

鹿児島 Kagoshima

This issue we're hopping on board the shinkansen and heading as far south as it will take us—to Kagoshima on the island of Kyushu.

In Japan today it is possible to use Japan's *shinkansen* system to travel as far north as Aomori, at the top of Honshu, Japan's main island, and as far south as Kagoshima. From Tokyo or Kyoto a change is required at Hakata, but from Osaka, the *Sakura* or *Mizuho* Shinkansen can take visitors straight to Kagoshima City in as little as 3 hours 37 minutes. After the speed of the *shinkansen*, a more leisurely pace awaits.

Kagoshima prefecture is the most southerly of the seven prefectures on the island of Kyushu. The capital, also called Kagoshima, is well known for its view out over Sakura-jima, a volcano that still sends ash across the city periodically. The people of the Kagoshima area have been known for their spirit of independence. Several leaders of the Meiji Restoration were born here, including one of Japan's heroes, Takamori Saigo (1827-1877), and Kagoshima city has a Museum of Meiji Restoration.

While there is plenty to see and do in Kagoshima, just taking it easy is perhaps one of the nicest ways to pass the time. Ibusuki is a hot spring resort town that lies 1 to 1½ hours by train to the south of Kagoshima city. Here you can try sand bathing (a), where natural steam comes up through the sand.

Located halfway between Kagoshima city and Ibusuki is Chiran (c), an old town that has a preserved samurai residential district of national importance. Here you can see samurai houses with refined gardens. Chiran also produces fine green tea.

Kagoshima prefecture takes in several beautiful and unique islands lying off the coast of the Kyushu island. Among them is Yakushima island whose forests include ancient Yakusugi cedar trees that are designated as World Heritage properties. The significance of the oldest tree, the Jomon Sugi (cedar tree) thought to be between 6,300 and 7,200 years old, has been recognised since Edo times. Seeing this ancient giant for yourself does require proper planning and a guide is suggested for beginners wanting to hike to the site*. The primeval forest of Shiratani Unsuikyo Ravine (b) offers easier daytrips for hiking.

Kagoshima prefecture stretches even further south across many islands before reaching Okinawa prefecture. The small resort island called Yoron Island lies off the main Okinawan island but is part of Kagoshima. A popular attraction here is Yurigahama beach (d) which only appears at low tide. While it might be far away from Japan's better known four main islands, Yoron Island gives an idea of the diversity of landscapes that is waiting to be discovered and enjoyed by visitors to Japan.

*Japan National Tourist Organisation (JNTO) has handy information on Yakushima in *Practical Travel Guide—708*: www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/rtg/pdf/pg-708.pdf

Kagoshima Travel Guide is easy to use with suggestions about what to see and do in Kagoshima: www.kagoshima-kankou.com/for/

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