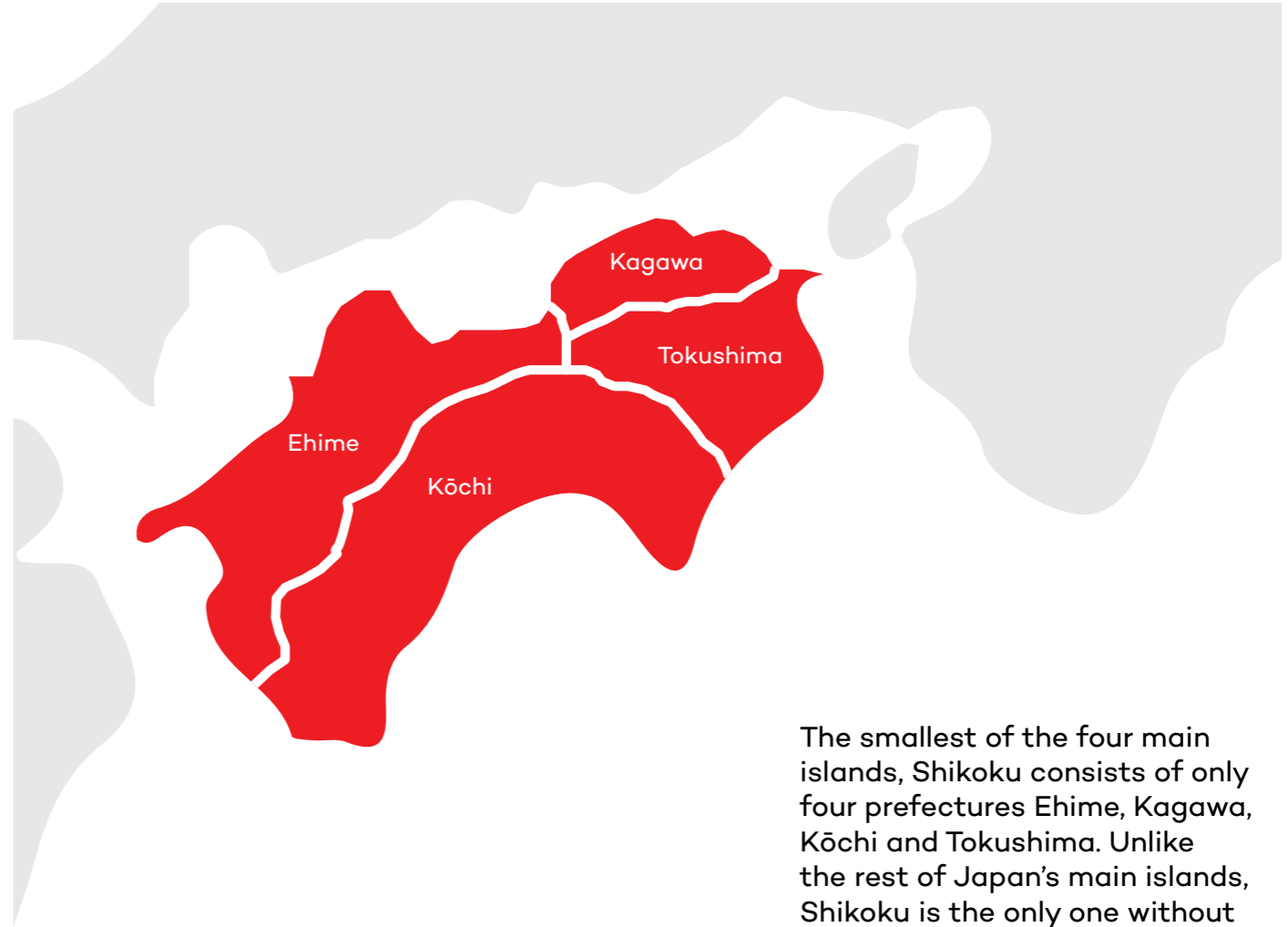


四国

SHIKOKU



View of Matsuyama, Matsuyama Castle



The smallest of the four main islands, Shikoku consists of only four prefectures Ehime, Kagawa, Kōchi and Tokushima. Unlike the rest of Japan's main islands, Shikoku is the only one without any volcanoes.

The island is connected to Kyūshū and Honshū by the Shimanami Kaido Expressway, which also has an impressive cycleway which gives amazing views on all three islands. The cycleway runs from Onomichi, Hiroshima all the way to Imabari, Ehime.

愛媛県

EHIME

Ehime literary means 'lovely princess'. As the name indicates, the climate is warm and mild and it is rich in the beautiful nature. It is surrounded by Seto Inland Sea, or the Aegean Sea of the Orient, and Shikoku Mountains Range including Mt. Ishizuchi, the highest peak in western Japan. Blessed with the abundant nature, the unique history and culture as well as traditional spirit of hospitality have been cultivated.

Dogo-onsen is a 3,000 year-old hot spring, the oldest hot spring in Japan. It has established a monumental status as the No.1 destination in Ehime. It has attracted many residents, tourists and pilgrims, including the emperors and imperial

families, for a long time. You can enjoy the noteworthy tradition in Dogo-onsen Honkan (Main Building), the symbolic communal bathhouse.

Ehime is one of four prefectures where the Shikoku Pilgrimage extends. It is a grand loop trail of about 1,200 kilometres, connecting 88 temples tied with a legendary Buddhist priest Kukai (774 – 835). 26 temples from the 40th Kanjizai-ji Temple to the 65th Sankaku-ji Temple are located in Ehime. Walking pilgrims in white is a signature sight especially in spring. People in Shikoku including Ehime are proud of the culture of hospitality to travellers. They have succeeded the tradition of the compassionate attitude to the pilgrims for generations.



Train passing Turret Building of Takamatsu Castle, Takamatsu



Strait Ohashi, Kagawa



香川県

KAGAWA



Ritsurin Garden, Takamatsu



View of Mt Ryuo and Kagawa, across Seto Inland Sea from Mihara, Hiroshima

Kagawa is situated in the northeastern part of Shikoku. The Sanuki Mountain Range, a chain of 1,000-meter-high mountains including Mt Ryuo-zan, the highest of all at some 1,060 meters above sea level, runs through the southern part of the prefecture. The Sanuki Plains stretch out to the north, and the Seto Inland Sea is dotted with 116 islands of all sizes, including Shodo-shima Island.

Since early times, Kagawa has been known for the production of cotton, sugar and salt, together

called 'Sanuki Sanpaku', or Sanuki Three Whites. Takamatsu City, which was a castle town in the Feudal Age, prospered as an important centre of transportation for these products.

Shodo-shima Island, known as the place where olive cultivation started in Japan, has beautiful valleys such as Choshikei and Kankakei, Shodoshima Olive Park that resembles a location along the shore of the Mediterranean, and many other interesting places worth visiting.

高知県

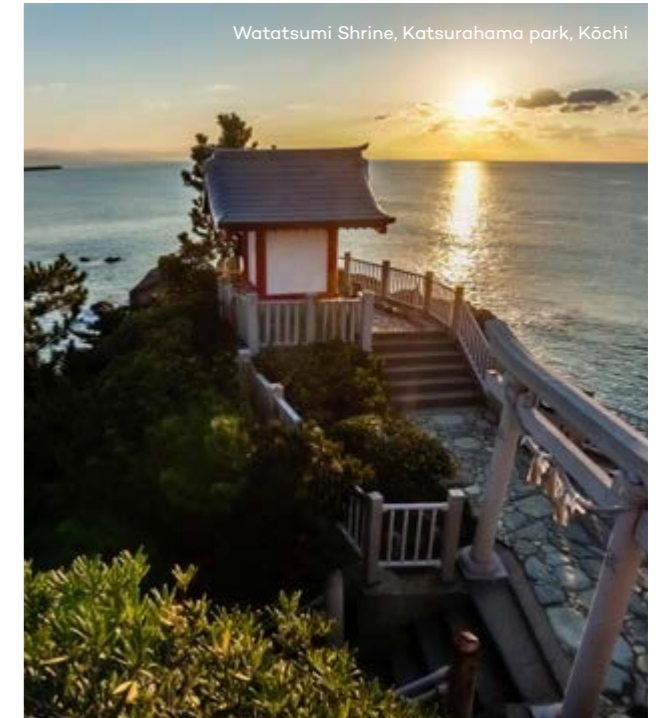
KŌCHI

Kōchi is ringed by rugged mountains to the north, and its arc-like southern coastline traces the outline of Tosa Bay. To the east is Cape Muroto, and to the west, Cape Ashizuri, with gently undulating sandy beaches stretching between these two extreme points. The prefecture also boasts the mystical limestone caves of Ryu-ga-do, and the beautiful sands and green pines of Katsura-hama Beach.

The Shimanto-gawa River, with its crystal-clear waters, is known as Japan's last pristine river. It begins its winding journey in the mountains of Tsuno Town, before flowing into the Pacific Ocean. The river is a treasure trove of marine life, including 'ayu' (sweet fish) and river prawns. Ayu are caught using large torches that scare the fish into nets - a unique fishing technique known as 'Hiburi-ryo'. These ancient fishing methods remain even to

this day. Further downstream, you can even enjoy canoeing. To the north of Cape Muroto - known for its many coastal boulders - are Shira-hama and Ikumi-kaigan beaches. These coastal areas are ideal for water sports such as swimming and surfing.

The prefecture's largest event is the Yosakoi-matsuri Festival, which brings together 20,000 dancers. The festival is held annually between 9 and 12 August, and features dancers wielding wooden clappers who compete at various locations around the city. Each team has its own unique costume with various colours, designs, hairdos, and make-up styles on display. Every unique dance is energetic, and the pulse of this festival stirs the spirits and paints the city in even brighter summer hues.





Vine bridge crossing Iya Valley



Manneken Pis in Iya Valley



Mount Tsurugi, Miyoshi



Naruto Whirlpools, Seto Inland Sea National Park

徳島県 TOKUSHIMA

Situated in the eastern part of Shikoku, Tokushima is surrounded by mountains topping 1,000 meters on three sides. As well, Tokushima is blessed with the bounty and diversity of nature, which is highlighted by sightseeing spots such as the Naruto area (which is part of the Seto Inland Sea National Park and is home to the Naruto whirlpools), the Tokushima City area (which has Mt. Bizan, known as the symbol of Tokushima City), the Mt. Tsurugi and Iya Valley area (where there are magnificent gorges and vine bridges), and the Anan coastal area (home to many pristine beaches).

In the Tokushima City area, the largest event of the prefecture, the Awa Odori Dance, is held from August 12 to 15 every year, attracting about 1.3 million spectators. During the dance festival, the lively sounds of the 'shamisens' (Japanese three-stringed instrument), bells, and drums engulf the city

centre with a wave of excitement of this traditional dance. If you wish to experience the Awa Odori Dance out of season, you can visit the Awa Odori Kaikan, which is open throughout the year.

The Mt. Tsurugi and Iya Valley area, which features beautiful green mountains, attracts many visitors all year round. Oboke and Koboake boasts the magnificence and beauty of its ravines and the Iya Valley is among the three unexplored regions of Japan.

What makes the Anan coastal area attractive is the deep blue sea of the Japan Current. There are many facilities on site, from bathing places to campsites, as well, there are many surfing and diving spots on the shoreline, where many people come to enjoy their summer.



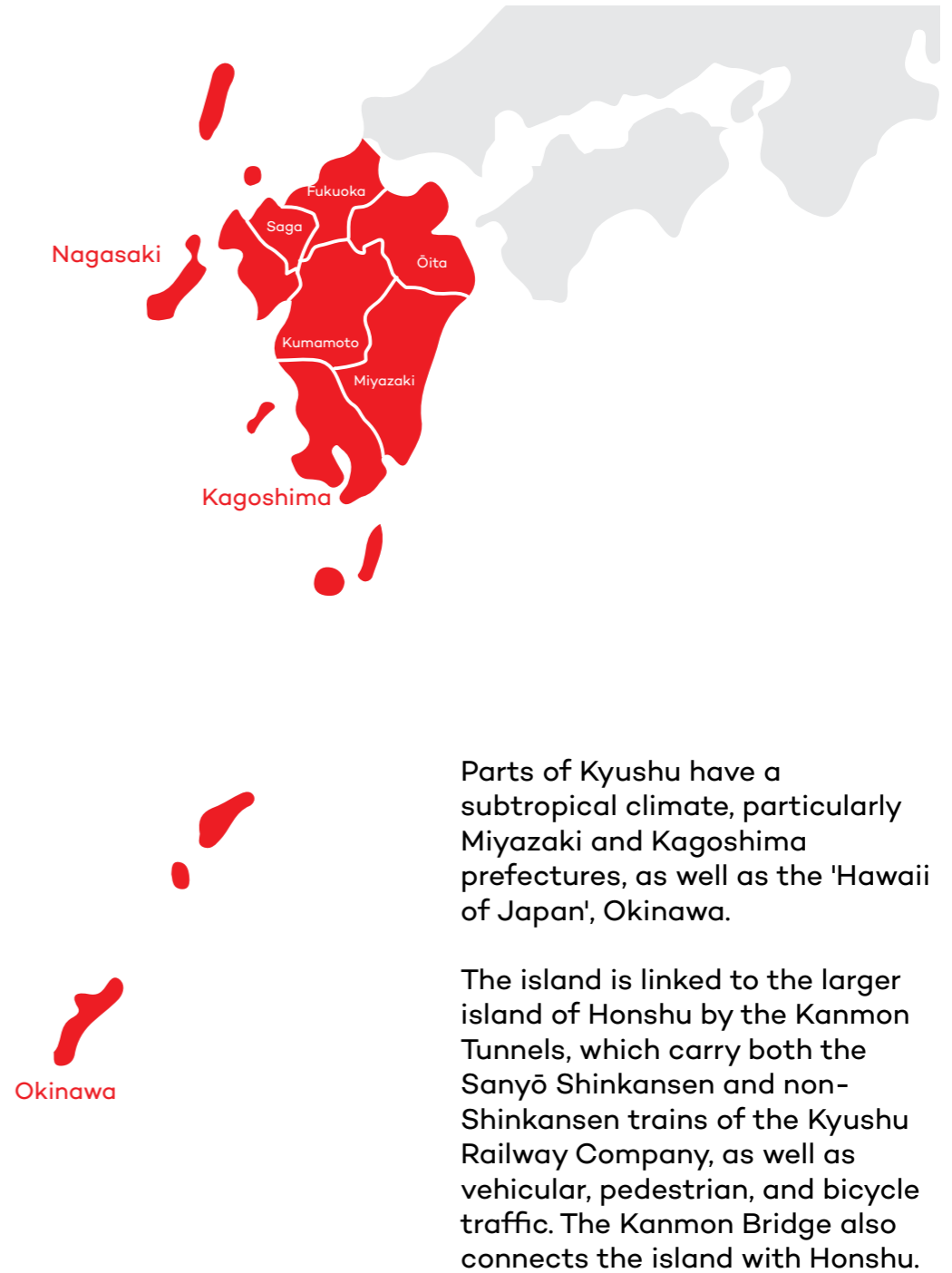
九州
KYŪSHŪ

Himejima Island, Oita





Palm Trees, Satsuma Peninsula



Parts of Kyushu have a subtropical climate, particularly Miyazaki and Kagoshima prefectures, as well as the 'Hawaii of Japan', Okinawa.

The island is linked to the larger island of Honshu by the Kanmon Tunnels, which carry both the Sanyō Shinkansen and non-Shinkansen trains of the Kyushu Railway Company, as well as vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic. The Kanmon Bridge also connects the island with Honshu.

福岡県

FUKUOKA

Fukuoka is situated in the northern extremity of Kyushu, facing the Sea of Suo to the northeast, the Sea of Genkai to the northwest, and the Sea of Ariake to the southwest. As the prefecture borders the Korean Peninsula to the continent of China with a strait in between, Fukuoka was the first place in Japan to be exposed to the culture of the continent. Ever since the Government-General of Kyushu, Dazaifu, was set up in the 7th century, Fukuoka has grown as the hub of the Kyushu region.

In Dazaifu, the ancient capital of the Kyushu region that lasted for 500 years, is Dazaifu Tenman-gu Shrine, where about 6,000 red and white plum trees of 200 varieties and 30,000 irises of 50 different varieties lie, as well as other seasonal flowers that can be enjoyed. As Tenman-gu enshrines the god of academic achievement, it is visited by many

people, students seeking luck in their entrance examinations mostly, all year round. Also, the prefecture has scenic spots such as the Senbutsu limestone cavern, a national natural treasure with beautiful stalagmite and stone pillars, as well as Space World, the world's first space theme park.

The city of Fukuoka, also known as Hakata, is not only the centre of administration and economy in the Kyushu region but also a terminal for air routes and railroads. The Hakata Dontaku is a colourful port festival held in summer each year. Highlighted by a parade of children in traditional dress, men and women in fancy costume, and 'te-odori' dancing (dancing with nothing in hand) people through the streets, this event draws more than 580 groups and about 31,000 citizens, and is viewed by more than 2 million spectators.



Canal City Shopping Centre, Fukuoka



Downtown Fukuoka at Twilight



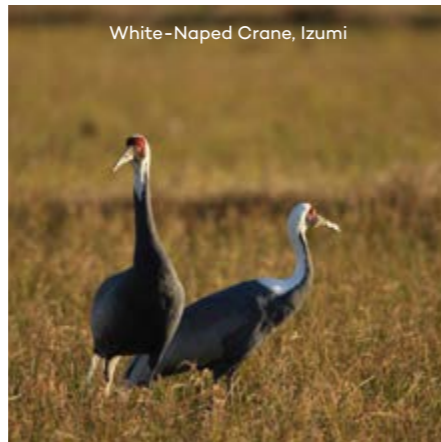
The Reclining Buddha, Nanzoin Temple



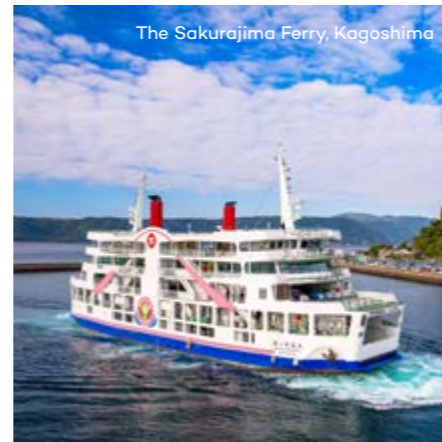
Dazaifu Shrine, Fukuoka



View of Sakurajima Island, Kagoshima



White-Naped Crane, Izumi



The Sakurajima Ferry, Kagoshima

鹿児島県 KAGOSHIMA



Kamikawa Waterfall, Kinko

Located on the southern tip of Kyushu, Kagoshima Prefecture extends 600 km from its borders in the north to its boundaries in the south, separate from Okinawa Prefecture. It is blessed with exceptional scenery, of beautiful oceans, mountains, rivers, and is home to many hot springs and diverse, rich nature. There are also many cultural and historical sites. Islands belonging to Kagoshima Prefecture include about 30 islands far to the south, among which is Yakushima Island, an island registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Tokara Islands, a chain of twelve islands of varying in size and stretching over a distance of 162 km, and Amami Oshima, the second largest isolated in Japan.

The Koshikijima Islands, 30 km off the western shore of the Satsuma Peninsula, are famous for wild Japanese lilies. The lilies cover the islands in pink

during full bloom after the rainy season. Another popular destination is Tanegashima Island and Uchinoura Town. Tanegashima Islands is especially known for its rocket-launching bases, some of which are among the most technologically advanced gateways to space.

At a closer glance, the landscape of the main prefectural area are volcanic areas like the Kirishima mountain range and active volcano, Sakurajima, and national parks like the Kirishima-Kinkowan National Park (includes Yakushima Islands and Kuchinoerabujima Islands) and the Nichinan Kaigan Quasi-National Park, known for thriving subtropical plants like Livistona, a type of fan palm. The nature and parks in Kagoshima Prefecture range from temperate to subtropical.

熊本県

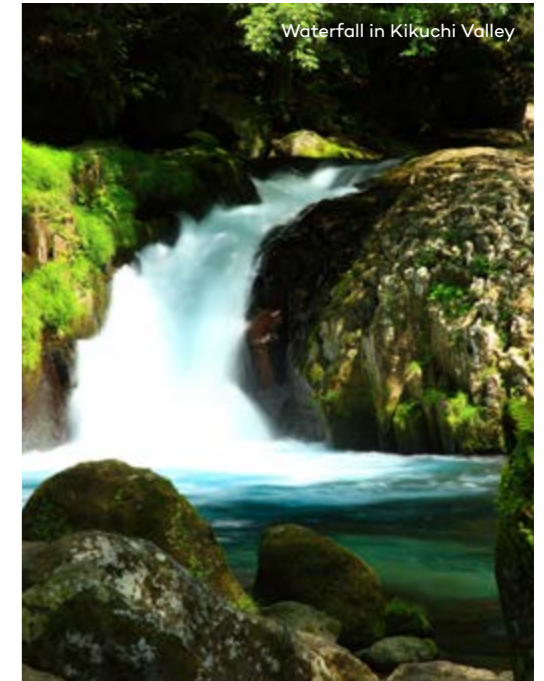
KUMAMOTO

Kumamoto is situated in the centre of Kyushu at the western end of Japan. Mt. Aso-san stands in the east and the Chikuhai Mountains lie to the north, while the Shira-kawa River, the Kuma-gawa River, and other rivers flow from the mountains to the western part of the lower current area, forming the Kumamoto Plain and Yashiro Plain. The Uto-hanto Peninsula juts out to the southwest from the Kyushu mainland, and the Amakusa Islands lie beyond the peninsula.

Kumamoto has two national parks, namely Aso-Kuju and Unzen-Amakusa, and two quasi-national parks, namely Mt. Yabahita-hiko-san and the Kyushu Central Mountains. The total area of these natural parks occupies 20 percent of the prefecture. The Aso district has an active volcano, Mt Aso, with one

of the largest calderas in the world and many hot springs. The Amakusa district has the Amakusa-Gokyo (five bridges), historic sites with tragic stories of Christian martyrs, and scenic sites of the islands and a saw-toothed coast. The central mountainous area attracts people with its valleys, virgin forests, and beautiful mountain sights.

Other must-sees in Kumamoto include Kumamoto City with Kumamoto Castle noted for its stonewalls with 'musha-gaeshi,' a special defence designed to prevent enemy attacks, and the Suizenji-joju-en Garden, hot spring villages and valleys in the basin of the Kikuchi-gawa River, which empties into Shimabara Bay, and the Hitoyoshi and Kuma area with abundant historical sites from the 12th to 14th centuries.



The Kodomo No Kuni Flower Fiesta, Miyazaki



Takachiho-kyo Gorge, Takachiho



宮崎県

MIYAZAKI



A Torii Gate inside a Cave, Takachiho



Uda-Jingu Temple, Nichinan City

Situated in the southeastern part of Kyushu, Miyazaki faces the Sea of Hyuga in the Pacific Ocean in the east and is surrounded by mountains on the other three sides. The north-to-west area bordering Ōita and Kumamoto contains the Kyushu Mountains, while the south area bordering Kagoshima has the Kirishima Mountains and the Wanitsuka Mountains. These mountains create a barrier against the winter wind, which, with the effect of the warm Pacific current, keeps the climate of Miyazaki mild.

The prefecture boasts many shrines involved with the myth of the birth of Japan, such as Miyazaki Shrine sacred to Emperor Jinmu, supposedly the

first Emperor of Japan. Amanoiwato Shrine and Takachiho Shrine are known for the Takachiho Yokagura. At the Yokagura, from November to February, thirty-three nocturnal Shinto music performances and dances are performed as thanksgiving for the fall's harvest and prayers for the next year's abundant crop.

The Nichinan Coast, facing the Pacific Ocean with a beautiful coastline, contains places of natural beauty such as Aoshima and Cape Toi. Seagaia, located along Hitotsuba coast in Miyazaki City, is a comprehensive resort complex complete with a hotel, convention centre, golf courses, and other activities fields.

長崎県

NAGASAKI

Nagasaki Prefecture lies in the northwestern part of Kyushu, the third-largest island of Japan and most southwesterly of its four main islands, and consists of five peninsulas and numerous islands. With the sea in between, it stands face-to-face with a continent, part of which is China, and the Korean Peninsula. It has therefore long been an important transportation point facing the continent of Asia. Ports for trade with Portugal and Holland were also established there in the 16th century. In addition, since it was once the centre of Christian propagation, there are many exotic historical ruins and buildings that still remain within the prefecture.

Almost half of the total land area of the prefecture consists of 971 inhabited and uninhabited islands. The prefecture has many scenic spots, such as the Kujukyu-shima Islands, a part of Saikai National Park, and Fugen-dake, the principal peak of the volcano

Unzen-dake, which is situated right in the centre of the Shimabara-hanto Peninsula. Huis Ten Bosch, a residential-style resort modelled after a mediaeval 17th century Dutch town, is also known as a popular tourist spot.

Nagasaki City, which is the heart of the Nagasaki-hanto Peninsula, is a port city that developed all the way up along the steep slope of a mountain, while it also stretched out horizontally, hugging Nagasaki Bay. The line of visitors attracted to its many tourist spots never ends. Such spots include Peace Park which tells of the facts and memories of the horrible damage that was inflicted by the atomic bomb and continues to appeal to the world with its wish for peace, and the nation's oldest wooden Christian church, O-ura Tenshu-do, which even today exudes an exotic atmosphere.



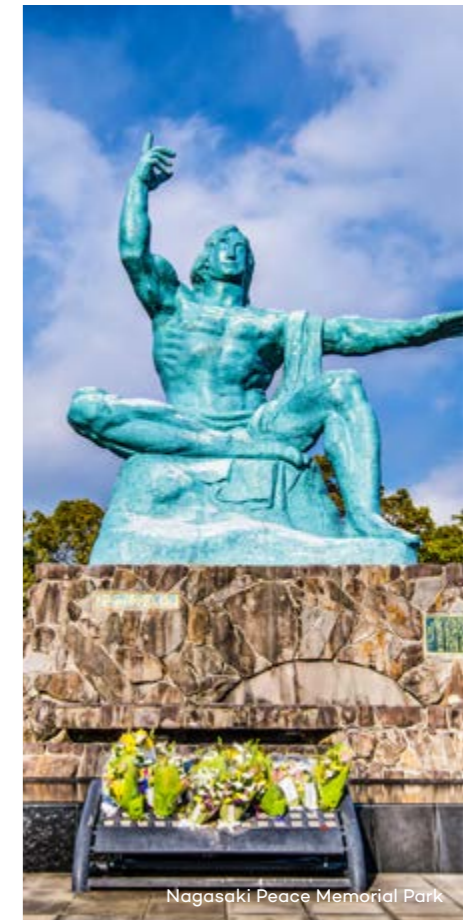
Shimabara Castle, Shimabara



Obae Lighthouse, Nagasaki



Sofuku-ji Temple, Nagasaki



Nagasaki Peace Memorial Park

Mount Yufu, Yufu



One of the Hells of Beppu, Beppu



大分県 ŌITA



Onsen, Kamado Jigoku, Beppu



Lake Kinrinko, Yufuin Town

Located in the northeast of Kyushu, Ōita borders Ehime, with the Hoyo Strait and the Bungo Channel in between, on the east and Yamaguchi across the Sea of Suo on the earth. To the north is a lava plateau, where you can enjoy the dynamic beauty of the Yabakei Gorge and other ravines, like the Aono-domon ('Tunnel of Ao') made through rocks, with mural precipices and numberless rocks and stones of fantastic shape eroded by rivers running between mountains.

The vast volcanic area that occupies a greater portion of the prefectural territory boasts the abundance of hot springs. There you can take a tour of eight boiling hot springs called "hells." On top of that, many hot springs are waiting for you, such as the spa of Beppu-onsen boasting the largest output of hot spring water and the Yufuin-onsen Hot Spring

known for music and film festivals held in summer, which are visited by many tourists from all over the country.

The Kunisaki-hanto Peninsula, whose cape makes out to the Seto Naikai ("the Inland Sea of Japan") between the Sea of Suo and the Sea of Iyo, is known for many Buddhist monuments that tell you of the prosperity that the Buddhist culture had enjoyed there in old times. These monuments, such as the Kumano-Magaibutsu ("Buddhist statues sculptured on the rock face"), the Fukiji Temple, the Maki-odo Temple, and the Usuki Sekibutsu-gun in Usuki City, southern Ōita, the largest collection of Buddhist stone figures in Japan, have earned the place the name of 'Nara of the west' and attract many tourists all the year round.

沖縄県

OKINAWA

Okinawa Prefecture is made up of the Ryukyu Islands, which at their southern extremity begin at Nansei Island, and lie between Kyushu, the most southwesterly of Japan's four main islands, and Taiwan. Okinawa consists of 160 islands of various size scattered across a vast area of ocean. The temperature in winter is about the same as that of springtime in Tokyo and Osaka, making it warm and comfortable throughout the year.

With Okinawa being in the subtropical zone, you can enjoy beautiful flowers in any season. Taiwan Cherries, which bloom earlier in Okinawa than anywhere else in Japan, red Deigo flowers, colourful bougainvilleas, pure white Easter lilies, and beautiful yellow tabebuias – it is like a party of tropical flowers! Another highlight is the inhabitation of many rare species of plants and animals, such as the Iriomote wildcats (declared a protected species) on Iriomote-jima Island. The crystal blue sea, with white sand beaches and colourful fish dancing through coral, attracts travellers as a holiday resort area with many diving spots.

For about 450 years, from the 15th to the 19th century, Okinawa prospered as the Kingdom of Ryukyu, a state independent of Japan's central government. Cultural characteristics and conventions born through the relations with

foreign countries in those days still survive in such interesting forms as artefacts and festivals, giving additional charm to Okinawa. Especially Shuri Castle (the castle of the King of Ryukyu) in Naha City, which reopened in 1992 after being reconstructed. It was inscribed as a World Heritage Site, and attracts many visitors.

Okinawa still preserves its traditional entertainment, such as Ryukyu-buyo, an elegant dance expressing a woman's emotions and feelings for someone special, such as her husband. It is performed by women in traditional dress made of bright-coloured Bingata cloth. The Shishi-mai, a dance of 'shishi' lions with colourful manes, and Eisa, danced in groups to the sound of heroic drums and a three-stringed musical instrument called a 'sanshin,' are other traditional dances still performed today.

Various festivals and events are held in Okinawa throughout the year. You can enjoy flowers and whale watching in winter and spring, marine sports and traditional performing arts in summer, and cultural events and field sports in fall. Some traditional festivals and events include the Hari Dragon Boat Race in May, an Eisa dance competition during the summer Bon Festival period, as well as tug-of-war competitions held each summer and fall.



Shuri Castle

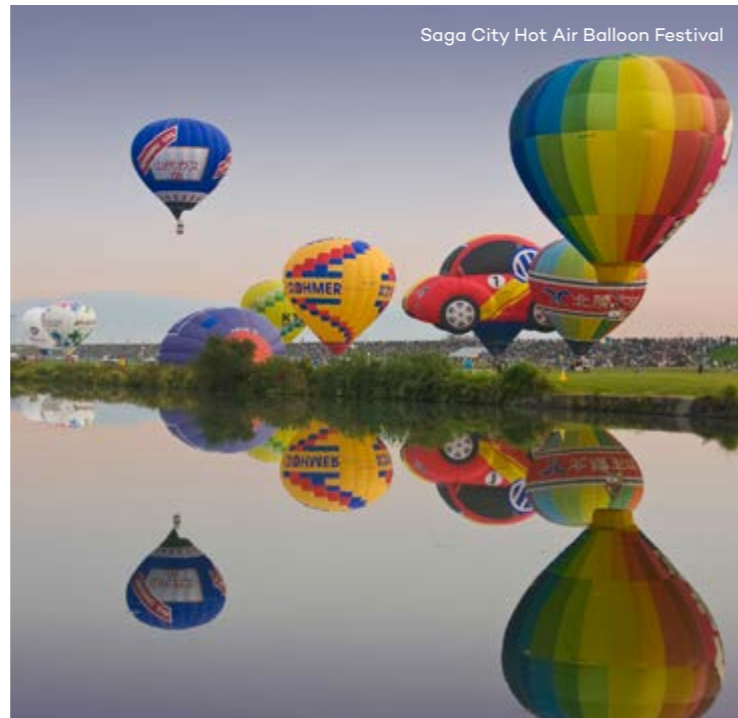
Okinawa Monorail, Naha

Zanpa Cliffs

Eri Mountain Rice Terraces, Ogi



Saga City Hot Air Balloon Festival



佐賀県 SAGA



Nanatsugama Cave, Karatsu



Floats at Karatsu Kunchi Festival, Karatsu City

Saga is located in the northwestern part of Kyushu. The shoreline of the Higashi-Matsu-ura-hanto Peninsula facing the Sea of Genkai is a saw-toothed coast with many outlying islets sitting in the offing. In the prefecture are many nature-rich places to visit, such as Niji-no-matsubara (Rainbow Pine Grove) with a Japanese black pine forest arcing five kilometers from east to west along Karatsu Bay. Nanatsu-gama, known for a row of sea-eroded caverns created by the raging waves of the Sea of Genkai, is another place worth visiting.

Thanks to its location facing the Korean Peninsula with the Sea of Japan in between, Saga was an important point of trade with the continent and has been influenced by Chinese and Korean culture since long ago. Even now, you can witness such

influences at places like the Tashiro-Ota-kofun, the mound in Tosu City known for an ancient colour picture-decorated grave. The site of the Yoshinogari Remains, featuring a reconstructed complex of a 12-meter tall watchtower and an ancient colony, is said to be where Yamatai-koku, a primitive polity of Japan mentioned in an ancient Chinese history book "Gishi-wajin-den," stood, and has attracted more than 16 million visitors since its discovery in 1989.

Boasting much pottery, Saga has been known as the home of ceramics, like Arita-yaki, which has become chinaware enamelled with colour pictures and Imari-yaki and Karatsu-yaki, which have long loved by tea ceremony masters, since Korean-descended potters from the Li Dynasty opened the first kilns there.

探検する

EXPLORE

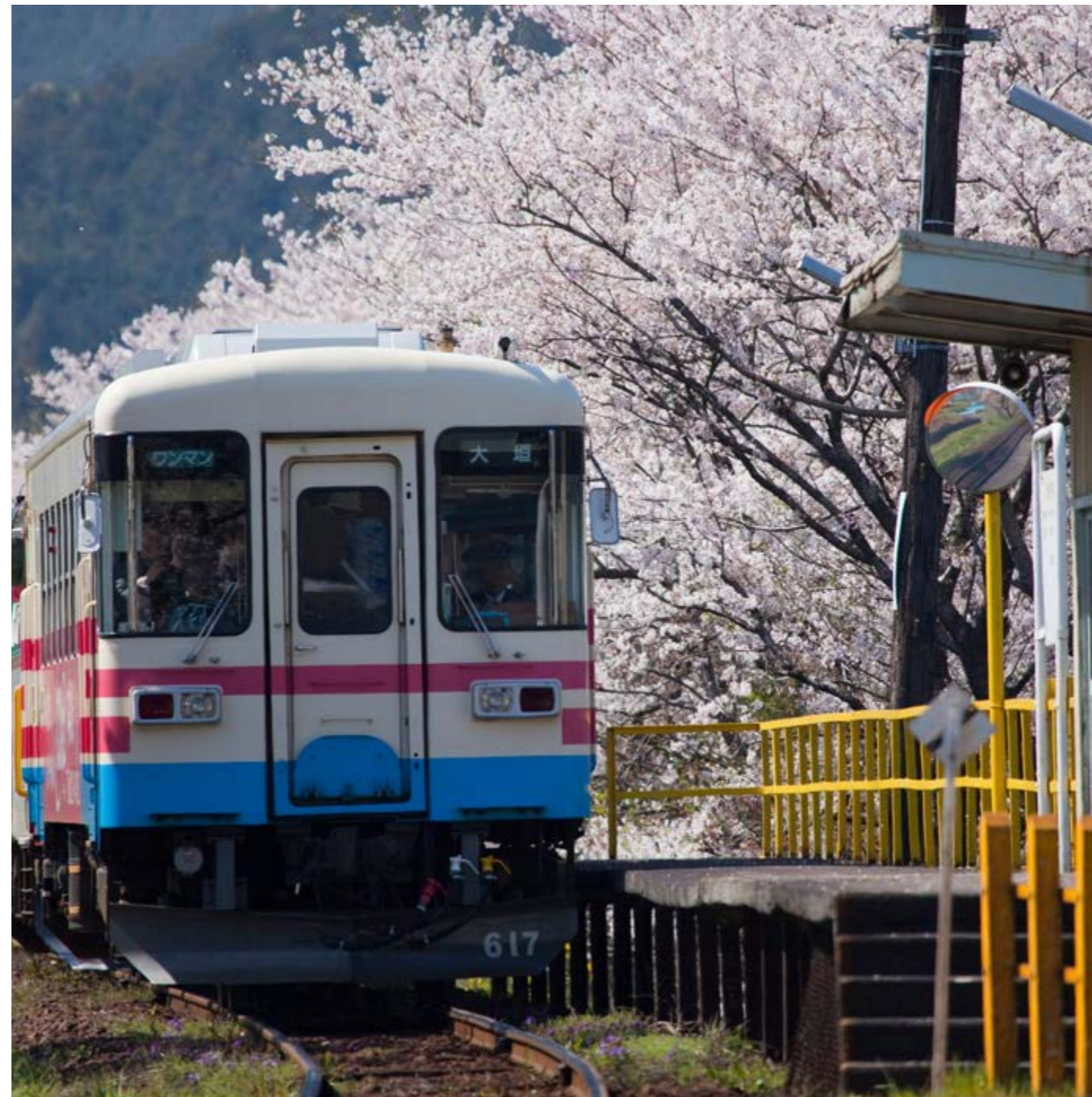
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There is so much to do in Japan and this book only scratches the surface of what the country has to offer.

If you want to know more about any of the places mentioned in this book you can visit www.jnto.go.jp/eng/ and you can find more in depth information regarding all the places mentioned and more.

Each prefecture also has it's own website which can be found through the Japan National Tourism Organisation, these websites provide more than enough information on each area and what there is to do there. You can also find schedules for events, for easier planning.

Have fun. Explore and chose your own adventure.



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GLOSSARY

NOTES

Anime - Japanese animated shows or movies.

Edo - A period of time between 1603–1867, the final period of traditional Japan.

Genkan - A specific type of entrance way common in Japanese style buildings.

Hanami - Flowering Viewing, specifically Cherry Blossom viewing in the Spring.

Itadakimasu - A phrase said before beginning a meal, Thank you for the meal.

Manga - Japanese comic books, usually printed in black and white.

Matsuri - Japanese festival.

Onsen - Japanese hot springs, hot baths.

Otaku - Blanket term for people who enjoy gaming, manga and anime culture.

Prefecture - Equivalent to our counties.

Ryokan - Traditional Japanese hotel, usually with their own Onsen.

Sashimi - Raw meat served alone.

Shinkansen - Bullet train.

Tatami - A type of Japanese flooring made from dry straw, it is quite fragile.

Yōkoso - Welcome.

Yukata - Traditional Summer Kimono made with light fabric.



