

群馬

Gunma

Gunma is one of Japan's few land-lock prefectures*. Far from being a disadvantage, Gunma's geography and location make it both a beautiful and easy area to visit.

If pictures do speak thousands of words, then surely looking at the images on this page there is ample reason to consider Gunma as a holiday destination.

Visitors can immerse themselves in the glorious scenery of the Oze marshland plain (a). Oze is the highest marshland on the island of Honshu and it is encircled by mountains. Part of a national park, Oze is home to rare species of animals and plants, and the marshlands are designated as a special natural monument. It is internationally important too, a listed Ramsar site due to its importance for migratory birds. Open from around mid-May to late October, some say Oze's best season is from late May to early June. The lingering snow has almost gone, and the skunk cabbage flowers (g) come into bloom, attracting large numbers of visitors. But each season brings something to enjoy; in July for example daylilies greet hikers along the boardwalks.

Gunma prefecture itself is very mountainous, particularly in the north and north-west, and two-thirds of it is forested. The southern area is part of the large Kanto plain and most of Gunma's larger cities are located here, including the prefectural capital, Maebashi (b).

Rising above Maebashi city is Mt Akagi, a double cone volcanic mountain. At its summit are several lakes and Akagi Shrine which sits by one of the caldera lakes (c).

Maebashi lies on the Tonegawa River, Japan's second longest river, which has the largest basin area of anywhere in Japan. Gunma supplies so much water to Tokyo, which is only an hour or so away, that it is called Tokyo's Water Tank.

The prefecture's proximity to Tokyo has given the agricultural industry a great market, and agriculture continues to be important to the economy. Other important industries today include machinery manufacture and electrical equipment. Ota city for example is home to the Subaru plant.

Gunma was an important site of early industrialisation in Japan. Silk was once a key industry in Gunma and Kiryu silk is still highly regarded. The Tomioka Silk Mill in Tomioka city was the first modern silk mill built under the Meiji Government (1868-1912) as it sought to catch up to the West's technologies. The mill has been nominated for world heritage listing as a significant example of Japan's early industrialisation.

Gunma has another interesting 'industrial' claim to fame. Takasaki city is the leading producer of *daruma* dolls in Japan. Originally silk-raising farmers made these good luck

charms during the winter for sale at the New Year [see more on p.7]

In an onsen loving nation, it is the more than 200 onsen which are probably Gunma's greatest drawcards year round. Among them, Kusatsu onsen (f) is considered one of Japan's top three hot springs. In winter, you can also ski at Kusatsu ski field (d), one of many throughout the prefecture.

Of course, wherever you travel in Japan there are specialities of the area to enjoy. To name but one, Gunma produces one of the top three *udon* noodles (e) in Japan. Made from local wheat and water, it is normally served cold with a dipping sauce.

Gunma Sightseeing Information: ← an informative and easy to navigate www.visitgunma.jp/en/ introduction to Gunma's attractions

* Out of Japan's 47 prefectures, only 8 have no coastline. In addition to Gunma, they are Nara, Shiga, Gifu, Nagano, Tochigi, Saitama and Yamanashi.

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