

English

# Countryside Stay Japan

web magazine



# Welcome to Japan's glorious countryside!



Try making cuisine using natural freeze-dried ingredients, known as *shimi*, in Chino City, Nagano (p. 15)

In Japan, a country surrounded by sea and covered in mountains across three-quarters of its surface, you are never very far away from lush, natural areas that vary from region to region. Influenced by variations in local climate, these regions have also developed their own unique cultures.

Enjoy a leisurely stay at a farm, mountain, or fishing village, take in spectacular views while immersing yourself in each of the four seasons, and get closer to local people through their traditional lifestyles and regional cuisine. These one-of-a-kind experiences far from the urban jungle will move you in ways you never thought possible.

Take a trip to Japan's countryside and feel right at home.

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## 1 Walk around Kushiroshitsugen National Park and enjoy cheese and wild game in a dairy farming village

### ● Tsurui Village, Hokkaido

Tsurui Village is a peaceful spot in eastern Hokkaido that sits alongside Kushiroshitsugen National Park. This park is home to the largest marsh in Japan, Kushiro Marsh, which makes up around 60 percent of Japan's total marshlands. The red-crowned crane, which at one point was thought to be extinct in Japan, was rediscovered deep inside the park at Cape Kirakotan. This area has been designated a special protection zone and is only accessible with permission from the Agency for Cultural Affairs, therefore it is recommended that you visit with a guided tour. A guide can also provide greater insight into the surrounding area and plant life.

Tsurui Village is also one of Hokkaido's most notable dairy farming villages, and it offers a variety of farm stays where you can experience life on a dairy farm and stay at the farm overnight. Dishes made from fresh raw milk and cheese are a must-try in Tsurui. You can also take part in an authentic cheese-making experience. Heart'n Tree Guest House & Cottage, a local guesthouse, proudly supports local dairy farmers, serving a range of dishes that use plenty of local milk. The guesthouse is also well renowned for its wild game dishes featuring Yezo sika deer, which are hunted to protect local forests, plants, and crops. Walk through the marshlands and feel one with nature, then get your fill of delicious cuisine. Take time to delight in the luxury of utter relaxation amid this rural landscape.

#### Taito Nature Club

📍 1 Tsuruinishi, Tsurui-mura, Akan-gun, Hokkaido

[Japanese webpage](https://hotel-taito.com/tourism/hiking/) <https://hotel-taito.com/tourism/hiking/>

#### Heart'n Tree Guest House & Cottage

📍 496-4 Setsuri, Tsurui-mura, Akan-gun, Hokkaido

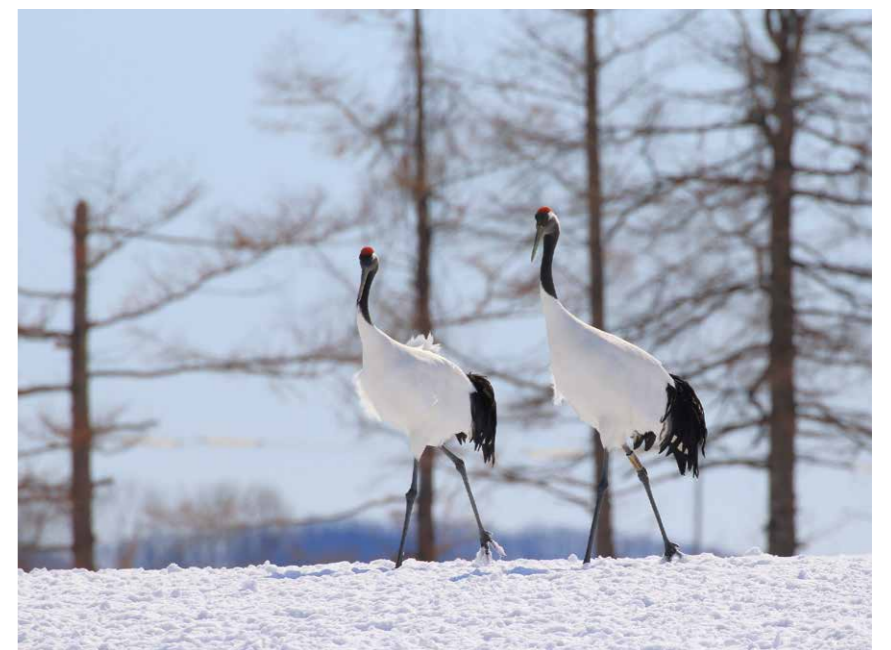
<https://heartntree.jimdo.com/language/english/>

# Hokkaido

Hokkaido is located north of Japan's main island of Honshu and covers over 20 percent of the country's total area. Temperatures in the region rarely rise above 30°C, even in summer, and tropical nights of 25°C and above are uncommon. The low humidity and pleasant temperatures make summer the perfect season to explore Hokkaido. Winters, on the other hand, are extremely cold. Sapporo gets an average snowfall of over six meters, and visitors to mountainous areas can enjoy high-quality powder snow. With six national parks, the untouched natural landscapes preserved across the region are yet another draw. You can also find a wide variety of flora and fauna here that is unique to Hokkaido. Taking advantage of the region's vast tracts of land, dairy farming has become a thriving industry that produces delicious and highly regarded milk and cheese.



Dinners at Heart'n Tree are packed full of local ingredients



The red-crowned crane, designated a Special Natural Monument of Japan



There's also a tour where you can enjoy wine with apple pie among the grapevines

## 2 Savor unique Japanese wines at a small Hokkaido port town overlooking the Sea of Japan

### ● Yoichi Town, Hokkaido

Yoichi is a small port town in western Hokkaido that looks out over the Sea of Japan. Drive out of Yoichi toward the mountains and you will soon begin to see beautiful hills covered in vineyards. This area was designated a Special District for Wine in 2011, and it attracts considerable attention both locally and internationally as one of Japan's foremost regions for winemaking. Widely cultivated in Yoichi are grape varieties for white wines characterized by their refreshing acidity and rich fruitiness, as well as those used for pinot noir, which are considered difficult to cultivate in Japan. There is also a tour where you can enjoy a glass right in the middle of a splendid vineyard.

Yoichi LOOP is a hotel in front of Yoichi Station that has been designed specifically for the enjoyment of wine. On the first floor is a restaurant that serves Yoichi wine paired with "Yoichi cuisine," which features dishes prepared by cooking seafood caught from the port town's bountiful waters, freshly harvested vegetables, and other delicacies using French, Spanish, and Japanese cooking techniques. The wine theme continues throughout the entire building, with winery and other wine-themed accommodations on the second and third floors.

The town is also dotted with restaurants where you can try a variety of different wines. Gazing out at Yoichi's vineyards while enjoying local cuisine paired with a glass or two of wine will allow you to appreciate Yoichi's *terroir* with all five senses.



Yoichi LOOP, a modern hotel renovated from an old building. Rooms with kitchenettes are also available



A glass of local wine served alongside a terrine with layers of fresh herring and seasonal vegetables

#### Taste the Vineyards Tour

📍 Not disclosed  
<https://www.experienceyoichi.com/index.html>

#### Yoichi LOOP

📍 4-123 Kurokawacho, Yoichi-cho, Yoichi-gun, Hokkaido  
<https://yoichiwine.co.jp/loop3/en/index.html>

## 3 Gaze across a vast landscape that spreads as far as the eye can see in a hilly town with gorgeous seasonal scenery

### ● Biei Town, Hokkaido

Biei Town stretches out from the foot of the Tokachi mountain range in Daisetsuzan National Park. Rolling hills form an idyllic landscape of undulating waves that enchants visitors. Also known as the "town of hills," Biei offers various observation points around town with views of the patchwork-like hills and flower fields from spring to autumn, and pure white snowscapes in winter. A drive along Patchwork Road will take you past all the beautiful scenery that Biei has to offer.

The vast and varied farmland is what makes this landscape so beautiful. Vegetables such as asparagus are harvested in spring, while wheat, sweetcorn, tomatoes, and melons emerge in summer, followed by potatoes, onions, and pumpkins in autumn. If you join the walking tour that takes you along a footpath through the patchwork hills of Biei, you can get special permission to walk atop a normally inaccessible hilltop from the farmers. Meanwhile, Cottage SPOONVALLEY, a sweet cottage that looks like something straight from a fairy tale, also has its own farm where you can enjoy typical Biei cuisine served with plenty of vegetables. Let yourself fully unwind in the midst of this magnificent scenery.

#### Footpath Walking Tour along the Patchwork Hills of Biei

📍 Biei Tourism Association (Shiki no Johokan), 1-2-14 Motomachi, Biei-cho, Kamikawa-gun, Hokkaido (meetup location)  
<https://mybiei.jp/en/event/p=437/>

#### Cottage SPOONVALLEY

📍 Okubo Kyosei, Omura, Biei-cho, Kamikawa-gun, Hokkaido  
 🌐 Japanese webpage <https://spoonvalley.com/>



Cottage SPOONVALLEY, which feels like stepping into a fairy tale



Experience harvesting wheat from a wheat field

Walk along a footpath atop hills on a walking tour through farmland





Try on a kimono at an inn created by renovating the main house and storehouse of a home that has been in existence for 11 generations

#### 4 Try on a kimono in safflower country and enjoy local fine dining dishes

##### ● Shirataka Town, Yamagata

Nestled between mountains to the east and west and split by a large river flowing through its center, Shirataka is a town blessed with nature. In this once thriving base for silkworm rearing and silk weaving, a style of woven textile with intricate patterns called Shirataka Tsumugi has been preserved and passed down as an important traditional craft of the town. Shirataka is also known for growing safflower, which is used as an ingredient in dye, and has been recognized as a Japanese Nationally Important Agricultural Heritage System. Meanwhile, NIPPONIA Shirataka Gennai House is a hotel and “kimono retreat” dedicated to sharing the joy of kimono and the natural features of the town. Hotel guests can experience getting dressed up in kimono. After being dressed by a local kimono professional, guests can walk around freely in full kimono attire. Strolling around the countryside in kimono while enjoying the unique scenery of the seasons, such as cherry blossoms in spring and golden foliage in autumn, will certainly become an unforgettable memory. Shirataka Town is also popular thanks to its rich food culture. A wide variety of ingredients can be harvested throughout the year, including traditional vegetables cultivated in the region for centuries, wild mountain vegetables, fruits, and more. Local townspeople follow a long-standing tradition of eating soba (buckwheat) noodles during festivals and other celebratory occasions, and popular soba noodle spots can be found all across town. This area is one where you can get a sense of the local climate and history from its food.

##### NIPPONIA Shirataka Gennai House

📍 183-1 Asadachi, Shirataka-machi, Nishiokitama-gun, Yamagata

Japanese webpage <https://nipponia-shirataka.com/>

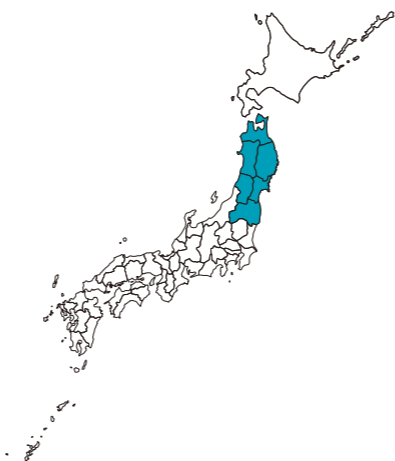
##### Hana no Yakata

📍 1707-1 Juo, Shirataka-machi, Nishiokitama-gun, Yamagata

Japanese webpage <http://www.sgic.jp/k/>

# Tohoku

Across the north part of Japan's main island of Honshu lies the Tohoku region, which is made up of the six prefectures of Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi, Akita, Yamagata, and Fukushima. The area is surrounded by ocean and mountains and undergoes distinct changes from season to season; it is particularly during the winter months, when snow lies deep on the ground, that the unique lifestyle and customs of local people can be witnessed. Tohoku is home to thriving agriculture and fishing industries that take advantage of the area's rich natural environment, while tranquil countryside sceneries spreading here and there lend the area a simple and rustic atmosphere. The unique food culture and local cuisine, which reflect the local ingredients and climate, form yet another part of Tohoku's charm.



Savor the chance to try high-quality meat and seasonal vegetables



A field of safflowers in Shirataka Town. The flowers bloom between late June and early August

## 5 Immerse yourself in the sublime and mystical nature of Towada-Hachimantai National Park

### ● Hachimantai City, Iwate

Located in the Tohoku region, Iwate Prefecture is known for its beautiful coastline, picturesque nature, and lush green mountains. Hachimantai City, tucked away in the mountains, is the perfect place to take in the stunning nature and tranquility of Iwate. From walking tours to forest exploration, a plethora of activities for nature lovers, whether solo or with friends or family, awaits.

Sitting on the edge of Towada-Hachimantai National Park is Hachimantai Mountain Hotel. This accommodation is highly rated by travelers who love its natural environs, receiving a special award at the Ecotourism Awards jointly held by Japan's Ministry of the Environment and the Japan Ecotourism Society. The rustic and cozy hotel features warm wood paneling and comfortable European-style sofas, creating the atmosphere of a luxurious mountain cabin. Dinner is a buffet-style selection of seasonal local dishes; along with Tohoku-grown vegetables, fish, and meat, you can also try the three great noodles of Morioka, such as Morioka Reimen (cold noodles), Morioka Jajamen (noodles with a scoop of meat miso), and *Wanko* soba (buckwheat noodles). Meanwhile, Iwate Kenpoku Bus offers guided walking and hiking tours that take participants in and around the Hachimantai area in a safe and efficient manner. Tour information is available at hotel information desks and Iwate Kenpoku Bus's official website, etc. The Hachimantai Flower Tour around Kagami Pond at the summit of Mt. Hachimantai, held between spring and summer, is popular. Knowledgeable guides will help you discover around 30 rare species of flowers in bloom, particularly harder to find varieties.

#### Hachimantai Mountain Hotel

☎ 1-509-1 Matsuoyoriki, Hachimantai-shi, Iwate  
<https://hachimantai-mountainhotel.com/en/>

#### Iwate Kenpoku Bus

☎ 18-88-99 Obuke, Hachimantai-shi, Iwate (Hachimantai sales office)  
 Japanese webpage <http://www.iwate-kenpokubus.co.jp/>

The Dragon Eye is a natural phenomenon that appears on Kagami Pond at the summit of Mt. Hachimantai between late May and early June each year



The hotel is topped with an impressive triangular roof. You can also bathe in the hot springs that take their water from Matsukawa Onsen



Take a tour with an experienced guide to learn about the highlights of Hachimantai



View of Kesennuma Bay from Mt. Anba, located north of downtown Kesennuma

## 6 Come to understand the beauty and power of the ocean at one of Tohoku's leading port towns

### ● Kesennuma City, Miyagi

Kesennuma sits along the Pacific coast at the northernmost tip of Miyagi Prefecture and is known for its incredible views of ria formations. Close to the Sanriku Coast, one of three largest fishing grounds in the world, the city is also one of Japan's leading port towns with a thriving fishing industry. Particularly noted for its swordfish and skipjack tuna, the port of Kesennuma has the most landings countrywide. Oysters and scallops are also farmed here. The Kesennuma Fish Market is a great place to learn more about life and culture in Kesennuma. Tours of the bustling morning fish market are available, and guides offer guidance in English by request.

Kesennuma also suffered immense damage during the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011. Traces of the earthquake remain more than a decade later, and local people are still working hard to rebuild the city. Renovated from a home that once served as a base for disaster relief volunteers, Tsunakan is a guest house located a stone's throw from the sea. Kesennuma not only offers abundant nature and a bounty of seafood, but also rejuvenates visitors through the powerful spirit of the people and community that call the area home.

#### Morning Fish Market Walking Tour

☎ Kesennuma "Umi no Ichi," 7-13 Uoichibamae, Kesennuma-shi, Miyagi (meetup location)  
 Japanese webpage <https://kesennuma-kanko.jp/request2022-fishmarket/>

#### Tsunakan

☎ 81 Shibitachi, Karakuwa-cho, Kesennuma-shi, Miyagi  
<http://moriyasuisan.com/english/>



You can observe fishermen and market vendors working hard at the Kesennuma Fish Market



Tsunakan, a guesthouse built in an architectural style unique to the region



lizuka-tei, a historical building-turned-hotel in Nakagawa Town

## 7 Feel at home during a stay in a historic residence and tangible cultural property in a rural village

### ● Nakagawa Town & Ohtawara City, Tochigi

Nakagawa is a small town in Tochigi Prefecture with a population of about 17,000 people and accessible from central Tokyo in approximately 2.5 hours by car. With the clear Naka River, famed for having the largest catches of *ayu* sweetfish in Japan, flowing through the town, and surrounded by the Yamizo mountain range and Kitsuregawa Hills, Nakagawa is rich in natural beauty. The town also offers a variety of delicious cuisine thanks to the rice, vegetables, buckwheat, and other produce grown in surrounding areas. Nakagawa is also home to Iizuka-tei, a historical building-turned-hotel registered as a Cultural Property of Japan that is popular among travelers both from within Japan and overseas. The secret to this hotel's appeal is that it provides a comfortable stay in a luxurious space featuring modern interiors and the latest facilities, while also maintaining the atmosphere of a traditional Japanese home. Another positive about the hotel is the ability to personalize your stay, including enjoying meals catered by local restaurants and bars, visiting local farms to meet the farmers and taste a farm-cooked meal, and other programs. In addition, Nakagawa's neighboring city of Ohtawara is one of the most well-known places for farm stays in Japan; the area features many farmhouse accommodations dotted throughout that offer the chance to meet local people and enjoy a stay in the countryside that will make you feel right at home.

#### lizuka-tei

📍 360 Bato, Nakagawa-machi, Tochigi

<https://iizukatei.ohtawaragt.co.jp/en/>

#### Ohtawara Tourism

📍 2F, Ohtawara City Sogobunka Kaikan, 1-3-3 Honcho, Ohtawara-shi, Tochigi

🌐 Japanese webpage <http://www.ohtawaragt.co.jp/index.html>

# Kanto

The Kanto region, which includes the capital of Tokyo and the greater Tokyo area, along with the prefectures of Kanagawa, Chiba, Saitama, Gunma, Tochigi, and Ibaraki, is the largest economic zone in Japan and home to one-third of the country's total population. At the same time, the region is also home to the Kanto Plain, which is the largest plain in Japan. Travel outside the urban areas and you will discover Kanto's tranquil rural landscapes blessed with abundant water, along with small fishing villages along the coast. Further, located in the mountainous and hilly areas spreading out around the plain are the prefectures of Yamanashi and Nagano, which, while easily accessible from Kanto's urban centers, still retain the traditional ways of life and culture that allow people to live in harmony with the harsh natural environment of the mountains.



Farmhouse accommodations are dotted throughout Ohtawara City, allowing visitors to enjoy farm activities and experience life in the country



Enjoy local flavors with a catered dinner at lizuka-tei



You can choose from a variety of colorful yukata at Miyamoto-ke

## 8 Stay at a 200-year-old farmhouse, savor a sumo's favorite dish, and enjoy the taste of freshly picked fruits

### Chichibu City, Saitama

Chichibu City has excellent access to Tokyo, taking just 80 minutes on the limited express train. The area is popular with those seeking to experience nature in each of the four seasons: vast expanses carpeted in creeping phlox in spring, water activities such as river rafting in a tributary of the Arakawa River in summer, golden foliage in autumn, and icicles in winter. The area is also dotted with auspicious temples and shrines, such as Mitsumine Shrine and Chichibu Shrine, which are among the top spiritual sites in Japan. The Chichibu Night Festival, held yearly in December, is one of the three largest *bikiyama* festivals in Japan\* and has been added to the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list.

While the area is not far from Tokyo, staying overnight is recommended. At the 200-year-old farmhouse Miyamoto-ke, you can try a chanko hotpot\* bursting with local vegetables, including those grown on the Miyamoto family farm. As the head of the family is a former sumo wrestler, you are guaranteed a tasty and authentic pot of chanko. Be sure to enjoy it with some local Japanese sake. The accommodation also has a private onsen bath. You can also take part in harvesting seasonal fruits and vegetables at a nearby farm. Why not step out of Tokyo and let yourself unwind?

\*The three largest *bikiyama* festivals in Japan: *Hikiyama* are a kind of festival float adorned with decorations and used in Japanese festivals. The Gion Festival in Kyoto, Takayama Festival in Gifu, and Chichibu Night Festival in Saitama are said to be the three largest *bikiyama* festivals in Japan.

\**Chanko nabe*: Chanko hotpot, known in Japanese as *chanko nabe*, is a hotpot prepared from scratch by sumo wrestlers and eaten at sumo stables.



On the menu for dinner are chanko hotpot and fish grilled over the hearth



The best part of fruit picking is being able to eat freshly picked, perfectly ripe seasonal fruits

**Miyamoto-ke**  
(Reformed historic farmhouse of more than 200 years old)  
510 Nagaru, Ogano-machi, Chichibu-gun, Saitama  
<https://www.miyamotoke.jp/english/>

**Komatsuzawa Leisure Farm**  
1408 Yokoze, Yokoze-machi, Chichibu-gun, Saitama  
Japanese webpage <http://www.komatsuzawa.co.jp/>

## 9 Try *shimi*, a unique method of naturally freeze-drying food, at an old folk house themed around a rural retreat

### Chino City, Nagano

Chino is a highland town lying at the foot of the Yatsugatake Mountains. Deep in the mountains, the settlement is home to several 100-year-old Japanese houses spread out across an expanse of rural landscape almost untouched by development. Tucked away in this hidden village is Yamaura Stay, a complex featuring several farmhouses in the style of old folk homes that can be rented out in their entirety. The renovation was overseen by East Asia researcher Alex Kerr. During your stay, you can relax in the farmhouse or take a walk around the historical village. The cool, invigorating mountain air is a reminder that time spent relaxing here is one of the greatest luxuries there is.

Chino is also known for its traditional way of preparing food called *shimi*. This technique involves leaving vegetables and other ingredients, such as tofu and daikon radish, outside to dry out during the cold winter months, taking advantage of the area's freezing winter temperatures and dry climate. *Shimi* cuisine then incorporates the ingredients prepared using this natural method of freeze-drying. Guests at Yamaura Stay can try making and tasting *shimi* dishes with a local grandmother. Also on offer is a visit to a local facility to watch the process of making a regional specialty known as *kanten* (agar), which takes advantage of the region's climate and abundant water. You can also try making *kanten* yourself.

A stay at an old folk house in a secluded village and the taste of unique local cuisine—this alternative way of exploring Japan offers something different to the more well-known tourist spots.



Create and taste *shimi* dishes made using freeze-dried ingredients with a grandma from the village



Try making a dish known as *tokoroten* with boiled seaweed that has congealed into agar

### Yamaura Stay

Not disclosed

<https://yamaurastay.jp/en>

### Learn to make *kanten* sticks in Japan's top agar-producing region

1253 Yugawa, Kitayama, Chino-shi, Nagano  
<https://chinotabi.jp/en/activity/1388/>

Kiyomizu, one of Yamaura Stay's four farmhouse accommodations in Chino, is a 150-year-old folk house







Take in the panoramic coastal views from a guestroom at Wakasa Kajitsu

## 10 Enjoy the bountiful seafood and coastal scenery of the Sea of Japan in a small port town at the start of the Saba Kaido

### ● Obama City, Fukui

The city of Obama in Fukui Prefecture has long flourished as a Miketsukuni, a term used for regions that have provided ingredients to the Imperial Court since ancient times. Abundant seafood and processed foods were transported to Kyoto along a network of roads known as the Saba Kaido ('mackerel highway') to support the former capital's food culture.

Wakasa Kajitsu is a hotel designed around the concept of *kajitsu*, or 'auspicious day,' which offers a delightful stay and gastronomic delights from Obama. Particularly eye-catching is the hotel's stunning design, which blends traditional and modern Japanese aesthetics in an exquisite balance. Guest rooms feature ambient lighting and a palette of calming earth tones, creating unique spaces in each room. Moreover, almost all areas in the hotel provide ocean views, with the vistas at early morning and before dusk being particularly spectacular. Breakfast and dinner both offer a chance to try cuisine made only from locally grown ingredients and with a unique Obama twist. The evening menu includes silky sesame tofu in a rich and aromatic miso soup and a wide selection of seafood dishes, such as a regional specialty, Wakasa Guji (red tilefish from Wakasa), and dried mackerel marinated in soy sauce. Enjoy your meal while overlooking the view of Wakasa Bay stretching out in front of you.

After admiring the beautiful ocean scenery and savoring its many fish varieties, why not get even closer to the water on a sea kayak? The Ano Paddlers Club offers popular sea kayaking tours led by local guides. The Ano area faces an inland sea, resulting in calmer waves. Here, you can enjoy the striking contrast between the lush, verdant mountainside and the clear ocean waters. During the three-hour course, you will first learn the basics of how to navigate a sea kayak, then paddle along the coastline to a private beach where you can try snorkeling and swimming. The tour also takes participants past fish feeding grounds, so you may come across schools of silver mackerel and pufferfish being fed.

#### Wakasa Kajitsu

📍 10-4 Ano, Obama-shi, Fukui

🌐 Japanese webpage <https://wakasa-kajitsu.com/>

#### Ano Paddlers Club

📍 9-4 Ano, Obama-shi, Fukui

🌐 Japanese webpage <https://obama-apc.com>

# Hokuriku

The Hokuriku region, close to the center of Japan's main island of Honshu, includes the prefectures of Niigata, Toyama, Ishikawa, and Fukui, which lie in a row along the coast of the Sea of Japan. This region is supported by many thriving primary industries, such as fishing in the Sea of Japan and rice cultivation on the plains, and remains popular thanks to its rich food culture. The mountainous areas of Niigata Prefecture receive some of the heaviest snowfalls in Japan, offering a plethora of activities that can only be enjoyed in this so-called "snow country." The Hokuriku region is also home to the World Heritage Site-designated settlement of Gassho-style homes at Gokayama Village, along with Noto's Satoyama and Satoumi, which have been registered as Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems. At both these sites, you can experience a traditional Japanese way of life.



Mackerel sushi made with mackerel marinated in vinegar



Try sea kayaking and enjoy the scenery along the coastline accompanied by a guide

## 11 Build a *kamakura* snow dome, a one-of-a-kind experience in “Snow Country,” and enjoy rice in one of Japan’s best rice-producing regions

### ● Joetsu City, Niigata

Niigata Prefecture is one of Japan’s best producers of rice, which is a staple of Japanese cuisine. In the southwestern part of the prefecture is Joetsu City, a thriving rice-growing region. Facing the Sea of Japan and surrounded by mountainous terrain, the city is blessed with fresh produce from both the mountains and the sea. Inland, the city is also known as having some of the heaviest snowfall in Japan. A special thing about this area is that rice and other crops receive an abundance of water from melting snow, which makes for delicious local sake that can be enjoyed together with local cuisine made from seasonal ingredients.

YUKISATO Lodge was created from the idea of wanting to give guests the chance to experience the wonder of snow. The lodge, built by renovating a traditional Japanese-style house, can be rented out in its entirety. Surrounded by expansive forests and fields, guests can take part in activities perfect for places with deep snow, such as building a *kamakura*, a Japanese-style igloo made by packing snow tightly to form a dome shape then digging out the center so that people can enter the inside, along with snowmobile tours across vast fields. There are also a variety of activities that offer a glimpse into life in the countryside, such as farming experiences.



A bedroom at YUKISATO Lodge. The thick wooden beams are striking ©YUKISATO



You can enjoy mountain biking and trekking when the ground turns green ©YUKISATO

#### YUKISATO LODGE

📍 1073 Okazawa, Nakago-ku, Joetsu-shi, Niigata  
<https://yuki-sato.jp/lodge/>

\*This site is available in both Japanese and English

#### Build a Kamakura

📍 1073 Okazawa, Nakago-ku, Joetsu-shi, Niigata  
<https://yuki-sato.jp/lodge/activities-services/kamakura/>

\*This site is available in both Japanese and English

Relax inside a *kamakura* snow dome. This unique experience is only possible in areas with heavy snowfall



The Suganuma settlement in Gokayama of Gassho-style houses has been designated a World Heritage Site

## 12 Experience life as it was lived in the past in a traditional Gassho-style home

### ● Nanto City, Toyama

Nanto City, nestled between the mountains of western Toyama Prefecture, is known for the UNESCO World Heritage list registered settlement of Gassho-style houses at Gokayama Village. Gassho is a traditional Japanese architectural style that is cleverly adapted to the harsh climate and natural features of this mountainous region, which receives heavy snowfall in winter. It is characterized by its steeply sloping thatched roofs that allow snow to easily slide off. While Gassho-style houses are scarce, even across Japan, a cluster of them have been preserved in the Gokayama area. People even continue to call them home.

Next to the World Heritage settlement is Gokayama Gassho no Sato, a unique facility where visitors can stay in a Gassho-style home. While here, you can take an in-depth look at the architecture and learn about the traditional way of life that accompanies it. Also available are optional activities such as enjoying local cuisine and folk music. When snow settles on the ground, there are trekking tours where participants can explore the surrounding area on foot wearing traditional snowshoes, known as *kanjiki*. These help the wearer to walk over snow without sinking in. Experience the local food, culture, and agricultural traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation while observing the area’s hidden natural beauty.



The houses at Gokayama Gassho no Sato still use open hearths, known in Japanese as *irori*



During the Kanjiki Trekking Tour, you can explore the surrounding area on foot for two to three hours

#### Gokayama Gassho no Sato

📍 855 Suganuma, Nanto-shi, Toyama  
<https://www.gokayama.jp/en/>

#### Kanjiki Trekking Tour

📍 855 Suganuma, Nanto-shi, Toyama  
<https://www.gokayama.jp/en/> (related site)



Create your own *washi* paper under the guidance of a craftsman

### 13 Experience the culture of *washi* paper and *ayu* sweetfish cuisine in Mino, a city cultivated by abundant sources of water

#### ● Mino City, Gifu

Situated in central Gifu and blessed with the clear flowing waters of the Nagara and Itadori rivers, Mino City has been well-known for *washi* papermaking since ancient times. Mino *washi*, whose traditional papermaking techniques have been passed on for over 1,300 years, was registered as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2014, taking its position as an important traditional craft in Japan. The area lined with splendid buildings that local merchants fought with one another to build is known as the Udatsu Wall Historical District. It still retains an atmosphere imbued with the abundant prosperity from those days.

NIPPONIA Mino Merchant Town Hotel is recommended for overnight stays. The hotel was built out of a 100-year-old residence formerly owned by a wealthy merchant, and its facilities, renovated using traditional Japanese wood joinery techniques, give off a pleasant woody fragrance.

A 15-minute or so drive from the center of Mino City takes you to the Warabee Land workshop, where you can try making Mino *washi* paper from scratch. Here, participants make their own unique *washi* paper under the guidance of a craftsman by scooping up the paper material with a special bamboo mold for papermaking called a *sugeta*, then adding color with dried flowers and pigments.

In summer, the Nagara River, one of the clearest rivers in Japan, heralds in the season of *ayu* sweetfish. *Ayu* is a quintessential part of summer in Mino, and at Mino Kanko Yana, a long-established restaurant located along the river, you can savor dishes made from fresh *ayu* swimming in a tank within the restaurant. The restaurant's popular *ayu* full-course set includes several dishes incorporating *ayu* prepared in different ways, such as marinated in vinegar, prepared as sashimi, grilled with salt, and deep fried.

**NIPPONIA Mino Merchant Town**  
 ☎ 1912-1 Motozumicho, Mino-shi, Gifu  
 Japanese webpage <https://nipponia-mino.jp/>

**Mino Kanko Yana**  
 ☎ 15-1 Maeno, Mino-shi, Gifu  
 (only open between April and October)  
 Japanese webpage <http://minokanko-yana.jp/>

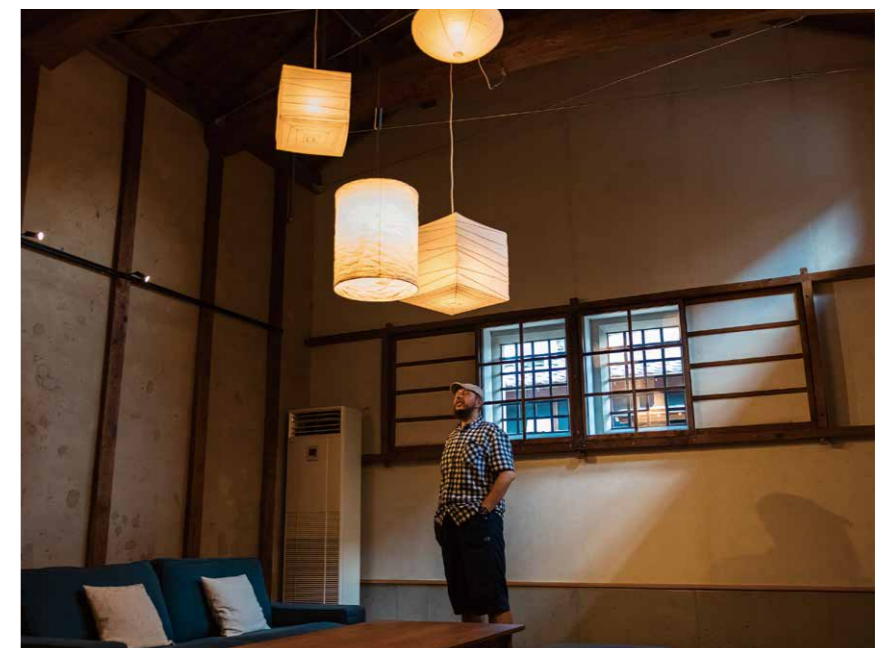
**Warabee Land**  
 ☎ 726 Warabi, Mino-shi, Gifu  
 Japanese webpage <https://warabeeland.com/>

# Tokai

Aichi, Gifu, Shizuoka, and Mie prefectures—collectively referred to as the Tokai area—sit almost at the center of the Japanese archipelago. Gently undulating plateaus extend inland, while mandarin oranges and tea plantations thrive along the plains of the Pacific coast, taking advantage of the area's mild climate. At two of the largest rivers in Japan, the Nagara River in Gifu and Kiso River in Aichi, traditional river fishing techniques are still being employed, and visitors can observe and try out this masterful art. The Tokai area also turned out many of Japan's leading figures from the feudal period, not least Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582, from Aichi Prefecture), a powerful daimyo who worked to unify Japan. With its castles, old temples and shrines, traditional merchant houses, townhouses, and other historic sites remaining here and there across the region, Tokai is a great place to experience Japan's history and traditional culture.



Grilled *ayu* sweetfish served at Mino Kanko Yana, the classic way to try *ayu*



At NIPPONIA Mino Merchant Town Hotel, *washi* paper is not only used as wallpaper, door screens, and lampshades, but is also woven into soft fabric for pillowcases using a special technique



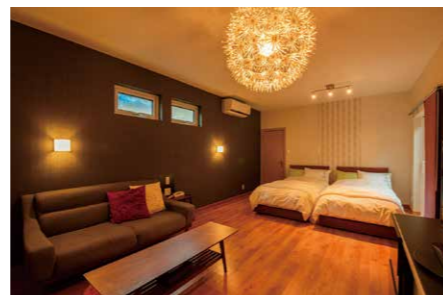
Yana fishing, where waiting for fish to appear from atop a bamboo fishing weir (*yana*) is part of the fun

## 14 Enjoy the summer tradition of catching *ayu* sweetfish from a fishing weir and taste wild game meat in a secluded hot spring area

### ● Inabu, Toyota City, Aichi

The Inabu district in the northeastern part of Toyota City is full of natural beauty, with Tenryu-Okumikawa Quasi-National Park spreading out to the east, and Aichi-Kogen Quasi-National Park extending out to the west. Within the former is the virgin forest of Mennoki, home to dense thickets of large beech and maple trees. The forest also features a popular forest trail offering spectacular views across the seasons, such as fresh greenery, autumn foliage, and barren branches covered in rime ice. As a way of making nature exploration in Inabu even more enjoyable, a framework has been put in place for visitors to explore the area's mountains and rivers while learning skills and knowledge from the past, with the entire district considered part of a "stay-and-experience facility." The base for this is the hands-on workshop Donguri Kobo at Roadside Station "Michi-no-Eki" Donguri-no-Sato Inabu. Popular activities include a mountain biking tour around forest trails and culinary experiences that offer the chance to taste local dishes. You can also try catching fish by hand on the Yahagi River using a type of fishing weir called a *yana*, which have been handmade by local residents. Another place to visit in Inabu is Natsuyake Onsen, a hot spring surrounded by a river and mountains. At the hot spring inn Seiryu-tei, you can savor unique dishes full of rustic flavors, such as *shishi nabe*, a hot pot made with wild boar meat, river-caught fish sashimi, and salt-grilled *ayu* sweetfish.

\**Yana*: A device with a platform made from bamboo or wood that traps fish by stemming the flow of the river.



A guest room at Seiryu-tei, an inn where you can enjoy hot spring water flowing from Okumikawa and delicacies from the mountains and river



Catching fish with your hands is so simple that even children are sure to have a blast

#### Seiryu-tei (Natsuyake Onsen)

📍 45 Koizawa, Inabu-cho, Toyota-shi, Aichi  
Japanese webpage <https://seiryu-tei.com/>

#### Oiden Yana Fishing Weir

📍 Onose-cho, Toyota-shi, Aichi  
Japanese webpage <https://oonose.com/>

## 15 Chat with active *ama* divers, and enjoy local seafood dishes and hot springs

### ● Toba City, Mie

Toba City is found in the southeastern part of Mie Prefecture, located on the Shima Peninsula separating Ise Bay from the Pacific Ocean. The entire city has been designated part of the Ise-Shima National Park, whose beautiful waters are a source of pride as one of the world's first places to be successful in producing cultured pearls. The area's topography of a ria coastline with complex inlets encourages a rich ecosystem to thrive, and here female free divers catch abalone, turban shells, and other seafood. This practice, known as *ama* diving, is a local cultural tradition that has been passed down over the generations; some say it goes back as far as three to five millennia. At the Ama Hut, you can chat with active *ama* divers while enjoying freshly caught seafood.

A variety of seafood lands at Toba Port in addition to the abalone and turban shells caught by *ama* divers, most notably the Ise-ebi spiny lobster. Each inn in the area proudly serves these local delicacies from the sea. There are also accommodations where you can soak in hot spring water reputed to give bathers beautiful skin.

Another must-visit place is the Shinmei Shrine, where local *ama* divers have long visited to pray for safety and bountiful catches. Also called "Ishigami-san," the shrine is known as a spiritual spot that grants women one wish.

#### Ama Hut Experience Osatsu-kamado

📍 Osatsu Fishing Port, Osatsu-cho, Toba-shi, Mie  
<https://osatsu.org/en/>

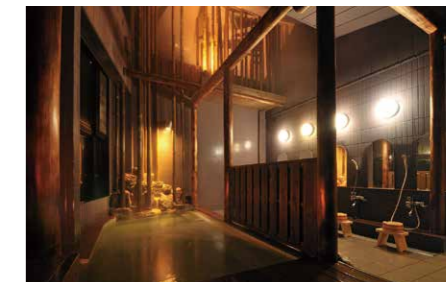
#### Hana-no-koyado Ju-bei

📍 1395 Osatsu-cho, Toba-shi, Mie  
<https://www.ju-bei.com/>

\*This site is available in both Japanese and English



One of the highlights is getting to try the freshly caught seafood



Soak in the hot spring water of Shaguji Onsen, which is gentle on the skin

You can meet active *ama* divers and listen to their stories





North of Miyama is Kayabuki no Sato, where 39 thatched-roof houses still exist today

**16** A forest in Kyoto where the quaint atmosphere of a traditional farm village is preserved  
Enjoy local delicacies in a Japanese *satoyama* mountain village lined with thatched-roof houses

● **Miyama Town, Kyoto**

Miyama is a mountain town located at the center of Kyoto Prefecture. The town has been designated a national Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings due to the preservation of its thatched-roof buildings and the passing down of older Japanese customs. Moreover, in 2021, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) certified the town as a Best Tourism Village where visitors can get up close with the food culture and lifestyle of a traditional farming village. Formerly a pharmacy selling Western medicines, the thatched-roof restaurant and inn KIGUSURIYA comprises a spacious main building and a 140-year-old annex that can accommodate only one group per day. One of the most memorable experiences here is trying a *nabe* hotpot meal cooked over a traditional Japanese charcoal-fired sunken hearth. These hearths were once commonly used for heating and cooking in rural parts of Japan, but are incredibly rare today. Enjoy your meal around the hearth for a precious experience that will bring you in contact with Japan's history. The *nabe* hotpot includes organic vegetables grown on the property, along with *Kyo jidori*, a local breed of Kyoto chicken that is less fatty and has a chewier texture. Each mouthful is packed with delicious local flavors.

In Miyama Town, visitors can also participate in one-hour guided tours that introduce the thatched-roof houses and lifestyles of local people, bringing their existence to a modern audience. These one-hour guided walking tours of Kayabuki no Sato are available in the morning or afternoon. During the tour, you can visit the Miyama Folklore Museum and learn in detail about the techniques used for thatching, which are registered as a UNESCO World Intangible Cultural Heritage, as well as see how the buildings are built inside, including the roof space, sunken hearth, and more.

**KIGUSURIYA**

📍 8-1 Imayasu, Tsurugaoka, Miyama-cho, Nantan-shi, Kyoto  
<http://www.kigusuriya.com/en/>

**Kyoto Miyama Tourism Association**

📍 23 Agake Shimo, Miyama-cho, Nantan-shi, Kyoto  
<https://miyamanavi.com/en/>

# Kansai

The Kansai region sits at the heart of Japan's main island of Honshu. Formed of five prefectures that include Osaka, Kyoto, Hyogo, Nara, and Wakayama, the region has played a central role in Japan's history. Nara was the country's first capital, before the seat of power shifted to Kyoto in 794; consequently, various aspects of Japan's history, traditions, and culture spread to the rest of the country from this region. While most historical sites are concentrated in more central areas, a large part of Kansai's charm is its many tranquil natural landscapes waiting to be enjoyed just a short distance away from the city. The northern part of the region overlooks the Sea of Japan, while the southern part borders the Pacific Ocean; these varied climates have given rise to a rich and diverse food culture.



*Nabe* hotpot at KIGUSURIYA made with vegetables grown on-site and local chicken



You can hear details about the structure of thatched-roof houses from a guide

## 17 Energize your body and mind in a nature-rich town with a deeply rooted medicinal herb culture

### ● Uda City, Nara

Uda City is a castle town in the eastern part of Nara Prefecture that has been selected as an Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings. Blessed with an abundance of nature, Uda also flourished as a town of medicinal herbs for many centuries, as evidenced by an entry in the *Nihon Shoki*\* that mentions that Japan's first *kusurigari* ("medicine hunting")\* event took place here.

Yatakiya is a hotel in Uda that has been renovated from a 300-year-old traditional Japanese house. Staff at Yatakiya certified in health tourism encourage guests to use their trip as an opportunity to maintain healthy practices and enrich their lives. Guests can also take part in guided walking tours to nearby cultural properties and enjoy dishes made from locally grown vegetables at the on-site restaurant. Even the bath salts provided in each guest bathroom are made at Yatakiya. They contain a compound of Yamato Toki (*Angelica acutiloba*), a medicinal herb said to relieve fatigue and improve circulation.

Morino Medicinal Herb Garden is another must-see in Uda. You can find about 250 varieties of seasonal medicinal herbs and flowers growing at this approximately 600-square-meter medicinal herb garden, including some that are seldom seen elsewhere. The walking paths in the garden are well-maintained for ease of accessibility. This is an ideal place for a walk in nature to soothe your body and mind.

\**Nihon Shoki*: Written around 702 CE, the *Nihon Shoki (The Chronicles of Japan)* is the oldest official chronicle of Japanese history

\**Kusurigari*: An event held by the Imperial Court in May 611 to collect fawn antlers and medicinal herbs for use in herbal medicines



See a beautiful thatched roof building up close



Lunch at Yatakiya is prepared with plenty of vegetables, many of which are grown on the premises

#### Yatakiya

📍 1835 Haibarayataki, Uda-shi, Nara  
[Japanese webpage https://yatakiya.jp/](https://yatakiya.jp/)

#### Morino Medicinal Herb Garden

📍 1880 Oudakamishin, Uda-shi, Nara  
<https://enntourism.com/spots/morino-medicinal-herb-garden/> (related site)

Pretty Asian fawn lilies, a type of medicinal herb that symbolizes spring



The evening menu at NIPPONIA Fukusumi Post Town Hotel features dishes packed with ingredients produced in Tamba

## 18 Go on a food tour of marine and mountain delicacies that flourish in the climate of the Tamba Basin

### ● Tamasasayama City, Hyogo

Tamasasayama City in Hyogo Prefecture was once a thriving a castle town. Back then, the city's Fukusumi district, a 20-minute or so drive from the former castle town area, served as a busy post town\* on the route to Kyoto. A rare example of a post town-cum-farming settlement, even in Japan, the townscape has been selected as an Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings in Japan. Nestled in the heart of this district is the NIPPONIA Fukusumi Post Town Hotel, an accommodation that was built by renovating a 100-year-old mansion. The hotel's appeal lies in its relaxing interior, which has been completely updated to boost guests' comfort while still retaining the building's original character, along with its innovative cuisine that makes generous use of ingredients from the mountains and rivers of the former Tamba Province (present-day Hyogo Prefecture).

Thanks to the climate and fertile soil unique to the basin, a variety of agricultural produce can be grown here with exceptional levels of quality. Tamasasayama City is particularly known for its Tamba chestnuts and black soybeans. The local practice of cultivating black soybeans has been recognized as part of Japan's industrial heritage. During a trip to this well-known food paradise, many people buy Tanbaji Purin to take home as a souvenir. These jars are packed with some of the best ingredients from Tamba. Especially popular is the Kuromame Purin, a two-layered dessert of flan topped with a jelly filled with gently simmered large black soybeans grown in Tamasasayama.

\*Post town: A town that developed around its roadside inns, mainly built during the Edo period (1603–1868).



This hotel in the post town was renovated from a former merchant's residence



Three varieties of Tanbaji Purin are available, including black bean, white azuki bean, and custard

#### NIPPONIA Fukusumi Post Town Hotel

📍 378 Fukusumi, Tamasasayama-shi, Hyogo  
<https://www.vmg.co.jp/en/hotels/fukusumi/>

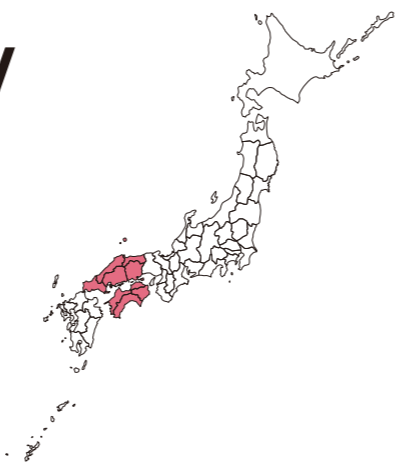
#### Tanbaji Purin

📍 397 Hioki, Tamasasayama-shi, Hyogo  
[Japanese webpage https://www.tanbaji-purin.com/](https://www.tanbaji-purin.com/)



The village of Ochiai in the Iya region of Tokushima Prefecture, which was designated an Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings

# Chugoku/ Shikoku



Both the Chugoku region in the western part of Honshu, Japan's main island, and the Shikoku region to the south have beautiful mountain ranges that appear to circle the calm waters of the Seto Inland Sea. The Chugoku region is steeped in Japanese history—on one hand, the prefectures of Tottori and Shimane preserve some of the most important legends in Japan's mythology, while on the other, Yamaguchi Prefecture was the hometown of leading figures in the country's path to modernization during the Meiji Restoration (1868). Bordering the Seto Inland Sea are Hiroshima Prefecture, home to the two World Heritage sites of Itsukushima Shrine on the island of Miyajima and the Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome), and Okayama Prefecture, where you can find the elegant white walled buildings of the Kurashiki Bikan Historical Quarter. Meanwhile, the Shikoku region, which is separated from Honshu by the Seto Inland Sea, is formed of the four prefectures of Kagawa, Ehime, Tokushima, and Kochi. Shikoku has a unique pilgrimage culture, with pilgrims who travel to worship at each of the many temples scattered across the region referred to as *ohenro-san*.

## 19 Visit a settlement where people live in harmony with nature deep in the mountains of Shikoku's secluded Iya region

### ● Miyoshi City, Tokushima

Miyoshi City sits roughly at the center of the Shikoku region and is surrounded by rugged wilderness on all sides. Here you can find Mt. Tsurugi, the second highest mountain in western Japan at 1,955 meters above sea level, along with the majestic Yoshino River.

At the northern part of the city is the area of Ikeda-cho. It was here that traders once used the Yoshino River as a means for transporting goods, and even today, the streets are lined with traditional merchant houses built between one to two centuries ago. Meanwhile, the sharp, mountainous area to the south features many spectacular valleys, including the gorges of Oboke and Koboke, which were carved out by the rapid currents of the Yoshino River, and the Iya Valley, which is crossed by traditional suspension bridges. Blocked off by steep mountains, the Iya region is sometimes referred to as an "unexplored region," and legend has it that the Heike, a samurai clan of great power and influence, fled here in defeat after a political tussle in the 12th century. The people of the Iya region have come to live in close harmony with the natural world, building settlements on steep slopes and cultivating crops using methods adapted to the sloping land. You can experience this unique way of life at Tougenkyo-iyā, which offers accommodations in renovated traditional mountain village homes. If you make a reservation, you can enjoy local delicacies prepared by the villagers, such as grilled red-spotted masu salmon (*amago*) and skewered *gosbi imo* potatoes.

#### Tougenkyo-iyā

📍 403 Higashiyaochiai, Miyoshi-shi, Tokushima  
<https://www.tougenkyo-iyā.jp/>

#### Iya-no-Kazurabashi Vine Bridge

📍 162-2 Zentoku, Nishiyayamamura, Miyoshi-shi, Tokushima  
<https://miyoshi-tourism.jp/en/spot/iyānokazurabashi/>



Visit a sloping millet plantation and pick tea under the guidance of local residents



Traditional dishes are specially prepared for you at Tougenkyo-iyā



HISOM has transformed its interiors into cozy spaces while retaining the atmosphere of an old *kominka* residence

## 20 Observe the atmosphere of a hot spring resort town that takes visitors back in time and traditional dances passed down for generations

### ● Yunotsu Town, Shimane

Yunotsu in Shimane Prefecture is a port town facing the Sea of Japan known for its hot springs and pottery. The Yunotsu Onsen hot spring facilities at the center of town are part of the cultural assets of the Iwami Ginzan Silver Mine, which was certified as a World Heritage Site in 2007. For your stay, we recommend HISOM, a villa available to book for private stays of one group at a time. Built from a former residence in the small village of Hiso, HISOM has been renovated into a cozy and warm accommodation incorporating the Nordic concept of using natural and recycled materials in the home while still preserving the unique features of Japanese homes where possible. The two spacious and comfortable bedrooms include European-style beds and desks for reading. In the back garden overlooked by the kitchen are a charcoal grill, folding table, and chairs for guests to enjoy a private barbecue outside. Extra futon beds can be added in order to accommodate up to 10 people in each room.

A memorable event in Yunotsu is *yokagura*, traditional Shinto dances performed every Saturday from 8:00 pm to 9:00 pm in the *dendo* hall at Tatsu no Gozen Shrine (reservation required). Originally a ritual involving tales about gods and demons set to high-tempo music and dramatic dances, *kagura* has evolved into a form of folk entertainment that still exists today. Though the actual practice of *kagura* has largely dwindled across Japan, here in Yunotsu, local residents take pride in this tradition that has been passed down for hundreds of years, with some residents learning the dances from an early age. Particularly impressive are the elaborate masks worn by the performers. Made of Japanese *washi* paper and handmade lacquer by local artisans, these masks play an important role in *kagura*, bringing the performances to life.



A bedroom at HISOM, decorated in a Nordic style while preserving a Japanese aesthetic



*Yokagura*, performed every Saturday on the stage at Tatsu no Gozen Shrine (image provided by the Yunotsu Onsen Ryokan Association)

#### HISOM

588-1 Yunotsu I, Yunotsu-cho, Oda-shi, Shimane  
 Japanese webpage <https://hisom.jp/>

#### Tatsu no Gozen Shrine

736 Yunotsu I, Yunotsu-cho, Oda-shi, Shimane  
 Japanese webpage <https://yunotsu-meguri.jp/introdecu/yokagura/>

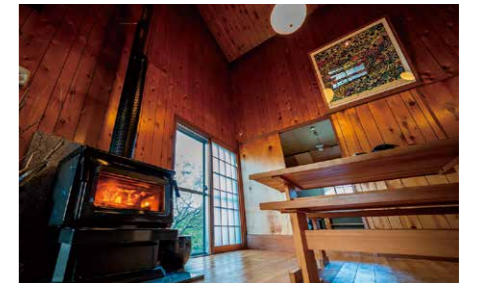
## 21 Encounter scenes of steel production and terraced rice paddies in a village tucked away between mountains from Japanese mythology

### ● Okuizumo Town, Shimane

Okuizumo Town lies at the southeastern tip of Shimane Prefecture and borders Tottori and Hiroshima prefectures at the edge of the Chugoku Mountains. This historical area is considered as the birthplace of Japanese mythology and site of Susano-no-Mikoto's\* mythical descent to earth; consequently, you can find many spiritual spots in the area associated with the legend. In the past, the town was also an excavation site for high-quality iron sand, leading to a boom in iron manufacturing using the traditional *tatara* ironmaking process. Mountain slopes cut away to get at the iron sand were later leveled to use in growing buckwheat. *Yokota kosoba*, the rare, aromatic variety of indigenous buckwheat grown on these slopes, is known as "phantom soba (buckwheat noodles)": a noodle that can only be eaten in and around Okuizumo. The slopes, along with water channels carved into the mountainside for mining, have also been transformed into terraced rice paddies that reflect the beautiful natural scenery. This unique use of the land for agriculture has been recognized as a Japanese Nationally Important Agricultural Heritage System. Nita rice, the name of the rice grown in these terraced rice paddies, is regarded as one of the foremost varieties in western Japan for its delicious taste.

You can learn more about the region by participating in hands-on activities, including knife-making under the guidance of a master craftsman from a blacksmiths spanning several generations, and soba-making taught by a farmer. Stay at Miinohara Garden, a log house tucked away in the highlands, and enjoy a relaxing stay while discovering nature and getting to know the local people.

\*Susano-no-Mikoto: A deity that appears in Japanese mythology. Legend says that Susano-no-Mikoto fought against Yamata-no-Orochi, an eight-headed and eight-tailed serpent, to save a princess



The living room with wood-burning stove. There is also a Japanese-style room with tatami flooring at the rear



Forging a knife by heating then repeatedly striking iron

#### Miinohara Garden

2915-2 Yakawa, Okuizumo-cho, Nita-gun, Shimane  
 Japanese webpage <https://okuizumo.org/jp/guide/detail/2134/>  
 (related site)

#### Knife-Making Experience

Unshu Chuzen Hamono, 712-7 Minari, Okuizumo-cho, Nita-gun, Shimane  
 Japanese webpage <http://okuizumo.org/jp/plantour/detail/1315/>  
 (related site)

The scenic landscape of terraced rice paddies built on excavated mountains







Around 150 historical buildings line the streets of Fukushima district in Yame City

**22** Learn crafts through factory tours and *washi* papermaking in an area that has protected its traditional crafts, such as *kurume kasuri* textiles

● **Yame City, Fukuoka**

Yame City is a place rich in nature in the southern part of Fukuoka Prefecture, surrounded by the clear waters of the Yabe River that flow into the Ariake Sea, along with several mountain ranges. The city has a thriving agriculture industry, producing rice, wheat, a variety of fruits, and Yame tea, which is renowned for its superb quality. The region has long been a center for traditional craft making, such as handmade *washi* paper and *chochin* paper lanterns\*, Buddhist altars, bamboo crafts, and Kurume Kasuri cloth\*, and the craft making techniques are still being passed down today. Craft Inn 手[té] is an accommodation that places Yame's traditional craftsmanship at front and center. Guest rooms are decorated with furnishings showcasing the brilliance of local handmade crafts, with each room designed around the different themes of bamboo, *washi* paper, and the color indigo. The inn also organizes a selection of hands-on craft tours, along with a tour to a *kurume kasuri* textile making factory and walking tours around workshops in the town. Once you see for yourself the work that goes into these traditional crafts, you will come to realize the true depth of their artistry.

At the heart of the city is the Fukushima district, a picturesque townscape characterized by elegant, white walled buildings. This area flourished as a merchant district from the 1700s to the 1950s, and in 2002, it was selected as an Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings in Japan. Historical buildings (townhouses) constructed in the stately *dozo-zukuri*\* style sit along the old highway, retaining the atmosphere of the past.

\**Chochin*: A lantern created by covering a frame made from thinly split bamboo with *washi* paper or similar, then placing a candle inside. Nowadays, lightbulbs are typically used instead of candles.

\**Kurume kasuri* cloth: Cotton textiles developed in the Chikugo region of Fukuoka Prefecture in around 1800, dyed using the *ikat* technique.

\**Dozo-zukuri*: A traditional Japanese architectural style characterized by tiled roofs and clay walls covering the exteriors of inner walls, eaves, and other wooden elements to create a fire-resistant structure. In the Fukushima district of Yame City, these elements are finished with plaster (the practice is called *igura-zukuri* locally).

**Craft Inn 手[té]**

📍 120-1 Motomachi, Yame-shi, Fukuoka  
<https://craftinn.jp/en>

**Shimogawa Orimono**

📍 1111-2 Tsunoe, Yame-shi, Fukuoka  
<https://oriyasan.com/en/>

# Kyushu/ Okinawa



From its position at the southwestern part of the Japanese archipelago, Kyushu has been actively involved in trade with other Asian countries since ancient times. Blessed with a mild climate and plentiful nature, the region is host to a wide range of agricultural practices, including fishing, forestry, and crop and livestock farming. The chain of islands stretching from Tanegashima in Kagoshima Prefecture to Okinawa, collectively referred to as the Nansei Islands, has a warm and humid subtropical climate that supports a diverse variety of ecosystems. Amami-Oshima Island, Tokunoshima Island, the northern part of Okinawa Main Island, and Iriomote Island in particular were listed as a UNESCO Natural World Heritage site in 2021. The region's stunning blue sea and large coral reefs are a sight you will never forget.



A room at Craft Inn 手[té] designed with the theme of *washi* paper



We recommend touring the Shimogawa Orimono factory and making a *kurume kasuri* scarf

**23** Encounter a rich ecosystem and magnificent scenery  
The island's unique traditions and cultures will leave an imprint on your heart

● Amami City, Kagoshima

Amami-Oshima Island sits between Kagoshima on the mainland of Japan and Okinawa Main Island. Millions of years ago, the island was connected to the mainland and Eurasian continent. As it underwent a transformation into the cluster of islands that it is today, certain plants and animals that went extinct on the mainland managed to survive on the island, a haven for rare endemic species such as the Amami rabbit\*. Amami-Oshima Island features pristine, untouched nature, such as blue seas colored by coral and the second-largest mangrove forest in Japan, which was registered as a Natural World Heritage site in 2021. As a melting pot of different cultures, including continental culture from China, native Japanese (Yamato) culture from Kagoshima, and native Okinawan (Ryukyu) culture from the islands, Amami-Oshima Island has developed its own distinct island culture that can be clearly seen from its *oshima tsumugi* textiles\*, *shima uta* island folk songs, and brown sugar *shochu* (spirits made from unrefined sugar cane).

In the northern part of Amami-Oshima Island is the DenPaku resort, which offers three different styles of accommodation to make you feel like an islander including luxury villas, traditional folk houses, and hotel-style accommodation. DenPaku can also arrange ocean activities for guests, as well as excursions that offer the opportunity to experience local culture, such as the Hachigatsu Odori dance\* and the game of *nanko-asobi*\*. Interact with local people to learn more about the nature and culture in Amami.

\*Amami rabbit: An endangered species of rabbit endemic to Japan and found only on Amami Oshima and Tokunoshima islands.

\**Oshima tsumugi* textile: A silk textile unique to Amami-Oshima Island that is dyed with juices extracted from simmering *sharinbai* (*Rhaphiolepis umbellata*), a plant native to the island, and mud, then woven by hand. In Japan, it is considered one of the great three textiles in the world alongside Gobelins tapestries from France and Persian carpets from Iran.

\*Hachigatsu Odori dance: Lit. "Dance of the Eight Month." A folk dance performed every year in September (the eighth month of the old lunar calendar) to pray for successful harvests

\**Nanko-asobi*: A traditional drinking game from the Amami area



*Nanko-asobi*, a game where players have to guess the number of sticks (*nanko-dama*) the other person is hiding in their hand



Explore a mangrove forest by canoe with a local guide

**DenPaku The Beachfront MIJORA**

📍 986-1 Kamesaki, Sotoganeku, Kasari-cho, Amami-shi, Kagoshima

🌐 Japanese webpage <https://den-paku.com/the-beachfront-mijora/>

**Slow Guide Amami**

📍 Wadatsumikan, 555-13 Surigachi, Sumiyo-cho, Amami-shi, Kagoshima  
<https://www.amami-guide.com/en/>

The sea, a special shade of "Amami blue," stretches out before you at DenPaku The Beachfront MIJORA



"Shower climbing," a popular activity within the Natural World Heritage site

**24** Witness the dynamism of nature in Higashi Village, part of a Natural World Heritage site

● Higashi Village, Okinawa

At the north of Okinawa Main Island is Higashi Village, an area of outstanding natural beauty covered with forest over 72 percent of its area and traversed by as many as 14 rivers. The Yanbaru area across north Okinawa Main Island is a vast expanse of mountains and wilderness and home to a huge variety of animals and plants that have evolved in unique ways. The area was registered as a UNESCO Natural World Heritage site due to its importance as a natural habitat. This area is also notable for the Gesashi Bay mangrove forest, where you will find mangrove trees (*hirugi* in Japanese) designated a Natural Monument of Japan, as well as other beautiful mangrove colonies that grow in the wetlands near the sea. A recommended activity in this area includes canoeing through the mangrove forest and "shower climbing" in a natural canyon. You first trek along the river by canoe, then aim for the river source while walking through jungle-like areas, swimming in natural pools, and jumping into rivers. During this popular tour, you can enjoy the nature at a Natural World Heritage site in a more physically active way. After getting your fill of this dynamic natural environment, spend some time in quiet self-reflection at a peaceful guest house.



The clear water feels great and will rejuvenate your body and mind



A warm and welcoming room in a traditional folk house that staff members renovated by hand

**Shower Climbing Tour**

📍 334 Kawata, Higashi-son, Okinawa (meetup location: Fukujigawa Seaside Park)  
🌐 Japanese webpage <https://higashi-kanko.jp/hikyoo/index.html>

**Yanbaru no Yado Yui**

📍 111 Gesashi, Higashi-son, Kunigami-gun, Okinawa  
🌐 Japanese webpage <https://yaaninjuyui35.wixsite.com/family/yanbaru-stay>



Published and edited by JTB Publishing, Inc.

\*The information contained in this publication is current as of January 1, 2023.

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