

兵庫

Hyogo

Hyogo is a prefecture on the western half of Honshu, Japan's main island. Hyogo stretches from the Seto Inland Sea to the south and the Japan Sea to the north. Mountains lie in the middle and it is on the large plain to the south where most people live. Here you find the famous city of Kobe, the prefectural capital, and Himeji, home to the splendid UNESCO-listed Himeji Castle.



Hyogo is an interesting and attractive place to visit. Its capital, Kobe, may not be as well known abroad as nearby Kyoto and Osaka, but it has long been a more international city than its neighbours.

As far back as the 8th to 12th centuries, the port of Hyogo, now known as Kobe, was an important base for trade with the Asian mainland. After Japan's period of national seclusion under the Tokugawa shogunate ended (mid-1850s on), Kobe was one of several port cities that were opened up to international trade (1858). Today, Kobe is the most important international port in the western half of Japan.

Landmark structures on Kobe's foreshore (b) are instantly recognisable throughout Japan, but it is architecture of a different kind that has been an important tourist drawcard. During the twentieth century, Kobe became famous for its western influences. A foreign settlement developed in the Kitano area of Kobe and there are well preserved Western-style *Ijinkan* houses in the area (d). Some are open to the public and the area is made for wandering.

Wherever people go they like to take elements of their culture with them, especially food, and Kobe is home to many companies making delicious European-style sweets. In Nankin-machi, Kobe's Chinatown, there are many Chinese restaurants to try. And of course there's the world-famous and very delicious Kobe beef (g).

Modern Hyogo is an important industrial centre. Products include ships, transportation equipment, ceramics, textiles and Kobe steel. However, the prefecture has plenty of natural beauty.

Kobe itself has Rokko Mountain (e) which people can access easily by cable car. Rokko is a favourite place to escape summer heat and there are excellent views back over the city. To the north, Hyogo's Japan Sea coast is part of the San'in Coast National Park.

It's in the north that you'll find the 1,400 year old hot-spring town of Kinosaki (h). Closer to Kobe at the northern foot of Rokko is Arima onsen, said to be the oldest hot spring in Japan. It was a favourite of several emperors and famous historical figures such as Toyotomi Hideyoshi. There are many onsen houses to visit as well as outdoor thermal foot baths (c) for tired feet. Throughout the town, Arima Cider (f) is sold as a cooling drink after a dip in the hot springs.

There's still much more to see and do in Hyogo. To the west of Kobe, is Himeji, whose famous castle (a) should be visited by anyone with an interest in Japanese history. Himeji-jo is the largest original castle in Japan and a fantastic place to explore. Significant renovations on the main *donjon* (keep) are currently in progress [check online for access] and are scheduled to finish in March 2015. Lovers of Japanese pop-culture might want to head east of Kobe, to Takarazuka city, where you'll find a museum dedicated to Osamu Tezuka, the creator of that international manga/anime hero, Astro Boy.

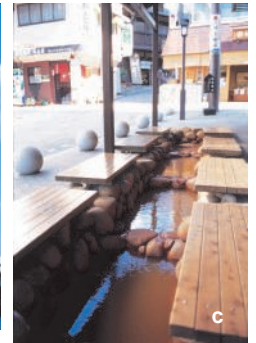


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Hyogo Tourism Guide:

www.hyogo-tourism.jp/english/index.php

Feel Kobe:

<http://feel-kobe.jp/en/>

← The official prefectural tourism website with information about what to see and do in "Hyogo, a sure place for a warm welcome".

← Kobe's official tourism slogan, Feel Kobe, wants to convey that visiting the city is about experiencing and feeling—the lifestyle, culture and history.