

三 Mie Prefecture

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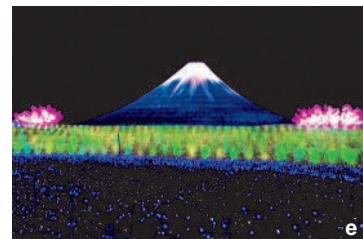
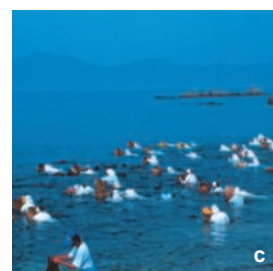


Mie Prefecture hosted the G7 Ise-Shima Summit in May this year, but the name Mie is surprisingly little known. This is particularly so given the prefecture has several major claims to fame—as home to Japan’s most important Shinto shrine, Ise Grand Shrine, and the birthplace of cultured pearl technology. The prefecture is blessed with beautiful coastlines, mountains and traditional rice-terraced landscapes. Mie is also where you find modern amusement parks and the Suzuka Circuit which will again hold the Japanese Formula 1 Grand Prix in October later this year. And let’s not forget the ninja!

Mie’s location means it is rich in history. The prefecture lies on the eastern side of the Kii Peninsula in central Honshu and neighbours both Nara and Kyoto prefectures. Northern Mie has several places that were stopovers on the historic Tokaido Road, the important link between Edo/Tokyo and the main western cities of Kyoto, Nara and Osaka. Mie is also part

Imperial Family, is enshrined in the inner building of the shrine complex.

Matsusaka City in central Mie thrived as a castle town and trading centre thanks to the many merchants and pilgrims to Ise Shrine who stopped off in the town. Visitors can see legacies of its past, such as the traditional merchant house [a]



of the culturally important UNESCO-listed Kumano-kodo Pilgrimage routes.

Mie has a rich coastline and the Ise-Shima area [photo d] is truly blessed by the sea. The Meoto-Iwa rocks lie off the coast of Futami Town (Ise City) and for centuries these rocks joined by sacred *shimenawa* ropes have symbolised marriage. Seeing the summer sun rising between the rocks is especially beautiful [top image]. Nearby is Toba City and Pearl Island, the centre of Mikimoto cultured pearls.

Japanese divers were among the earliest people to come to Australia in the late nineteenth century. In Ise-Shima many *ama*, female divers, still actively dive using traditional methods without masks to collect the bounties of the sea [c]. The *ama* no longer seek pearls, but other treasures, Mie’s famous abalone, Ise-ebi (a type of spiny lobster) and other seafood. Eating in Mie is definitely no hardship.

In Ise City itself, one third of its area is forest. The forest belongs to Ise Grand Shrine, where Amaterasu Omikami, the Sun Goddess and ancestral goddess of the Japanese

picture here. Today the name Matsusaka is most associated with the top-rung beef that can be enjoyed in delicacies such as *sukiyaki* [b].

What about the ninja, you ask? The castle town of Ueno in the Iga area is home to Iga-ryu ninja (there are ninja in other parts of Japan) and there is a ninja museum that you can visit. If these legendary spies are not quite for you, Ueno City is also the birthplace of Japan’s most famous haiku poet Matsuo Basho, and close to Ueno Station, there is a haiku sanctuary commemorating the great poet. Why not take time out to compose your own 5-7-5 tribute to Mie?

And in Mie, the modern also inspires with its beauty. In Kuwana City in northern Mie, traces of its past as a station on the historic Tokaido Road may be long gone, but since 2007, the Nabana no Sato botanical park has held winter illuminations [e] using millions of LEDs to create what is now considered one of the best displays in all of Japan.

Mie Travel Guide (Prefectural Tourism Bureau)
www.travel.pref.mie.lg.jp

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