

Fukui prefecture is off the prime tourist track for international visitors, but the prefecture has some beautiful scenery and excellent food, and it boasts some surprising claims to fame.

Natural resources

Fukui prefecture is situated in the middle of the main island of Honshu facing the Sea of the Japan to its north. It consists of two former provinces, Echizen and Wakasa, which were merged in 1881 to create Fukui. Its natural environment is rich and diverse with mountains, the large Fukui plain and a beautiful coastline. The entire coast is a quasi-national park. The **Tojinbo** columns (b) are a designated national monument of scenic beauty, and it is the only place this type of columnar structure exists in Japan and one of only three in the world.

The people of Fukui have reaped the harvests of the land and the sea for centuries. Agriculture and fishing continue to play an important role. Fukui receives high rainfall and is known for producing good quality rice (a). It is the birthplace of **koshihikari rice**, considered to be Japan's best. The sea offers up delicacies such as the famous **Echizen-gani** (Echizen crab) (e) which is at its peak in winter.

Manufacture—new and very old

While natural resources are important to Fukui, the prefecture has a long history of making things, and manufacturing is still very important to the economy. For example, 90% percent of Made-in-Japan glasses frames are actually Made-in-Fukui. Modern industries such as synthetic textiles, machinery and chemicals

co-exist with traditions which have been passed down over generations.

Echizen-yaki (c & d) is one of the six oldest potteries of Japan. Once a common ware used every day, it suffered a period of decline, but has been preserved and now produces giftware and items for the tea ceremony. **Echizen lacquerware** is also highly regarded and thought to date back to the sixth century. **Echizen-washi**, traditional Japanese paper, draws on techniques more



Treasures from long ago

Much of the land in the old provinces of Wakasa and Echizen was owned by temples, and there has always been significant cultural and economic contact with Kyoto and Nara. For this reason there are many important temples and works of art. The small town of Obama, which became famous when Barack Obama ran for the US Presidency, is referred to by some people as a little Nara due to its large number of temples and culturally important treasures including the 1,000-armed Goddess of Mercy (Senju Kannon) pictured (f).

In 2000 in Katsuyama city, a new museum opened to show pre-historic treasures—the **Fukui Prefectural Dinosaur Museum** is considered one of the three most important in the world. The museum has six complete original skeletons and around 20 life-size models, as well as many other fossilised remains and minerals. It's famous nationwide, and in August this year, Prince Hisahito proved that just like many other young Japanese boys and girls, he's fascinated by dinosaurs. He visited the museum with his family who were travelling in Fukui.

than 1,500 years old. **Echizen-washi** was the paper used in the first Japanese banknotes. There are various types of **Echizen-washi** and you can visit different studios, some of which offer hands-on experiences. In fact, many of the traditional craft centres provide opportunities for visitors to try the craft for themselves.

Fukui Sightseeing Information: www.fuku-e.com/lang/english/ is an informative website that introduces the prefecture's attractions. It has several helpful suggestions on how you can incorporate a visit to Fukui prefecture into a wider itinerary (see 'Recommended Courses' under 'Places to visit'). There is also a good **Charm of Fukui** online video.

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