





Kansai International Airport

## What is THE EXCITING KANSAI?

Think Kansai, and you'll probably think of the central areas of Osaka, Kyoto, Kobe, and Nara.

But Kansai has many more attractive and exiting areas besides.

Areas where you can discover the traditions, myths, culture, and cuisines long nurtured and long cherished by Kansai locals.

Take a step outside central Kansai culture and stay for a while.

New and unprecedented discoveries are waiting:

all you have to do is immerse yourself in the unique experiences and cuisine of Kansai.

Here, we introduce eight areas guaranteed to inspire and ignite wanderlust.



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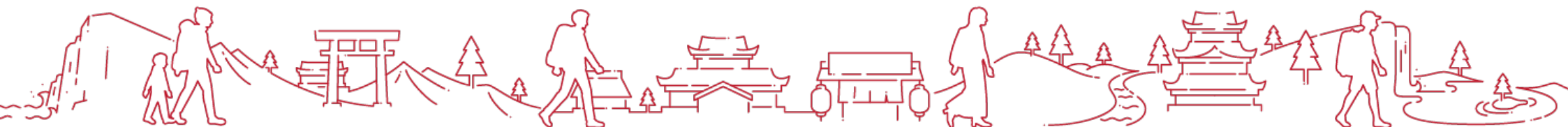
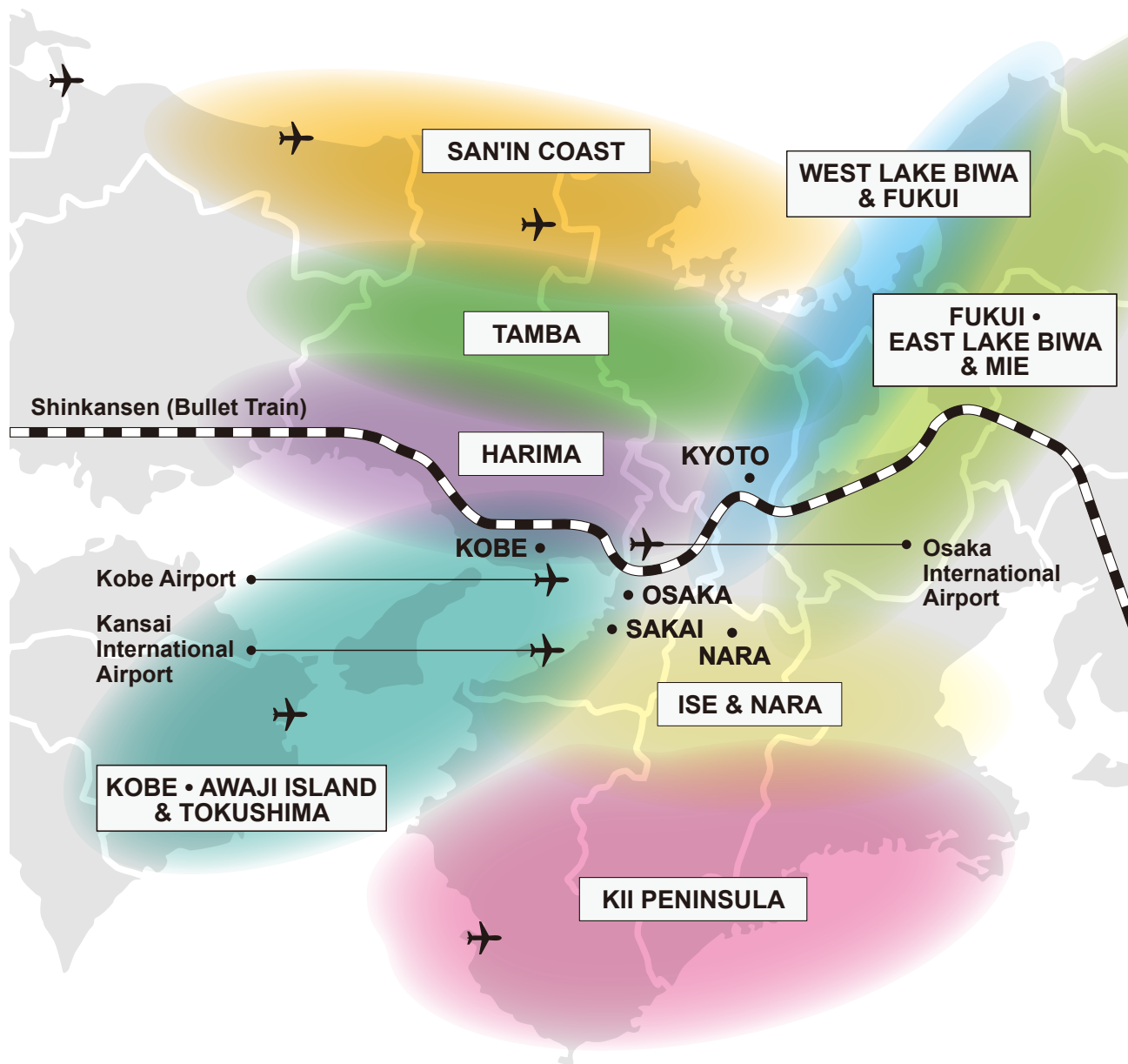
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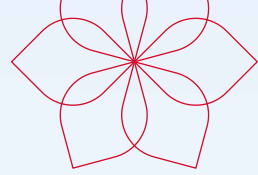
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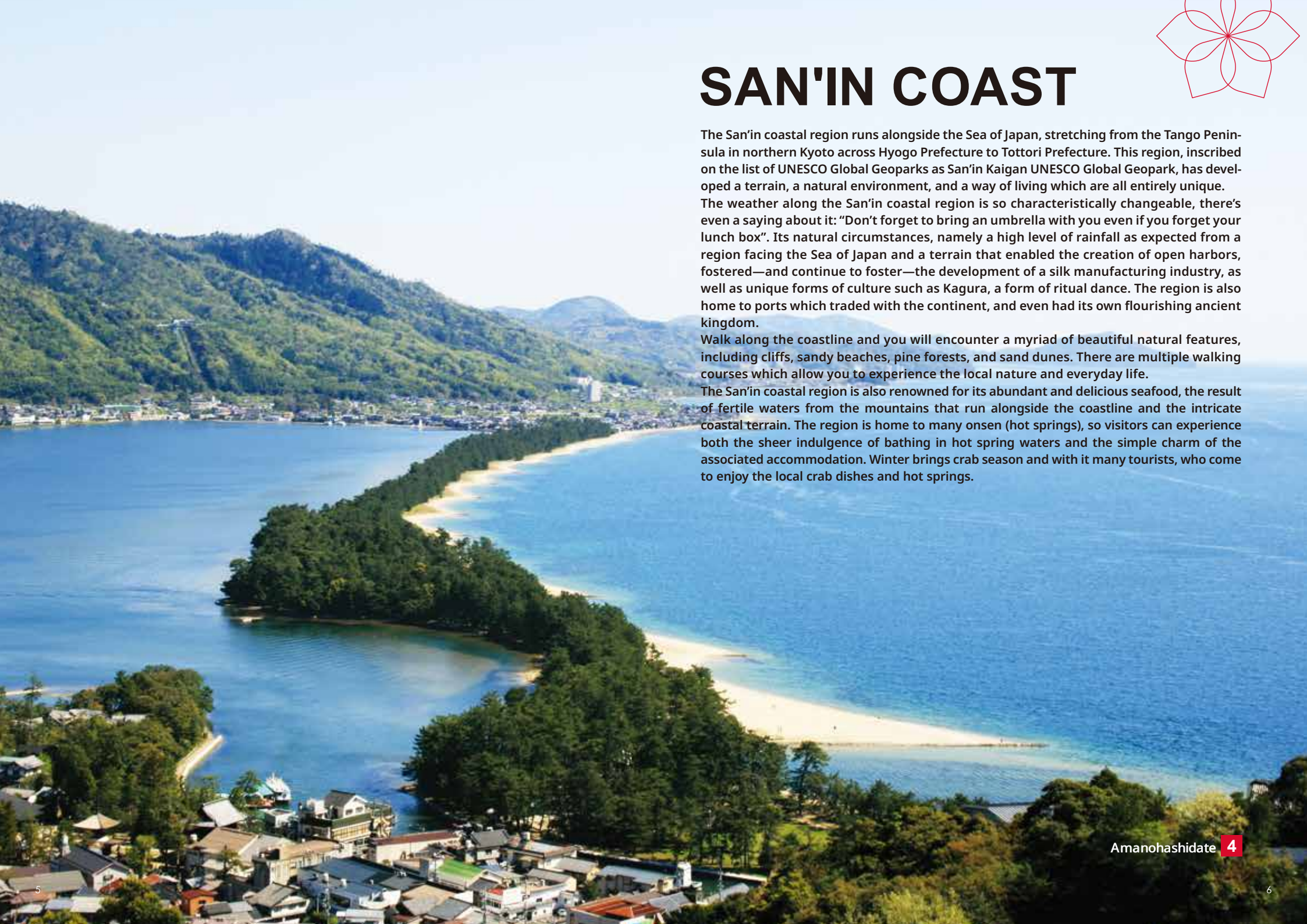
# SAN'IN COAST

The San'in coastal region runs alongside the Sea of Japan, stretching from the Tango Peninsula in northern Kyoto across Hyogo Prefecture to Tottori Prefecture. This region, inscribed on the list of UNESCO Global Geoparks as San'in Kaigan UNESCO Global Geopark, has developed a terrain, a natural environment, and a way of living which are all entirely unique.

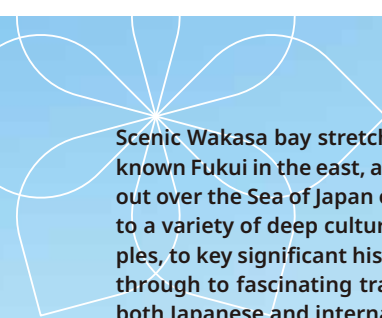
The weather along the San'in coastal region is so characteristically changeable, there's even a saying about it: "Don't forget to bring an umbrella with you even if you forget your lunch box". Its natural circumstances, namely a high level of rainfall as expected from a region facing the Sea of Japan and a terrain that enabled the creation of open harbors, fostered—and continue to foster—the development of a silk manufacturing industry, as well as unique forms of culture such as Kagura, a form of ritual dance. The region is also home to ports which traded with the continent, and even had its own flourishing ancient kingdom.

Walk along the coastline and you will encounter a myriad of beautiful natural features, including cliffs, sandy beaches, pine forests, and sand dunes. There are multiple walking courses which allow you to experience the local nature and everyday life.

The San'in coastal region is also renowned for its abundant and delicious seafood, the result of fertile waters from the mountains that run alongside the coastline and the intricate coastal terrain. The region is home to many onsen (hot springs), so visitors can experience both the sheer indulgence of bathing in hot spring waters and the simple charm of the associated accommodation. Winter brings crab season and with it many tourists, who come to enjoy the local crab dishes and hot springs.







Scenic Wakasa bay stretches from northern Kyoto to lesser known Fukui in the east, affording spectacular coastal views out over the Sea of Japan on three sides. The region is home to a variety of deep culture; from emotive shrines and temples, to key significant historical sites, and stunning nature, through to fascinating trade routes, not yet well known to both Japanese and international visitors. This tour provides a memorable journey to discover these treasures at your own pace. In addition to scenic views of Wakasa on each day from the west, south and then east, this tour provides a deep understanding and experience of five cultures, key to the region; spirituality, nature, history, daily life and preservation:



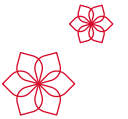




## Moto Ise Naiku Kotai Shrine Hiking

This is one of three shrines known collectively as the Moto Ise Sansha. Said to have been founded before the dawn of the common era, it is dedicated to Amaterasu Sume-Okami. Within the shrine grounds stand giant cedar trees over a thousand years old, and the surroundings are thickly forested. Nearby you will find a place of worship overlooking Himurogatake, a mountain where deities are said to have descended to earth. This is a place where you can truly sense the origins of religious devotion in Japan. <http://motoise-naiku.com/>

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## Amanohashidate / Narai-ji Course

It only takes around 4 minutes to get from the north bank of the Amanohashidate Sandbar to Kasamatsu Park. From there, walk the mountain path for some 20 minutes to reach Narai-ji, an ancient temple founded in 704. The "honzon" (principal image of worship) is the Kanzeon Bodhisattva (Goddess of Mercy), known as the Self-Sacrificing Kannon, who grants wishes. Take a short walk from the temple grounds to find a panoramic viewing spot from which you can take in a view of all of Amanohashidate.

<https://www.naraiji.jp/>



## Cycling around Mikata-goko (GOKOICHI)

This cycling course goes around the so-called Mikata-goko (Mikata Five Lakes), which are located next to the Sea of Japan and to the northwest of Lake Biwa. Mikata-goko is the collective name for five lakes which are spread out between the towns of Mihama and Wakasa. A circuit of the lakes can be completed in around 3 hours. The lakes have, variously, fresh, brackish, and saline waters, and each is a slightly different color.

[www.wakasa-mikatagoko.jp/](http://www.wakasa-mikatagoko.jp/)



## Ichijodani Walking

The ruins of a town, dubbed “Little Kyoto of the Hokuriku region”, that flourished during the Muromachi Period. The town was razed to the ground in the battles between the ruling Asakura clan and Oda Nobunaga, but was later excavated and is now designated a Special Historical Site. The site includes the ruins of the Asakura clan's residence and of rock gardens, as well as streetscapes which give a glimpse into the lives of the samurai and townspeople who once resided there. Enjoy the sense of having travelled through time as you stroll through the idyllic scenery surrounded by beautiful mountains.  
<http://fukuisan.jp/ja/asakura/>

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## Cycling and Walking in Obama

Obama is the starting point of the “Saba Kaido”, or Mackerel Highway. Many marine products, including of course mackerel, are landed at Obama port, from where they can be transported along established routes to major cities such as Kyoto and Osaka. From Obama Station, head towards the port to find the fish market, where you can buy super-fresh fish and shellfish. You can also enjoy a trip around the port on a tour boat. The townscape to the west of Obama Station retains the look of some 150 years ago, with its old temples, long-established restaurants, and atmospheric cafes.  
<https://www.wakasa-obama.jp/modelroute/cycling/>

6

## Wakasa Fisherman's Wharf

Take a cruise around Sotomo Arch. This 60-minute cruising experience allows you to enjoy a dynamic landscape, carved out by the rough waves of the Sea of Japan. The boat trip will take you along 6 kilometers of history and romance, interwoven from beautiful cliffs, uniquely-shaped rocks, and cave entrances. Make sure to enjoy the pleasures of cruising to the full as you take in this work of ocean art, crafted by the surging waves.  
<https://www.wakasa-fishermans.com/en>

6







## Meditation and Breakfast at National Treasure Myotsu-ji

An overnight stay completes with eight-course “shojin ryori” (vegan temple cuisine) evening meal, breakfast, and a Buddhist meditation experience. Myotsu-ji, located in Matsunaga village, is an ancient temple that has been designated a National Treasure. After staying in the Matsunaga Rokkan Fujiya ryokan (traditional inn) in Matsunaga village, guests first experience Ajikan meditation (comprising breathing techniques and meditation techniques from Shingon Buddhism) at Myotsu-ji in the early hours of the morning. Here you will cleanse yourself, correct your posture, regulate your breathing, and take the time to turn your gaze inwards. After meditation, you can try a traditional breakfast of rice gruel and boxed meal of shojin ryori dishes.  
[www.tenawan.ne.jp/lodgment/rec/007/611/pcl.asp](http://www.tenawan.ne.jp/lodgment/rec/007/611/pcl.asp)

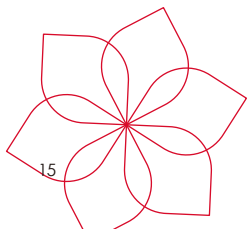
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## etoe

A multi-functional place where you can discover the traditional handicrafts of Echizen. Dive into the worlds of crafting wooden handles for Echizen forged knives and of “maki-e” lacquer art, a technique used for decorating Echizen lacquerware. In the gallery and the shop, you can purchase items including kitchen knives and lacquer accessories. Collaborative workshops are also held periodically, including with knife-makers Ryusen Hamono and Takefu Knife Village (workshop schedule is irregular).  
<https://etoe2020.com/functions/>

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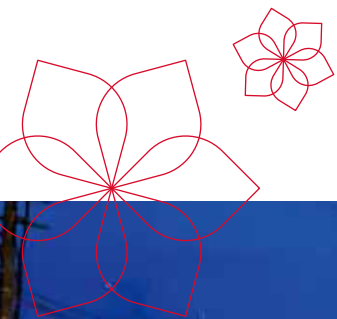


## San'in Kaigan UNESCO Global Geopark

Stretching from the eastern edge of Kyotango City to the western edge of Tottori City, this geopark measures some 120 km from east to west. Here you can observe diverse coastal terrain, such as ria shorelines and sand dunes, shaped by fluctuating sea levels and crustal movements. Walking courses traverse each area of the geopark. You can also take marine tours which offer spectacular views of the Geopark's uniquely shaped rock formations and giant boulders from the water, or take in the sights along one of multiple driving courses. This is nature at its most powerfully spectacular.  
<https://geopark.sakura.ne.jp/en/>







## Kinosaki Onsen

2

This onsen village has a 1,300 year history and is one of the most popular onsen destinations in western Japan. Being close to the sea means you can enjoy fresh marine products. The area has seven hot spring facilities and many traditional onsen hotels. The “Yu-meguri” tour is particularly popular, since it allows you to visit several of the onsen in a single day. The “onsengai”, or main village street, is lined with multiple restaurants and souvenir shops. Slip on your yukata cotton robe, pack your towel in your wicker hand basket, and set off for a stroll and a browse around the shops. <https://kinosaki-spa.gr.jp/>



**奥** OKU JAPAN  
Travel off-the-beaten-track



## Tottori Sand Dunes

These sand dunes, located in San'in Kaigan National Park, boast the largest undulations in Japan. This stunning and expansive landscape was formed by sand being carried by winds over countless years. Some 146 ha of this area has been designated a Natural Monument thanks to its particular beauty. Beautiful geographical features unique to sand dunes can be seen here: ripples, streaks, and columns. You can also enjoy a camel ride experience and a range of outdoor sports. <https://www.sakyu-vc.com/en/>

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©Tottori Pref.



# WEST LAKE BIWA & FUKUI

Biwa-ko (Lake Biwa) is Japan's largest lake. Its abundant water resources enabled communities to spring up around its shores and fostered distinctive regional cultures and landscapes. Its surrounding mountains have attracted spiritual interest, and came to be a center for Shugendo (mountain asceticism). Water has long been used in the region to brew sake, which in turn prompted the development of a fermented food culture.

Mt. Hiei, located in this area, is home to a group of significant Buddhist temples, collectively known as Enryakuji. That same mountain was the heartland of the Tendai school of Buddhism, which was established in the eighth century by the monk Saicho. It subsequently became a site of pilgrimage for many notable monks, including Dogen Zenji, who founded the Soto school of Zen Buddhism. He chose to establish Eihei-ji, nestled in the mountains of Fukui prefecture, as the head temple for his new school. Here, monks would dedicate themselves entirely to Zazen meditation, a practice cherished by Dogen. Still today, many monks practice Zazen meditation at Eihei-ji, in the hope of better understanding Dogen's teachings.

The four seasons are quite distinct in the mountains of Shiga and Fukui prefectures. In winter, snowfall is plentiful and pure spring water forms streams which flow into the Sea of Japan and Lake Biwa. This landscape is what prompted the formation of local communities: centered around pure water, with uniquely honed cultured and townscapes. Picturesque scenes of this area, such as the one depicted in this painting, have long been used as settings for noteworthy artistic and literary works.



Shirahige Shrine **5**





©Biwako Visitors Bureau

## 4 Lake Biwa

Biwa-ko (Lake Biwa) is an ancient lake, formed some 4.4 million years ago, and has the largest area of any lake in Japan. The richness of its fishing resources enabled the development of unique fishing methods and a distinctive local food culture. The surrounding area is home to many historic shrines and temples. Since ancient times, the scenic beauty of Lake Biwa has been celebrated in poetry, and it continues to captivate visitors to this day.

! There are many beaches and promenades around the shores of Lake Biwa. You can also enjoy a wide range of leisure activities, including lake swimming, lake sports, and bass fishing.



©Biwako Visitors Bureau

## 8 Lake Biwa Cruise

One popular option is to take a boat cruise around Lake Biwa to enjoy spectacular panoramic views. You can reach the three islands in the lake by boat. Cruise boats depart from Otsu, Hikone, and Takashima.



©Biwako Visitors Bureau

## 7 Hieizan Enryakuji

Enryakuji is the head temple of the Tendai school of Buddhism, founded more than 1,200 years ago by the monk Saicho. It is located on Mt. Hiei, a particularly sacred mountain for Japanese Buddhism. Temples are dotted across the entire mountain, and together this complex is called the Hieizan Enryakuji. The complex was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1994 as part of the Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto listing. The complex is beautiful in every season, but particularly breathtaking in the fall, when the turning foliage colors everything crimson. You can also enjoy panoramic views, with Kyoto to the west and Lake Biwa to the east.

<https://www.hieizan.gr.jp/en/>

! Try Zazen meditation or calligraphy at a temple nestled in a dense forest. By turning your gaze inwards upon yourself, you can experience a wealth of realizations. (Contact directly for details)

## 3 Harie

The Harie district is an unusual place where water from the Hira Mountains wells up from underground into local homes. This spring water is used for cooking and drinking; it has become an integral part of everyday life. The townscape, centered around this spring water, is steeped in nostalgia.

! Take a walking tour, led by a guide, around this town of spring water. There are two tours a day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, each lasting an hour at a leisurely pace. (Reservations required)







## Walking Kumagawa-juku Town along Wakasa Saba Kaido (Mackerel Highway)

2

The route connecting the sea-facing Wakasa area with Kyoto is known as the “saba kaido”, or mackerel highway. Since ancient times, this route has been used to transport mackerel and other marine products to Kyoto. The town of Kumagawa-juku has always been an important stop on that route. Today it offers overnight accommodation and museums complete with “bansho” (watch houses) and built in the “machiya” (town house) style. Nearby there is also a resource center (Shiryokan), where visitors can learn about the history of the mackerel highway, as well as a Michi-no-Eki rest stop where you can enjoy local food and pick up local products.



## Hiking in Mt. Horai

6

Mt. Horai, situated in the central area of the Hira Mountain range, is considered one of the 300 Famous Japanese Mountains. The summit offers spectacular panoramic views of Lake Biwa. The path up the mountain is well maintained, making climbing light work. You can also use a cable car to descend.



## 1 Eihei-ji

Eihei-ji is one of the main temples of the Soto school of Zen Buddhism, which was founded in the 13th century by Dogen Zenji. Nestled deep in the mountains, among rich natural surroundings, this temple is known as the “dojo of Zen” (place of Zen training). Criss-crossing its vast grounds are paths connecting the 70-plus temple buildings, both large and small, built in the complex. The many centuries-old trees growing in the temple grounds lend an aura of solemnity.  
<https://daihonzan-eihei-ji.com/en/>

! Three sessions of Zazen meditation are held each day, and visitors can also participate in morning “o-tsutome” chanting. This is a chance to quieten your mind and have an authentic Zen experience.



**興 OKU JAPAN**  
Travel off-the-beaten-track





# TAMBA

Satoyama, also known as managed countryside / community forests, is one of Japan's traditional landscapes. Among Japan's satoyama, the Tamba area is particularly noteworthy, as it still produces unique crops and harvests to this day.

Renowned as a place of rich harvest, Tamba is located around 30 minutes from central Kyoto by train. For more than a millennium, this mountain-encircled area has been delivering both building timber to the capital Kyoto and agricultural products vital to the diets of its dwellers. Various highways ran through Tamba and it was a key route for delivering harvested goods to the capital; this brought great prosperity to the area.

At Miyama, formerly a waypoint on the highway along which seafood was transported from the Sea of Japan, you can still see thatched-roof houses from some two centuries ago, and experience everyday satoyama life.

At Tamba Sasayama, you can catch a glimpse of what Japan would have looked like four centuries ago, including samurai houses, a castle town—still with its castle—as well as local nature and a pottery village from the Edo period. Tamba-yaki (traditional Japanese pottery) is a renowned style of pottery which began here in the 12th century, making it one of Japan's oldest pottery styles.

As of today, there are some 60 kilns working in the pottery village that nestles in the mountain foothills. Here you can enjoy a very special experience: a visit to the studio of a local potter, where you can view pottery pieces and talk to the artist.



Miyama's Thatched Village (Kayabuki no Sato) **2**





Meet the local people while cycling in Kameoka, as well as see various different crops. After that, you will have a chance to visit and spend the night in an old village called Miyama in northern Kyoto, which is well known for its traditional thatched roofed houses. Converse with locals who continue to live self-sufficient lives in the mountains. In addition to food-related activities, you will be able to visit the birthplace of Tamba-yaki (traditional Japanese pottery) and talk with the local craftsmen, and afterward choose your favorite dishes to take home.

Learn about how the local farmers sustain the mountains by experiencing it, and then finally head to your hotel up in the mountains.

At your hotel, you will have the whole restaurant to yourselves! Enjoy an amazing dinner that includes the local foods you learned about, as well as tableware, alcohol, and many other things that you experienced along the journey.





Kameoka City **4**



### Cycling in Kameoka

Kameoka, around 30 minutes from Kyoto Station by train, is a castle town that's home to the ruins of Tamba Kameyama Castle. It's also the starting point of the Hozukyo Kudari river boat ride that takes passengers to Arashiyama. Vegetable growing has long been prolific in Kameoka, and today the area is known as a producer of "Kyo-yasai" (Kyoto heirloom) brand vegetables. Cycling through this rural landscape, encircled by mountains, will give you a sense of how agriculture is embedded in local life.

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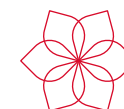


### Farmhouse NaNa

A farmhouse lodging set in an authentic Japanese house nestled in a satoyama village. Guests are limited to just one group per day. The main house aside, the site has a warehouse and a barn, enabling guests to get a sense of what life was like in Japan in times gone by. The guest rooms overlook a beautiful Japanese garden. Time your visit right and you can experience harvesting vegetables from the farmhouse garden. If in season, you can also try freshly-picked "Kyo-yasai", or Kyoto heirloom vegetables. Year-round you can enjoy making rice balls with rice cooked on a traditional wood-fired "kamado" stove, or try making stone-baked honey pizza.

<https://farmhousenana.wixsite.com/hozu/home>

**3**







## Masahiro Sword Smith

Run by a swordsmith said to be unique even in Kyoto, a city of such tradition and history. The forge offers a small blade forging experience, designed to enable visitors to understand the allure of swords. Visitors will make their own knife with a blade length of around 15cm in 3-4 hours. These knives are made from the same material used for Japanese swords: "tamahagane", made from iron sand. As such, the more you polish the blade, the more defined its "hamon" edge pattern will become. Challenge yourself to create your very own, one-of-a-kind knife.  
<https://morinokyoto.jp/masahiro/>

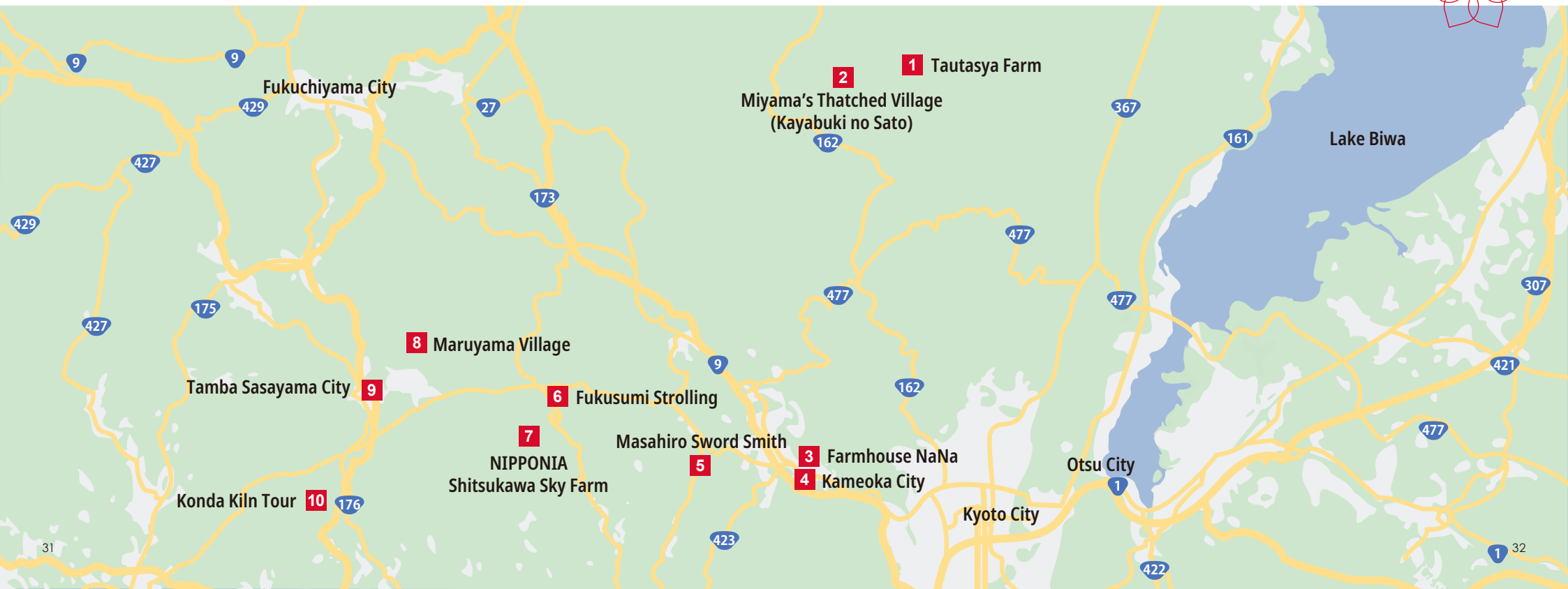
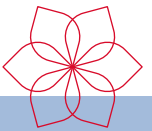
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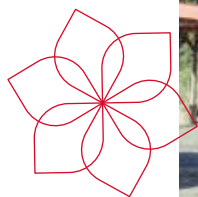
## Miyama's Thatched Village (Kayabuki no Sato)

A village lined with traditional thatched-roof houses, Miyama is designated a nationally significant Important Preservation Districts for Groups of Traditional Buildings. The idyllic satoyama landscape, when glimpsed from the surrounding hills, seems like something out of a folktale. The village is beautiful in every season, thanks to cherry blossom in spring, the lush green of summer, the changing foliage of fall, and winter's snow. Take a stroll through the village with your camera and you're sure to come across many photogenic scenes.  
<https://miyamanavi.com/en/>

2







## Tautasya Farm

1

Enjoy lodgings, dining, and outdoor experiences. The vast Tautasya site encompasses lodgings and a restaurant, both self-built using local timber. The farm is primarily self-sufficient in terms of essentials such as food, water, and firewood. As well as wild deer and boar caught by staff who are also skilled hunters, visitors can try “sansai” (naturally growing, mountain vegetables), fungi, and vegetables and rice grown on the farm.  
<https://www.tautasya.jp/>



## Re-thatching Experience

2

Experience the traditional Japanese technique of thatching, honed in Miyama over many generations. The re-thatching is carried out on a roof frame set up on the ground, so it's perfectly safe. You'll watch video footage taking you through all the processes involved, then learn about the structure of thatching using the roof frame model. Next you'll get changed into traditional “happi” work gear and experience what it's like to re-thatch a roof. Veteran thatchers will talk you through the process, so beginners are welcome. The experience ends with a commemorative photograph and certificate of completion.  
<https://www.veltra.com/jp/japan/kyoto/a/168460>



## Kiln Tour in Konda, Tamba Sasayama

10

The village of Konda has a history of making Tamba-yaki for more than 800 years, and is home to one of Japan's so-called Six Most Ancient Kilns. Today, there are some 60 pottery studios in the village, out of which a diverse range of Tamba-yaki, both traditional and modern, is being produced. Go for a wander around the studios in search of a bowl or plate that catches your eye. You can also enjoy pottery experiences at either the Museum of Ceramic Art or Tamba Traditional Craft Park “Sue No Sato”. You should also take a leisurely stroll around the town: historic old temples and hot springs are to be found among the abundant nature.



### Ichino Denichi Kiln

Most pieces feature motifs of plants, flowers, and nature. Offers a wide range of beautifully produced plant pots and planters.  
<http://denichigama.com/>



### Gen-emon Kiln

The most popular pieces produced by this kiln are polka-dotted dishes with a nostalgic yet unique style. Most items are intended for use in day-to-day life, where they will add a touch of color and beauty.  
<https://tanbayaki.net/artists/ichinotaro/>



### Taiga Kobo

A richly varied line-up of Tamba-yaki pieces. Most designs are modern: pop-inspired and colorful, in bold tones such as blue and yellow.  
<http://taigakobo.com>







## Satoyama Experiences

Kira Farm provides restaurants in Kyoto, Osaka, and Kobe with grown-to-order vegetables. The owner, Yoshiteru Kira, grows his vegetables without any use of chemical fertilizers or pesticides. His focus is not only on his farm: he also works on preserving the surrounding natural environment and providing farming education and training. Visitors can tour the fields, while listening to Yoshiteru talk about the farm. This is a place where you can touch the very heart of Japanese farming in harmony with nature.



## Fukusumi Strolling

6

Fukusumi is a post town situated on the route to Kyoto from Sasayama Castle. Since ancient times, it has been a key stop on the San'in Road: during the Edo period, it was called the "Kyokaido", or "road to Kyoto". Today, the town is designated an Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings. The streets, still lined with "hatago" inns and merchant houses, offer a glimpse into how it would have looked back then. It is also home to several shrines, including Maruyama Inari and Sumiyoshi Shrine. The rustic feel of the town makes it perfect for a stroll.



## Magnum Coffee

A roastery and cafe offering specialty organic coffee. All of their food is also non-GMO.  
<https://magnumcoffee.thebase.in/>



## Tabijino Brewery

A craft beer brewery located in Fukusumi. The beer, made with local ingredients, is rooted in the local community.  
<http://t-brewery.jp/>





Maruyama Village



Maruyama Village

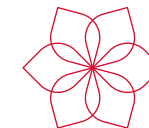


## NIPPONIA Shitsukawa Sky Farm

A guest house standing at the top of a terraced rice field, in a spot formerly held by a traditional thatched-roof house. This space offers a blend of old-time living and comfort. It is the perfect place to spend some quiet and private time, surrounded by nature. Guests are supplied with locally-produced breakfast ingredients, to be prepared following recipes supplied by a chef from a high-end Kyoto restaurant. The rice—the first crop of the season, harvested from the terraced rice fields and prepared in a clay pot—is impressively delicious. Shitsukawa has its own local variety of green tea, and guests can try tasting fresh tea leaves during the harvesting season.

<http://tenkunouen.tanbasasayama.com/>

7



## Maruyama Village

Previously unused old homes in this village have been refurbished into guest houses, around which are dotted traditional-style village homes. Here you can stroll through a village surrounded by unspoiled nature, while getting a sense of how carefree life might have been in the Japan of old. You can also make use of the rental bicycles available. Try your hand at making toys from wood or bamboo or at wood-chopping, and, if you come in the right season, at harvesting black beans and watching fireflies. The village has a French restaurant and a soba restaurant.

<https://maruyama-v.jp/>

8



 Japan Wonder Travel.com







# FUKUI • EAST LAKE BIWA & MIE

This area is rich with traces of warring states' era culture, as well as of samurai and ninja from that time. There is a long history of trade and exchange with the ancient capital of Kyoto, and many craft traditions continue to be passed down. The area boasts many onsen (hot springs), countless waterfalls, multiple rivers. These abundant water resources encouraged the development of a rich variety of traditional crafts. The wisdom of master craftspeople continues to be passed down here, in this region of water, warriors, and tradition, including: armor-making, pottery, Shigaraki ware, Echizen washi paper, Echizen knives, Echizen lacquerware, and Sabae eyeglasses.

Many castles and remains are dotted around Lake Biwa. Among them is Hikone Castle. The culture and the moral choices of ninja, samurai, and of Bushido (the way of the warrior) continue to be learned about and passed down here. While samurais were warriors who followed Bushido, dedicating themselves to serving a single lord, ninjas were more akin to mercenaries, willing and able to work as spies. In Koka and Iga, both formerly home to ninja clans, you can discover ninja culture through museums, traditional houses fitted with typical ninja booby-traps, and live-actions performances.

Hikone Castle





Megane Museum



Echizen Lacquerware Cooperative

## Megane Museum

This unique museum enables visitors to learn about the history of "megane" (eyeglasses) in Japan. More than 90% of eyeglasses produced in Japan are made in Sabae City in Fukui Prefecture. The museum showcases eyeglass production and how the shape of eyeglasses has changed over the past century. There are interactive elements too, such as eyeglass-making workshop experiences and hands-on areas. The museum also houses a shop which only stocks made-in-Japan eyeglasses.

<https://www.megane.gr.jp/museum/>

! One of the most popular and hands-on experiences offered by the museum enables participants to choose a material to then cut, shape, and finish into their very own eyeglasses.  
\* Reservation is required.



## Echizen Lacquerware Cooperative

Echizen lacquerware has a history of more than 1,500 years, and has been designated as a traditional craft product by the Japanese government. Echizen lacquerware is characterized by the subtle sheen of its lacquer and the use of deep, rich tones. It has long been prized by Japanese people as ideal for use at weddings and celebrations. Visitors to the Echizen Lacquerware Cooperative can learn about the history of lacquerware in the area, watch the production process, and browse through more than 1,000 superlative lacquerware items on sale.

<http://echizen.org/>

! Available workshops include the "e-tsuke" (drawing) workshop, where you can create your own designs by copying your sketch and coloring it in gold using lacquer paint, and the "fuki-urushi" (lacquer applying and wiping) workshop, where you can learn how to apply lacquer to raw wood.



Tonda Ningyo Museum



Echizen Washi Village

## Tonda Ningyo Museum

Tonda Ningyo is a traditional form of "Ningyo Joruri" (puppet theatre), some 180 years old and particular to the Kita-tonda area of Nagahama City. The tradition is said to have started when a troupe of Ningyo Joruri players, who had come from Awa (present-day Tokushima Prefecture) to put on some performances, left puppets and equipment behind in lieu of repaying travel expenses. Here you can discover the ensuing tradition of village locals performing Ningyo Joruri. You can also "meet" the puppets and see the stage equipment.

<https://www.facebook.com/tonda.ningyo>

! In addition to holding biannual performances, the museum also offers on-demand performs both in Japan and worldwide, offers instruction to elementary schools, and provides guidance to exchange students from around the world.



## Echizen Washi Village

Echizen boasts the biggest share of the luxury handmade washi (Japanese paper) market of any city of Japan. In particular, the Goka area of Echizen is home to many traditional paper-makers. The Echizen Washi Village is a 15 minutes walk from Goka and has much to offer: the Paper & Culture Museum, where visitors can learn about the history and significance of Echizen washi; the Udatsu Paper & Craft Museum, where visitors can watch craftspeople making washi; and Papyrus House, where visitors can try making traditional washi.

<https://www.echizenwashi.jp/english/>

! Have a go at making your own washi paper using a tool called a "keta" (frame). You'll use pressed flowers and dyes to create an original motif and the paper will be ready to use once dried.





## Hikone Castle

Hikone Castle, completed in 1622, is one of Japan's only 12 remaining original castles (castle towers). It is also known as Konki-jo, or Golden Turtle Castle, a name which comes from the fact that a statue of the goddess Kannon riding a golden turtle had formerly stood at the peak of Mt. Hikone, where the castle was built. The castle tower itself is a designated National Treasure, and multiple buildings on the castle grounds are also registered as Important Cultural Properties, such as the Tenbin Yagura turret and the Taikomon Yagura turret. The castle is a must-see in any season, whether flanked by cherry blossom, the lush green foliage of summer, the changing leaves of fall, or wintry snow.

<https://visit-omi.com/poi/article/hikone-castle/>

! Hikone Castle seen in the moonlight is particularly beautiful and is one of the so-called "Eight Views of Lake Biwa". Moon viewing events take place in the fall.



## Nagahama Hikiyama Museum

The Hikiyama Museum introduces the unique Nagahama Hikiyama Matsuri (festival). This traditional float festival, held on 9-17 April every year, is held to honor Nagahama Hatimangu. In 2016, the festival was inscribed on the UNESCO World Intangible Cultural Heritage List, as part of the "Yama, Hoko, Yatai, float festivals in Japan" listing. The so-called "hikiyama" are floats, crafted thanks to a coming together of traditional craft skills. The floats are called "moving art galleries" thanks to their extensive and colorful decoration, featuring metal fixings, carvings, and paint. The museum features authentic hikiyama from days gone by. You can also learn about the history and festivals of the village.

<https://nagahama-hikiyama.or.jp/foreign/eng.html>



Hikone Castle



Nagahama Hikiyama Museum

## Shigaraki Toen Tanuki Mura

Shigaraki is a pottery village and counted as one of the so-called six most ancient kilns of all Japan. Shigaraki ware is renowned as a pottery style that evokes the aesthetics of "wabi-sabi", or beauty in imperfection. It is characterized by warm fire marks and entrhralling burn marks. Ceramic models of tanuki, the Japanese raccoon dog, are often made in Shigaraki ware: they are intended as good luck charms. Any visitor to the area will certainly encounter many tanuki and you can even take part in a workshop to make a traditional tanuki ceramic figure.

<https://tanukimura.com/>

! Aside from experiences at the potter's wheel, whether hand-operated or electric, visitors can enjoy a range of pottery-centric experiences, such as drawing or painting onto unglazed pottery.



## Iga-ryu Ninja Museum

It has long been held that ninjas originated in the mountainous region that stretches from Iga City in Mie Prefecture to Koka City in Shiga Prefecture. Ninjas were believed to have a strong connection with mountain worship, and during the era of the samurai were active as "secret agents" skilled at enemyenergy infiltration. Here you can visit a ninja house, so-called because of all the hidden tricks and devices, such as rotating doors, hidden staircases, and booby-trapped doors.

<https://www.iganinja.jp/>

! Be awe-struck by the "ninjutsu" (ninja skills) on display at the ninja showcase. Try your hand at striking the target using authentic "shuriken" (hidden hand blade) throwing stars. (Additional fees apply).



Shigaraki Toen Tanuki Mura



Iga-ryu Ninja Museum



# HARIMA

The area of Harima faces directly onto the Seto Inland Sea, a critical sea route for Japan since ancient times. Here, it is still possible to sense a culture that remains deeply rooted in medieval Japan. Harima is the starting point of a route leading to the former capital city of Kyoto.

Midway along this route stands Himeji Castle, a key defensive military presence. This area retains a strong sense of the culture of the warring states period, as well as samurai culture.

Visitors can encounter traditional swordsmiths, while further inland you will find onsen (hot springs), the remains of castles on the hills, as well as visit old temples and shrines. It is here that Miyamoto Musashi, said to have been Japan's most masterful swordsman, is believed to have practiced his "musha shugyo" (warrior pilgrimage), undertaken in order to improve his sword skills.

Shoshazan Engyoji is a mountain-top complex of temples with a history of more than a thousand years; it is a treasure trove of traditional Japanese architecture and design.

Moving further east you will find Mt. Rokko and Arima Onsen. Renowned as one of Japan's so-called three ancient hot springs, Arima Onsen was once used by travelling monks, aristocrats, and samurais. To this day, the region between Harima and Kobe continues to play a vital role in transport and trade both domestically and internationally, and has incorporated diverse cultures as it has developed.







## Himeji Castle

5

Himeji Castle is also known as the White Heron Castle, thanks to the beauty of its white-plastered walls. It was the first site in Japan to be inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, alongside Nara's Hōryūji (Hōryū Temple). It is one of only 12 remaining original castles (castle towers) in Japan; the current castle tower was built in the early 15th century. The castle has been governed by such renowned military commanders as Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Ikeda Terumasa, and its charming cityscape still conveys a sense of the samurai culture from past times.



## Otokoyama Haisuiike Park

5

This park, situated north-west of Himeji Castle, offers a wonderful view, taking in the principle castle tower and the west, northwest, and east small towers all at once. The park sits at the top of some 198 stairs. This ultra-scenic spot, spectacular yet secret, is much loved by locals.

! Visit after dark for incredible views of Himeji Castle illuminated. You can also look out over the street lamps of Himeji from nearby the stairs.

## Shoshazan Engyoji

6

Shoshazan Engyoji, situated at the 371m peak of Mt. Shosha, is an ancient temple of the Tendai school of Buddhism, built in 966. It is considered to be one of Japan's three famous Tendai sect Buddhist temples, alongside Enryakuji and Daisen-ji. From the cable car that leads up to the temple, you can enjoy views stretching as far as the Akashi Strait and the island of Shikoku. Nestled in the densely forested temple grounds are multiple precious temple buildings, which take some 90 minutes to walk around.

[http://www.shosha.or.jp/\\_en/](http://www.shosha.or.jp/_en/)

! Choose from a number of monastic training experiences, including Zazen meditation and calligraphy. Training experience lengths vary, from around an hour to a full day.



## Kikyo Hayamitsu Japanese Sword Factory

8

The factory of Hayamitsu Kikyo, a traditional swordsmith dedicated to passing on authentic swordmaking techniques to the present day. Here, you can observe the processes involved in crafting authentic Japanese swords. Red-hot sparks will literally fly as you observe the hammering and drawing out of steel that has been heated to 800 degrees. Volunteers are also given a chance to hammer the steel. Taking a beautifully shaped and sharpened Japanese sword in your hand gives a unique glimpse into an aesthetics long-cherished by the Japanese.

! Try your hand at making an authentic knife. The finished item will be packaged in a leather sheath and can be taken out of Japan as checked baggage.



©Myochin Honpo

## Myochin Honpo

4

Myochin Hibashi (charcoal-handling chopsticks) are a traditional handicraft made by the Myochin family, which served successive Himeji lords as armorers. These hibashi, made possible by the family's legacy of armor-forging techniques, passed down through many generations, are used in wind chimes for their mystical, beautiful tone.





## Hiking in Kobe Rokko Mountain Range

Mt. Rokko's popularity as a hiking destination is down in part to its proximity to both Osaka and Kobe. It is well served by public transport options, including train and bus, so is readily accessible. Trail signposts are well-maintained, meaning that even beginners have plenty of options for making it right up to the top of the mountain. From the peak of Mt. Rokko, you can enjoy sweeping views of the Kobe and Osaka cityscapes, and perhaps even catch a glimpse of the Seto Inland Sea.

**!** Don't miss the mountain range's most scenic viewpoints, including Kikuseidai view point on Mt. Maya and the Tenran Observatory at Rokko Cable Sanjo Station. There are also several incredible viewpoints on the way up (or down) the mountain.

2



## Arima Onsen

1

Arima Onsen is one of Japan's oldest onsen (hot spring) villages. It is mentioned in Nihon Shoki (the Chronicles of Japan), an early text setting out Japan's creation story: it was apparently discovered by the ancient deities. There are seven natural hot spring sources in the village and the streets are always misty with steam. Arima Onsen has been a beloved therapeutic hot spring town for Kansai residents since times long past, and its streets are lined with historic ryokan (traditional inns). The village also offers public bathing facilities and a free public footbath, or "ashiyu".

**!** Arima Onsen is close to Mt. Rokko, and visitors are often at the end of a day of trekking or hiking. Soak weary feet in the footbath located outside of Kin no Yu Onsen.



## Nada Gogo Sake Breweries

3

Nada Gogo is one of the preeminent areas of sake production in Japan. Since the heyday of traditional sake production, it has been considered a top-three area. Nada Gogo has the rare blessing of being equipped with all three elements key to incredible sake: great water, great rice, and great technique. The five areas that make up Nada Gogo ("Gogo" literally means "five villages") are home to a plethora of sake breweries, including such nationwide favorites as Hakutsuru, Kikumasamune, and Fukuju.

**!** Several sake breweries offer retail sales of sake made on-site, and have displays about the brewery. Some breweries also offer site tours and sample tastings. <http://www.nadagogo.ne.jp/>

## Castle Town Strolls in Tatsuno and Ako

7 9

Tatsuno is a nostalgic castle town, lined with vintage townhouses and brewery storehouses. It has been designated as an Important Preservation Districts for Groups of Traditional Buildings by the Japanese government. It is also renowned as the place where brilliant swordsman Miyamoto Musashi undertook his warrior training. Ako used to be home to a castle, and traces of its former glory can be glimpsed in the stone walls and other remains found in the town.



**奥** OKU JAPAN  
Travel off-the-beaten-track





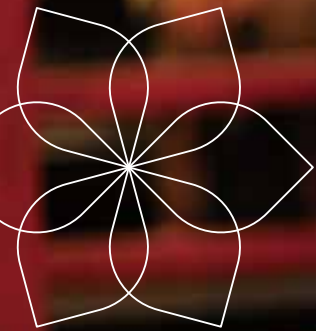
# KOBE. AWAJI ISLAND & TOKUSHIMA

The sea in this region is quite different to oceans or beach resorts. As an inland sea it is dotted with island silhouettes and alive with swirling tidal currents; calm yet vast and rich with changes. The climate here is warm, similar to that of the Mediterranean Sea, and the region is blessed with the bounties of both sea and mountain. Also distinct is its richness in both history and culture. Awaji Island is the island of the Kuniumi creation myth, which tells of the birth of ancient Japan. Around the Yoshino River basin, which is the second widest stretch of river in Japan, indigo cultivation and indigo dyeing industries developed as local people made good use of the soil, made fertile by river flooding. The wealth that these industries brought led in turn to the development of folk culture such as Ningyo Joruri and Awa Odori. Kobe developed as a global trading port, becoming a gateway for diverse cultures. By travelling from south to north as you take in this panoramic seascape, these many and varied stories will enable you to deepen your understanding of the local people, their history, cuisine, and everyday culture.



Ohnaruto Bridge 6





This tour follows the eastern side of the inland sea, from the small city of Tokushima on the north-east of Shikoku Island, through to Awaji Island, an important island told through folktales to be a key area in the birthplace of Japan. After experiencing the deep culture of this rural island, we continue on to Kobe, a modern bustling port town, with great onsen, unique local cuisine (including the world-famous Kobe beef) and excellent hiking on the adjoining mountain range.

Awaodori





## Awaodori Kaikan (Awa Odori Festival Hall)

This facility is dedicated to the preservation and the continuation of the tradition of Awa Odori, which has more than four centuries of history. Here, you can enjoy Awa Odori all year round. In addition to watching Awa Odori, you can get up on stage and dance with the dancers. There's a museum where you can learn about the history of Awa Odori, and a souvenir shop. You can also access the ropeway to Mt. Bizan; the ride to the summit starts here.  
<https://awaodori-kaikan.jp/en/>



The Awa Odori Hall hosts four performances of Awa Odori each day. Performances feature both the facility's own "ren" (team of performers), as well as famous "ren" from the local region. Whichever team you see, you'll be treated to an authentic performance of Awa Odori.  
 Fee: Adults: ¥1,000, Children up to age 15: ¥500

8



## Indigo-dyeing Experience

The distinct color of indigo dye, known to the world as "Japan Blue", is special to Japanese people. Way back when, the popularity of "ai-zome", or indigo-dyeing, turned the whole of Japan blue. Tokushima was at the very heart of that trend, as a place where high quality indigo was produced, as well as the home of sukumo, a fermented indigo dye. The knowledge and expertise of Tokushima's indigo producers and dye masters played a major role in the popularization of indigo, and it continues to be passed on to this day. Here, you can use authentic Awa-ai (Awa-grown indigo) to dye fabric using traditional techniques.  
<http://www.indigo-dyeing.sakura.ne.jp/>  
<https://www.entwo.com/>



## Tokushima Joruri Cruise

Awa Ningyo Joruri is said to have developed as a result of the great wealth generated by the high quality indigo that resulted from soil made fertile by the Yoshino River. Take a small pleasure boat along the beautiful waterways that run through the heart of Tokushima City, then cross Yoshino River to make your way to the Awa Jurobe Yashiki (Puppet Theater and Museum). After watching Ningyo Joruri, you can enjoy a lunch made with ingredients local to Tokushima.  
<https://www.east-tokushima.jp/feature/detail.php?id=10>



## Mt. Bizan Hiking

8

Mt. Bizan is one of Tokushima's leading tourism spots. The entrance to the route leading up Mt. Bizan is just a 10 minute walk from Tokushima station. Mt. Bizan peaks at 290m above sea level. The 400-odd stone steps up the mountain, steep inclines, and mountain paths running along the ropeway route are lined with old stone Buddhas, making for a visually enriching, authentic hiking experience. From the observation deck at the summit, you can take in a view encompassing the townscape of Tokushima, the Yoshino River, Awaji Island, and even far-off Wakayama. The view at night is just as stunning. The summit of Mt. Bizan can also be reached by ropeway or by car.  
<https://www.awanavi.jp/site/midokoro/bizan.html>







## Whirlpool Sightseeing Boats **7**

The "uzushio" (whirlpools) of Naruto are the largest in the world. During spring tides, which occur in spring and autumn, the diameter of these whirlpools can reach up to 20m. Whirlpool Sightseeing Boats are able to pass closely by the areas where whirlpools occur. Seeing swirling whirlpools with your own eyes highlights their power. You can choose to view these whirlpools from a large sightseeing boat, stable with little rocking, or from the window of a small underwater sightseeing boat (reservations required for small underwater sightseeing boats).  
<https://www.uzushio.com/en/>





## Otsuka Museum of Art

This museum is home to around a thousand life-size ceramic reproductions of masterpieces of Western art, housed in museum collections in 26 countries around the world. Here you can enjoy famous paintings from around the world, all while remaining in Japan. Along the 4 kmlong viewing route you'll see works by da Vinci, Monet, and van Gogh. Particularly spectacular among the exhibits are the reproductions of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling and murals and Picasso's Guernica.

<https://o-museum.or.jp/en/publics/index/>

7

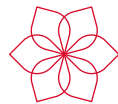
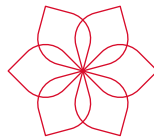


## Awajishima Museum

This museum introduces visitors to the history and culture of Awaji Island, from ancient times to the present day. On the first floor you'll find the Historical Gallery, which introduces the history of Awaji, and the Large Gallery which features displays of Ningyo Joruri and more. The second floor is home to the Folk Gallery, which displays everyday, agricultural, and fishing tools, as well as the Art Gallery. The third floor is a memorial gallery dedicated to Gyokusei Jikihara, a master of Nanga (Southern Chinese style brush painting).

<https://awajishimamuseum.com/>

5

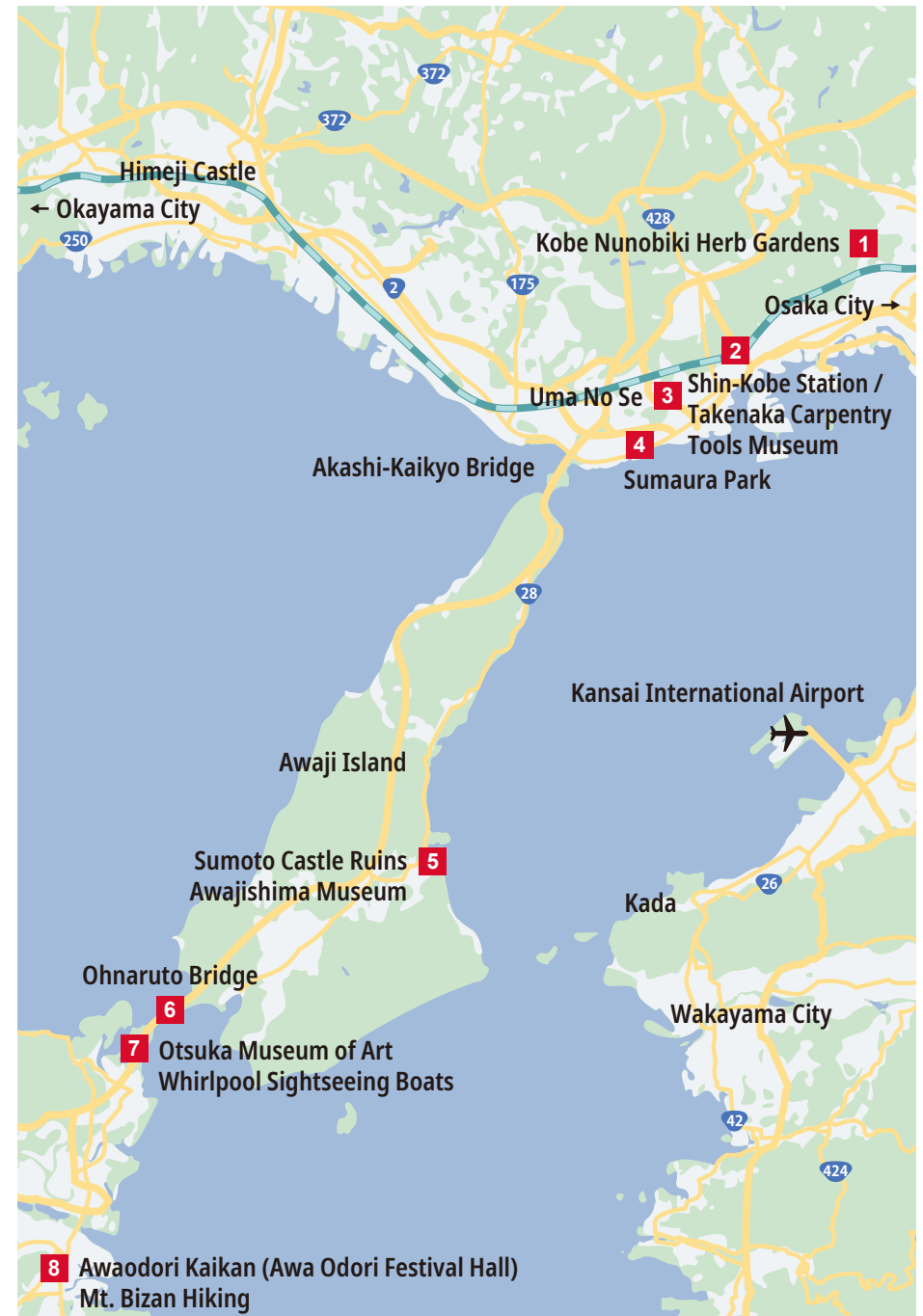


## Hiking to Sumoto Castle Ruins

Sumoto Castle Ruins is among the largest of such sites in western Japan. The castle complex runs some 800m east to west and 600m north to south, when the lower castle is included. On the site you can find the remains of uphill stone walls ("nobori-ishigaki"), which are rarely found in such good condition. From the main castle tower, you can take in panoramic views of the townscape, pine fields in Ohama, and Osaka Bay. This stunning seascape is one of the so-called "Eight Views of Sumoto".

<https://www.city.sumoto.lg.jp/site/360panorama/7841.html>

5







Uma no Se **3**



## Hiking around Sumaura Park, Uma no Se, and Takatori Shrine

Walk from Sumaura Park, the starting point of the Rokko traverse course, for around an hour along a mountain road boasting beautiful vistas and you'll find yourself at Uma no Se. This gorgeous spot was given its name (literally "the horse's back") after the steep rocks that stretch out to resemble a horse's back. Walk another hour from here and you will arrive at Takatori Shrine. From the shrine you can take in the Kobe cityscape, and perhaps even as far as the Akashi Strait and Awaji Island.

**4**

## Hiking from Shin-Kobe to Kobe Nunobiki Herb Gardens

This is a popular hiking course suitable for everyone from beginners onwards. Walk some 10 minutes from Shin-Kobe station and you will arrive at Nunobiki Falls, a beautiful spot with four interweaving waterfalls. Kobe Nunobiki Herb Gardens is one of Japan's largest herb gardens, boasting 75,000 flowers and herbs of around 200 different kinds. Enjoy a gentle swing in a hammock in the gardens while gazing down at the Kobe cityscape. <https://www.kobeherb.com/en/>



Take a Herb Guided Tour to discover ways to use herbs, using freshly picked herbs. You can also watch free demonstrations on how to make a pomander ball using lemon and spices.

**1**



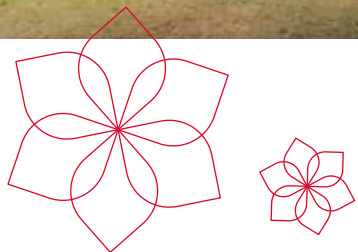




## Takenaka Carpentry Tools Museum 2

The only museum in Japan dedicated to carpentry tools, with around a thousand carpentry tools on display. The atrium displays include a model of Toshodaiji's Kondo (Golden Hall) and a structural model of a teahouse which allows you to view the intricacies of Sukiya-style architecture. The museum offers a wide variety of exhibits which speak to all five senses, through video, audio guides, and the scent of wood. Here you can truly feel the richness of traditional Japanese craftsmanship.  
<https://www.dougukan.jp/?lang=en>

**!** Experience traditional Japanese carpentry by shaving wood with a hand plane alongside a master carpenter. The museum also offers free demonstrations of the "yariganna" (spear plane), an ancient woodworking tool. (Contact directly for details)



**奥** OKU JAPAN  
 Travel off-the-beaten-track







Hōryūji (Hōryū Temple) ©Askaen

## ISE & NARA

Since mythological times, this area has been known as the birthplace of Japan. It is the home of Ise Jingu, which sits at the apex of Japan's indigenous Shinto religion. The home of sumo, of sake, of Shugendo (mountain asceticism), of giant Kofun (megalithic tombs). This is where you can sense the starting point of the politics and culture of today's Japan.

This sacred place extends to the Kii Peninsula and encapsulates many sacred mountains. In these forests, populated with cedar trees many hundreds of years old, native "kami" (gods) have been worshipped for more than two millennia. Ise Jingu is one of the most sacred and respected places in Japan. For Japanese people, Ise Jingu is "the home of Japan's heart". Nara sits in the center of the Kansai region. It is known worldwide for being home to Japan's oldest Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines. Nara became the center of Japanese politics and religion in the 8th century, meaning it is the site of many of Japan's most famous temples. The best known example, Hōryūji (Hōryū Temple), is a designated National Treasure and is also inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Of particular note is its five-storied pagoda: this is the world's oldest wooden structure and its beauty is an undoubted must-see.





©Askaen

## Hōryūji (Hōryū Temple)

The grounds of Hōryūji (Hōryū Temple) house the world's oldest surviving wooden structures, conveying images of Japan as it existed more than 1,300 years ago, during the Asuka Period (A.D. mid 6th – beginning of 8th c.). Hōryūji boasts an illustrious 14 centuries of continuous observance of tradition since established by Prince Shōtoku, the great statesman and founder of Buddhism in Japan. Hōryūji contains over 2,300 important cultural and historical structures and articles, including nearly 190 that have been designated as National Treasures or Important Cultural Properties. In December of 1993, Hōryūji, as a unique storehouse of world Buddhist culture, became the first treasure of any kind in Japan to be selected by UNESCO as part of the World Heritage.

<http://www.horyuji.or.jp/en/>



## Asuka-dera

Asuka-dera was Japan's first official Buddhist temple, and is home to the oldest "daibutsu" (Great Buddha) statue in Japan. The original building was lost to fire, but the Great Buddha has been installed in the same location for some 1,400 years. The serene expression on the Great Buddha's face speaks to artistic influences from mainland Asia.



## Mt. Yoshino

Kinpusenji is the head temple of Shugendo and the symbol of Mt. Yoshino. Shugendo, or mountain asceticism, was founded in the second half of the seventh century by En no Gyoja. It has developed into a unique religion, one which brings together elements from ancient Japanese mountain worship with aspects of Shinto, Buddhism, and Taoism. The temple's main hall, the Zaodo, houses a number of precious Buddhist images and is the second largest wooden building in Japan after Tōdai-ji's Great Buddha Hall in Nara.

**!** In spring, the mountain comes alive with color with the blossoming of about 30,000 cherry trees, planted as symbols of worship for the Shugendo religion. It is spectacular in every season, be it the lush green foliage of summer, the crimson leaves of fall, or the kiss of snow in winter.



## Hase Temple

This large temple was built in the second half of the 7th century. It stands halfway up Mt. Hase, a mountain considered sacred since ancient times. Its vast temple grounds are home to multiple historic buildings, as well as more than 1,000 precious cultural properties.

<https://www.hasedera.or.jp/>







## Ama Culture

Not only are the seas around Toba and Shima abundant in marine products, they are also the “office” for more than half of the “ama”—traditional female skin divers—active today in Japan. These women free dive for abalone, turban shells, and seaweed, and their method of fishing has been practiced for some two millennia. Since ancient times, ama have taken the marine products they harvest to Ise Jingu as “shinsen”, or offerings to the Shinto deities.

**!** Enjoy the taste of freshly harvested, freshly grilled marine products at an “ama” hut, where the women rest between dives. You can also meet some of currently active divers.  
 Ama Hut Osatsu-Kamado: From ¥3500 per person  
<https://osatsu.org/en/>  
 Ama Hut HACHIMAN: From ¥3850 per person  
<https://amakoya.com/>  
 Ama Hut SATOUMIAN: From ¥3850 per person  
<https://satoumian.com/>

## Meoto Iwa, Futami Okitama Jinja (Ise-Shima)

A site of ritual purification since ancient times, this is a place where visitors to Ise Jingu came to cleanse both mind and body. On summer solstice, the sun rises exactly between the Meoto Iwa, or the Wedded Rocks, as does the moon on winter solstice. This is also a favored spot to enjoy sunrise or moonrise.



## Ise Jingu

Ise Jingu has a history of some two thousand years. It comprises Kotai Jingu, also known as Naiku (the inner shrine), which sits on the bank of the Isuzu River, Toyoukedaingu, also known as Geku (the outer shrine), and some 125 other shrines of various sizes besides. Kotai Jingu is dedicated to Amaterasu-Omikami, and is held beloved in the hearts of Japanese nationwide. The grounds of the temple are home to vast swathes of untouched woodland. The approach to the temple, lined with ancient, giant trees, has an unmistakably sacred atmosphere.  
<https://www.isejingu.or.jp/en/>

**!** Both Naiku and Geku open at 5am. In these early morning hours, visitor numbers are still low and the temple grounds are quiet. You can enjoy listening to gentle sounds of bird song and footsteps on gravel.



©Isejingu



## Saioh Festival

The must-see “Saioh Gunko” in this Saioh Festival is a reenactment of the procession from Kyoto to Saiku by the so-called Saioh, unmarried princesses who had been chosen to worship Amaterasu-Omikami at Ise Jingu as representatives of the Emperor.  
 Schedule: First Saturday and Sunday of June every year.

©Meiwa Town Tourism Association





# KII PENINSULA

The sacred sites and pilgrimage routes running through the Kii Mountains are renowned as some of the most powerful spiritual spots in Japan: places where you can feel in harmony with some of the country's most awe-inspiring nature. The Kumano Kodo pilgrimage routes have inspired pilgrims for millennium. They lead to three sacred sites, offering them a chance to sense the very origins of spirituality in Japan, connecting the Kumano Sanzan, the three Grand Shrines at the heart of Japan's spiritual culture—harmoniously blending the indigenous Shinto beliefs and Buddhism. The Kumano Kodo passes through lush forests and isolated villages with panoramic mountain vistas. Sites such as the Hana-no-iwaya shrine and the Daimonzaka stone staircase which overflow with spiritual energy. In the Kii Peninsula you can trace the steps of pilgrims past. Travelers can soothe their mind, body, and soul in the unique onsen (hot springs) along the way. These thermal springs are a source of purification and miraculous healing powers.





## Kumano Hongu Taisha

Kumano Hongu Taisha Grand Shrine seems to be hiding in the surrounding forest. This remarkable wooden Shinto shrine was built without any nails, instead relying only on intricate joint work to connect the wooden building materials. It is a historic religious site, rooted in more than two thousand years of nature worship. Walk some five minutes from the shrine and you will find a giant torii (shrine gate), at Oyunohara, where Kumano Hongu Taisha was originally located and the deities enshrined here are believed to have first descended to earth.  
<http://www.hongutaisha.jp/english/>

2



## Kumano Nachi Taisha

Kumano Nachi Taisha Grand Shrine can be accessed by climbing a cobbled shrine approach, after climbing the moss-covered stone staircase known as Daimonzaka. The shrine, sitting midway up Mt. Nachi, offers panoramic views of the surrounding mountains and the Pacific Ocean. It is highly photogenic: the vermilion of its torii shrine gate and buildings contrasts beautifully with the green mountain foliage. Nearby Nachi Falls, a waterfall with a drop of some 133m, is a tangible reminder of how nature can be both awesome and sacred.  
<https://kumanonachitaisha.or.jp/>

4



## Kumano Hayatama Taisha

Kumano Hayatama Taisha Grand Shrine is the head shrine of all the Kumano shrines located across Japan. It sits in an area known as "Shingu", or "new shrine": the name comes from the fact that a new shrine was built there to welcome deities who first descended from heaven at the site of the Gotobiki-iwa rock on Mt. Kamikura. Within the shrine grounds stands the Nagi, a thousand-year-old sacred tree. Since ancient times, it has been customary for visitors to take home the Nagi's leaves as talismans for travel and road safety and marriage and love.  
<https://kumanohayatama.jp/>

3







Kumano Kodo **5**

## Kumano Kodo

The Kumano Kodo pilgrimage routes are located in the forest-shrouded Kii Peninsula, which are inextricably connected to Japan's ancient mythology. These trails have been walked by pilgrims for over a thousand years, connecting different sacred sites including the Kumano Sanzan Grand Shrines (Kumano Hongu Taisha, Kumano Nachi Taisha, and Kumano Hayatama Taisha), Mt. Koya, and Mt. Yoshino. In 2004, Kumano Kodo was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, and today is experienced by pilgrims from around the globe. Immersing oneself by trekking these ancient routes one can intimately connect to Japan's spiritual origins.

**5**



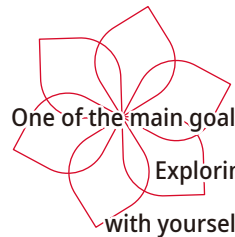
## Shishi-Iwa (The Lion Rock)

So-called because it resembles a lion roaring as it faces out to sea, this incredible 25m-high rock is both inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List and designated as a natural monument of Japan. It is also revered as the "komainu" (guardian lion-dog) of Oma Jinja Shrine, located towards the source of the Ido River.

**1**







One of the main goals of travel is to discover the true meaning of your life.

Exploring Kansai is an opportunity to reconnect  
with yourself, nature, culture, and the human way of life.

We're certain your life will be enriched by experiencing the origins of  
Japanese culture that are rooted across the Kansai region.

