

佐賀 Saga

Bound by sea to its north and south, Saga prefecture lies in the northwest corner of the island of Kyushu, between Fukuoka and Nagasaki prefectures. Not one of the better known prefectures in Australia, this area has a long history of exchange with the Asian mainland and some great scenery.

While the name Saga might not be that well known, the names Arita and Imari would be to anyone with an interest in ceramics. Japan's ceramic tradition is one world's oldest, dating back more than 12,000 years. Through the centuries, ceramic techniques were often transmitted via the Korean peninsula. In fact, it was Ri Sampei, originally from Korea, who in the early 17th century discovered a source of kaolin—a type of pure white clay necessary to produce fine porcelain—in the area of Arita.

Arita became famous for its outstanding porcelain wares (g). By the second half of the century it was being exported by the East India Company to Europe. Here Japanese porcelain became known by the name of the port if left Saga from, Imari. Imari ware was highly desired, particularly the multi-coloured Kakiemon designs, which were copied by other Japanese and later European producers such as Meissen.

Almost four centuries later, Arita is still the centre of porcelain manufacture in Japan and fairs are held twice every year. It is also possible to visit factories where you can try painting your own designs.

Also in Saga, Karatsu is famous for its stoneware ceramics (f). In ancient times, this harbour town was an important link with Korea. In the Edo Period, it became a castle town and Karatsu Castle (d) still dominates the city's skyline.

A natural castle of sorts in Karatsu is the Nanatsugama Caves (a) on the Genkai Sea coast. Also in Karatsu is Niji-no-Matsubara, considered one of Japan's three most beautiful pine forests. Around one million pine trees stretch along the coast for approximately 5km. The trees were first planted in the early 1600s by a local lord to protect against the wind and tides.

Throughout the prefecture, there are a number of beautiful areas of rice terraces (c). Rice terraces can look stunning in the evening light in May when they are filled with water.

On a much grander scale, the Ariake Sea to the south of Saga has large tidal flats that shimmer in the evening light. These tidal flats are home to many types of seafood and top quality nori (Japanese seaweed) is produced here.

A newer use for the mudflats are the Kashima Gatalympics (b), first held in 1985, with fun- and mud-filled games and races.

Another new attraction in Saga prefecture actually takes us back to the area's and indeed Japan's very early history. The Yoshinogari Hills were an area originally set aside for an industrial park, but it was here that Japan's largest moat-surrounded settlement from the Yayoi Period (300 BCE-300 CE) was discovered. The first phase of Yoshinogari Historical Park (e) opened to the public in April 2001 and aims to give visitors a firsthand experience of Yayoi culture.



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e

Saqa Sightseeing Information www.asobo-saqa.jp/lang/english/index.html



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