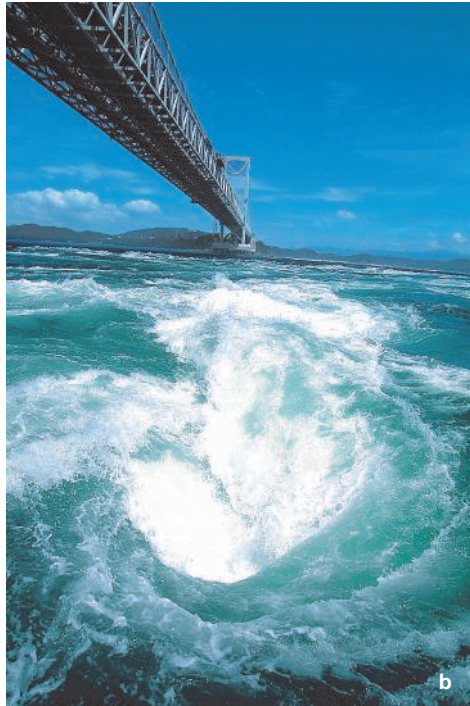


Tokushima

Tokushima is one of the four prefectures that make up the island of Shikoku – one of the lesser travelled islands by international visitors. Here's just a glimpse of what it offers.

Until a series of bridges linked Shikoku with the main island of Honshu, it was harder to access, but now Tokushima can be reached in two and a half hours by road from Osaka.



It perhaps took a little more concerted effort to visit in earlier days, but that didn't stop pilgrims. Shikoku is famous for a pilgrimage route of 88 temples that is still followed to this day. Not everyone will have the same religious devotion, but it certainly would give anyone time to think as the entire route is more than 1300 km long. Parts of it take in Tokushima's beautiful coast (c). The first 23 temples (and the 66th) of the pilgrimage route are found in Tokushima. The very first is Ryozenji Temple (g).

The prefectural capital refers to itself as a city on the waterfront; you could also say 'of the water' as 138 rivers run through the city area. Tokushima city (e) lies at the mouth of the Yoshino River which is the largest in Shikoku.

It's sea water that provides one of Tokushima's best known attractions – the dramatic whirlpools of Naruto Strait (b). The whirlpools' scale makes them internationally significant. They can swirl as quickly as 20km an hour and their diameter can exceed 20 metres. The whirlpools occur when opposing currents meet off in the Naruto Strait. One comes from the Seto Inland Sea which is the body of water to the north of Shikoku and the other from the Kii Channel which is to the east of Shikoku. The water level difference when these currents meet can be as much as 1.5 metres. The large whirlpools form from spring to autumn and are at their largest at high or low tide each day.

In addition to boats and lookouts, you can see the whirlpools from overhead. The Tokushima Prefectural Uzu-no-michi (Path of the Whirlpool) was completed in 2000. This is a walkway attached to the girders

of the O-Naruto Bridge which connects Tokushima with Awaji Island and then on to the main island of Honshu. The glass floor of the walkway is 45 metres above the sea affording a spectacular view. Uzu-no-michi is only accessible from the Tokushima end of the bridge.

Tokushima is known throughout Japan as the home of the Awaodori, a dance that is more than 400 years old. From 12 to 15 August, Tokushima city pulses with music – shamisen, taiko drum, flutes and gongs – and troupes of dancers as they move through the streets (a). The dance is so famous that there is a hall called Awaodori Kaikan where visitors to the city can | experience the Awarodori all year round.

Less well known is another culturally significant performance: the Awa Ningyo Joruri puppet theatre (d).

Another rare craft can be found spanning the Iya River at a height of 14 metres above the water. The Kazura suspension bridge (f) is made of vines and is remade every three years. It is designated as a nationally significant folk craft.

Perhaps such bridges made some people brave to the point of recklessness in the past? Also in the remote Iya valley is the Peeing Boy statue (h) which stands on a rock 200 metres above the most dangerous spot of the valley. Apparently travellers would show their bravery there by urinating over the edge. Whether bravery or reckless stupidity, the tale has resulted in quite a cute statue.

Tokushima tourism site
www.awanavi.jp/english/

