

The Japan Heritage Journey

Travel Experiences

The narratives of Japan's unique culture and traditions, shaped by the country's landscapes, climate, and people over countless centuries, are collectively known as Japan Heritage. Embark on a personalized journey through these iconic cultural sites, where you can engage in authentic encounters and experiences guided by master artisans and storytellers and discover the true legacies of Japan.



Agency for Cultural Affairs Government of Japan

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JAPAN HERITAGE

About Japan Heritages

Each region of Japan has its historic charm, unique culture, and traditions shaped by its landscapes, climate, and people across centuries. This cultural legacy of Japan, whether in tangible artifacts or intangible practices, has been carefully preserved and passed down, ensuring that its narratives endure and are shared for generations to come. These stories, recognized by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, are collectively celebrated as Japan Heritage.

The Agency for Cultural Affairs is committed to preserving and leveraging these cultural assets and the broader Japanese culture, both within Japan and abroad. In its efforts, the agency aims to revitalize local communities and unveil the lesser-known aspects of Japan, thus weaving together these narratives to capture the broader essence of its vibrant culture.

Exploring the theme of “Journeying Further into Japan,” embark on a voyage to these remarkable sites, from globally renowned cultural treasures to hidden gems off the beaten path, and discover the historical and cultural narratives unique to each region, allowing you to embrace the true spirit of Japan.

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Featured Areas

03 Japanese Copperware Craftsmanship in Toyama
From Tokyo : 3h30min (by Shinkansen) | From Osaka : 4h (by train)

12 Wood Carving Artistry in Inami
From Tokyo : 1h30m (by plane) | From Osaka : 4h30m (by Shinkansen and train)

09 Explore an Ancient Port Town in Fukui
From Tokyo : 5h20min (by Shinkansen and train) | From Osaka : 3h30min (by train)

02 The Rich Heritage of Green Tea in Kyoto
From Tokyo : 3h (by Shinkansen and train) | From Osaka : 50min (by train)

15 Spiritual Sanctuaries and Sunsets in Izumo
From Tokyo : 1h45m (by plane) | From Osaka : 1h10m (by plane)

05 A Sacred Journey into the Shikoku Pilgrimage
From Tokyo : 1h20min (by plane) | From Osaka : 2h (by plane)

13 Scenic Hikes and Sacred Heritages in Kunisaki
From Tokyo : 1h30m (by plane)
From Osaka : 1h (by plane)

10 Experience the Samurai Way of Life in Satsuma
From Tokyo : 3h30min (by plane)
From Osaka : 3h (by plane)

04 Spirituality and Gastronomy in Yamagata
From Tokyo : 1h15min (by Shinkansen)
From Osaka : 1h15min (by plane)

07 Trace the Footsteps of a Refined Samurai in Sendai
From Tokyo : 2h (by Shinkansen)
From Osaka : 4h45min (by Shinkansen)

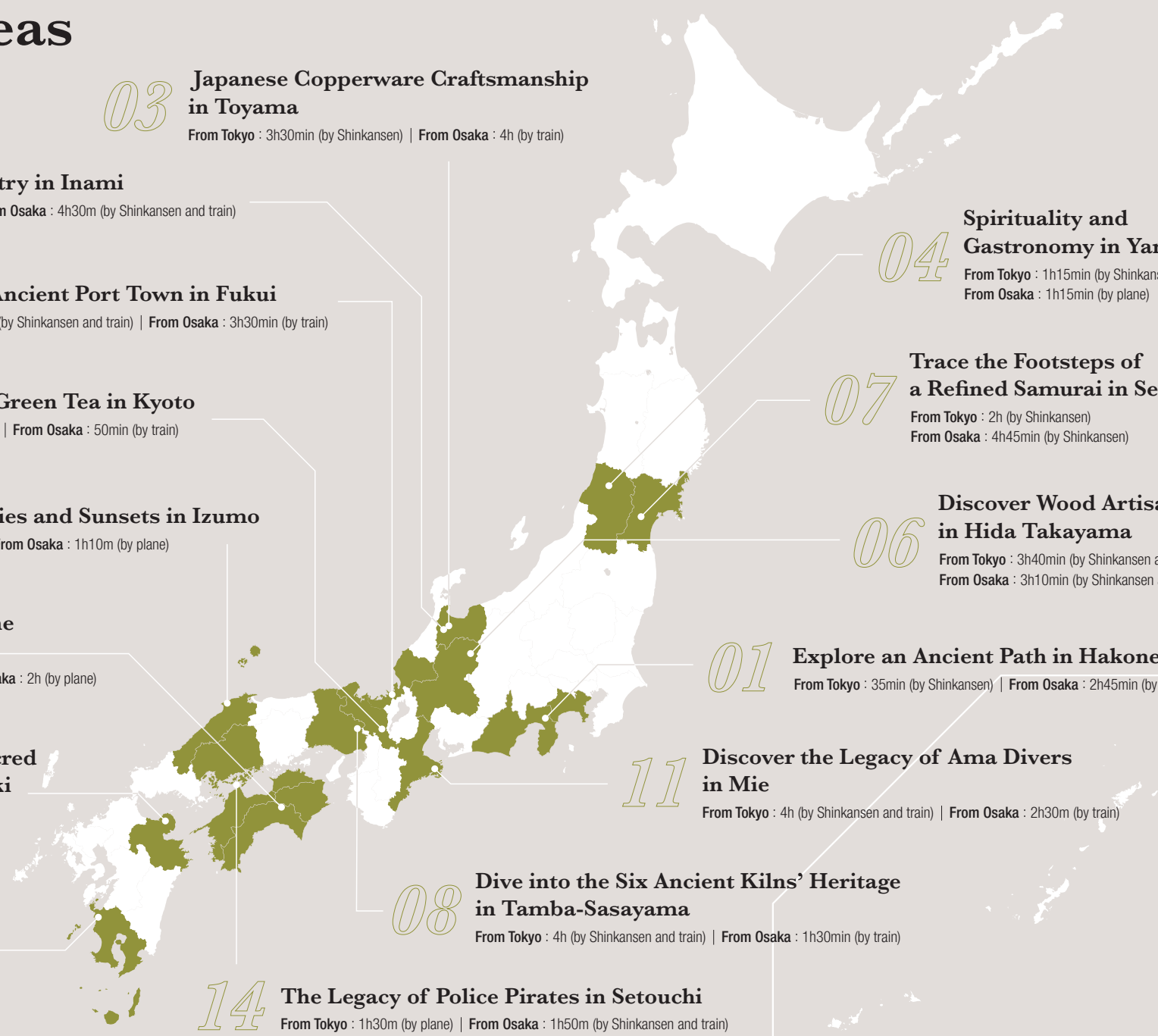
06 Discover Wood Artisans in Hida Takayama
From Tokyo : 3h40min (by Shinkansen and train)
From Osaka : 3h10min (by Shinkansen and train)

01 Explore an Ancient Path in Hakone Hachiri
From Tokyo : 35min (by Shinkansen) | From Osaka : 2h45min (by Shinkansen)

11 Discover the Legacy of Ama Divers in Mie
From Tokyo : 4h (by Shinkansen and train) | From Osaka : 2h30m (by train)

08 Dive into the Six Ancient Kilns' Heritage in Tamba-Sasayama
From Tokyo : 4h (by Shinkansen and train) | From Osaka : 1h30min (by train)

14 The Legacy of Police Pirates in Setouchi
From Tokyo : 1h30m (by plane) | From Osaka : 1h50m (by Shinkansen and train)



01



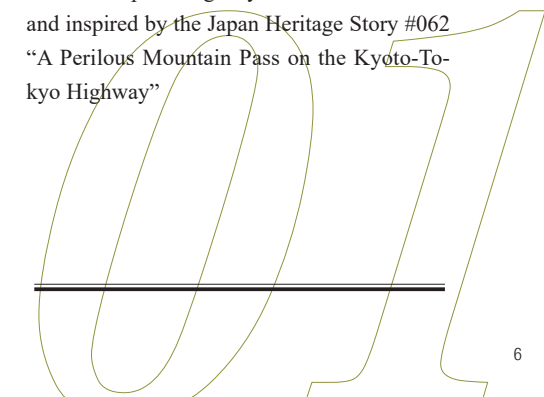


Hakone Hachiri, Kanagawa and Shizuoka

Explore an Ancient Path in Hakone Hachiri

The Old Tokaido Road, connecting Kyoto and Tokyo for centuries, offers a true sense of history steeped in nature. Walk through the exceptionally preserved section of Hakone Hachiri, a cedar-lined stone path that unveils breathtaking views of lakes and mountains. Pause at a 400-year-old traditional tea house where you can savor their time-honored amazake (non-alcoholic sweet rice wine). Discover the art of local Yosegi woodcraft, spend the night at a serene inn, and indulge in the region's delectable soba and eel specialties on this replenishing guided journey.


This experience was curated in collaboration with the Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs and inspired by the Japan Heritage Story #062 "A Perilous Mountain Pass on the Kyoto-Tokyo Highway"



62
Story

A Perilous Mountain Pass on the Kyoto-Tokyo Highway

Shizuoka Prefecture (Mishima City, Kannami Town), Kanagawa Prefecture (Odawara City, Hakone Town)



Tokaido Hakone Hachiri is a mountainous pathway that crosses Mount Hakone, known for its steep slopes, even portrayed in folk songs. Being one of the vital arterial roads dating back to the Edo period (1603-1867), Hakone Hachiri boasted the grandest stone pavement in Japan to endure the heavy foot traffic of the time.

A walk along the road, once trodden by historical travelers such as feudal lords visiting Edo (now Tokyo) from western Japan, the Dutch Trading Post's leaders from Nagasaki, Korean diplomats, and Tokugawa shogunate officials, brings visitors back to the Edo period with its post towns, teahouses, barrier posts, roadside trees, and milestones along the way, all of which are reminiscent of bygone times.



62

Cultural Properties

Amazake Chaya Tea House/Yosegi Zaiku Woodcraft/Yamanaka Castle Ruins/Unagi (Eel) Dishes/Mishima Taisha

02

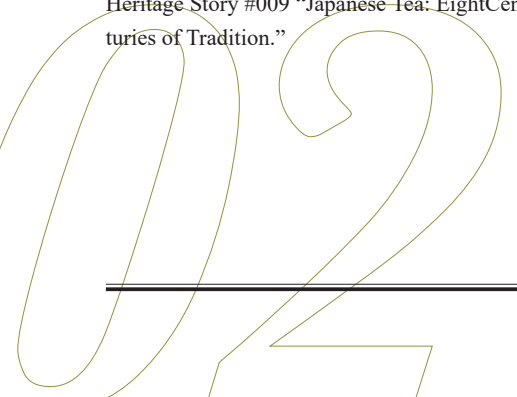


Wazuka, Kyoto

The Rich Heritage of Green Tea in Kyoto

Wazuka town in southern Kyoto is best known for its legacy of producing the finest quality Uji green tea, a tradition spanning over 800 years. Taking advantage of favorable climatic and soil conditions, the tea plantations in the town form a beautiful landscape. Harvest tea leaves in the fields, grind them into powder, and enjoy a tea-tasting session or a tea-infused lunch amid the breathtaking scenery. This immersive experience will lead you through the rich tea culture deeply rooted in this area of Kyoto, from the art of cultivation to the processing and creation of various tea-infused products.

This experience was inspired by the Japan Heritage Story #009 “Japanese Tea: Eight Centuries of Tradition.”



09 *Story*

Japanese Tea: Eight Centuries of Tradition

Kyoto Prefecture (Minamiyamashiro Region's Uji, Joyo, Yawata, Kyotanabe, Kizugawa, Ujitawara, Wazuka, Minamiyamashiro)

The introduction of tea to Japan traces back to China during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). In the Minamiyamashiro region of Kyoto, tea production techniques took root, giving rise to various types of green tea. Among them are matcha,

used in the traditional tea ceremonies; sencha, commonly enjoyed in daily life; and gyokuro, renowned as one of the world's finest green teas. For over 800 years, people in this region have cultivated premium teas, cementing their position

as pioneers in tea cultivation and processing. Simultaneously, they have made significant cultural contributions to the lasting traditions of the tea ceremony. Visitors to this area can journey through the evolving history of tea production, from the

enchanting tea fields to rows of wholesale shops and tea-themed festivals.





Story Cultural Properties
Birthplace of Nagatani Souen/Harayama Tea Fields/Hashidera Hojoin Temple/Uji Shrine



03

Takaoka, Toyama

Japanese Copperware Craftsmanship in Toyama

For over four centuries, the city of Takaoka has thrived on its proud tradition of craftsmanship, notably renowned for its copperware artistry. Discover this timeless craft by visiting the esteemed Nousaku casting company to tour their impressive manufacturing facilities, learn traditional techniques, and craft your own exquisite tin sake cup. Nearby in Tonami City, the long-established Wakatsuru Sake Brewery invites you for an exclusive brewery tour and sake-tasting. End the day with a Japanese dinner featuring Toyama's seasonal ingredients, perfectly complemented by the finest local sake.


This experience was inspired by the Japan Heritage Story #003 "Takaoka: Flourishing Folk Culture Under the Maeda Clan."



03 *Story*

Takaoka: Flourishing Folk Culture Under the Maeda Clan ~ People, Skills, Heart ~

Toyama Prefecture (Takaoka City)



Takaoka is a city that owes its development to commerce and industry, and its citizens have nurtured and inherited its culture. When Takaoka Castle faced abandonment and the city's prosperity was in jeopardy, the Kaga Clan enacted a transformative policy. They reimagined the city as a hub for commerce and industry and offered encouragement to its citizens.

Under the Kaga Clan's guidance, Takaoka thrived, diversifying its production with castings and lacquerware. It flourished into a bustling trading center for rice, cotton, fertilizer, and other goods, earning the moniker 'the kitchen of the Kaga Clan.' The townspeople returned their wealth to the local community through festivals and cultivated their distinct culture. Over time, Takaoka evolved as an entirely private town, and to this day, the heritage of its people endures in the city's layout, streets, way of life, and traditional events.



03 **Cultural Properties**
Zuiryuji Temple / Great Buddha of Takaoka / Takaoka Casting /
Yamachosuji Traditional Buildings / Kanayamachi Traditional Buildings



04

Dewa Sanzan, Yamagata

Spirituality and Gastronomy in Yamagata

Mt. Haguro, Mt. Gassan, and Mt. Yudono, collectively known as the Dewa Sanzan, hold a sacred mountain faith that mixes nature worship with esoteric Buddhist beliefs. Ascend the stone steps of Mt. Haguro with a yamabushi mountain priest, embarking on a journey of enlightenment. After receiving a special blessing at the mountaintop temple, a local restaurateur will guide you through the secrets of mountain foraging and local cuisine using these naturally grown ingredients. For a deeper understanding of the yamabushi culture and their unique views on nature and spirituality, visit the Ideha Cultural Museum at the foothills of Dewa Sanzan.

This experience was curated in collaboration with the Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs and inspired by the Japan Heritage Story #020 "Dewa Sanzan: A Journey to Rebirth."



20 Story

Dewa Sanzan: A Journey to Rebirth ~ 300-year-old cedars and 2,446 stone steps ~

Yamagata Prefecture (Tsuruoka City, Nishikawa Town, Shonai Town)

“The Three Mountains of Dewa,” or Dewa Sanzan, is the collective name for Mt. Haguro, Mt. Gassan, and Mt. Yudono. Together, they form the core of the ascetic religion known as Shugendō, a unique Japanese mountain faith that mixes nature worship with esoteric Buddhist beliefs. Haguro Shugendō lies within the magnificent nature of the Dewa Sanzan, in the center of Yamagata Prefecture. Mt. Haguro (the mountain of the present) is prayed to for happiness in the current life, Mt. Gassan (the mountain of the past) for a peaceful afterlife, and Mt. Yudono (the mountain of the future) for rebirth. The common people of the Edo period (1603-1867) considered a visit to the Dewa Sanzan as a journey to rebirth.

Many visitors still embark on this journey from one of the eight Happo Nanakuchi entrances to the mountains via a land route known as the Rokujurigo Kaido, or Rokujuri Mountain Pass Road, or by boat along the Mogami River. There are temple lodgings along the road and around the mountain entrances, with over 300 in the Toge area at the foot of Mt. Haguro alone. Temples run by yamabushi mountain priests still welcome worshipers in Toge today. Toge residents grow up participating in events such as the Shoreisai fire festival and watching adults welcome worshipers. This builds a close familiarity with the three sacred mountains and the beliefs of the yamabushi. Many young local men go on to become yamabushi themselves after rigorous training, allowing them to guide worshipers on their "journey to rebirth."





Story **20** **Cultural Properties**
Stone Stairway on Mt. Haguro/The Five-Story Pagoda of Mt. Haguro/
Mt. Haguro, Japanese Cedar-lined Path/Mt. Haguro's Sanjin Gōsai-den/
Remains of the Kiyokawa Checkpoint



05

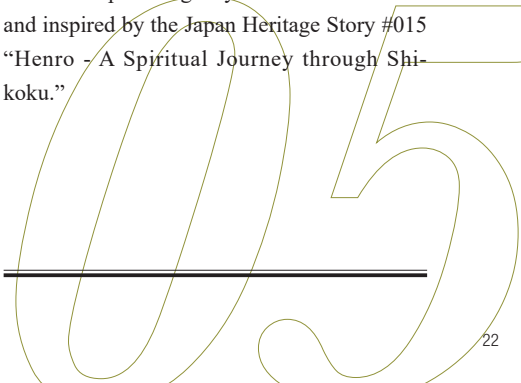


Shikoku Region

A Sacred Journey into the Shikoku Pilgrimage

The Shikoku Henro, a renowned pilgrimage route on the island of Shikoku, encompasses 88 temples, where Kukai, the founder of Japan's Shingon school of Buddhism, is said to have undergone training in the 9th century. The entire route requires nearly 40 days for an average traveler by foot, but on this condensed journey, visit significant temples and scenic sites, including Zentsuji Temple, considered the birthplace of Kukai. The local community extends respect to those who walk the path, offering drinks and a place to rest, a custom deeply rooted in this region and known as “os-ettai.”

This experience was curated in collaboration with the Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs and inspired by the Japan Heritage Story #015 “Henro - A Spiritual Journey through Shikoku.”



15
Story

Henro – A Spiritual Journey through Shikoku

Tokushima Prefecture, Kochi Prefecture, Ehime Prefecture, Kagawa Prefecture & 58 local government offices



The Shikoku Henro is a pilgrimage route of 88 temples established by the great Buddhist priest Kukai (Kobo Daishi) over 1,200 years ago on Shikoku Island. It is one of the world's longest circular pilgrimage routes, extending some 1,400 kilometers across Shikoku's regions of Awa, Tosa, Iyo, and Sanuki. Pilgrims still journey on steep mountain roads, up long stone stairways, through pastoral countryside, along calm seashores, and around remote promontories. Visitors walking the paths will easily find other pilgrims journeying around Shikoku. This circular pilgrimage differs from those practiced under Christianity or Islam, focusing on the voyage to and returning from a holy place. In Japan, anyone can be a pilgrim regardless of nationality or religion, and all are sure to receive a warm welcome from the locals. Walking the "Henro Route" and retracing the footsteps of Kukai (Kobo Daishi)--whether for the sake of a memorial, personal discipline, redemption, or health--is a spiritual journey and a rare opportunity to experience the culture of pilgrimage and Shikoku Island.



15 Cultural Properties
Daihouji: The 14th Temple/Iwaya-ji: The 15th Temple
Zentsuji Temple



006



Takayama, Gifu

Discover Wood Artisans in Hida Takayama

Gifu Prefecture's Hida region is celebrated across Japan for its 'Hida no Takumi,' master artisans renowned for their exceptional wood-working skills. A journey to Hida immerses visitors in these age-old artisanal techniques refined over 1,300 years. Discover lacquerware painting, a local specialty since the 17th century, and visit studios where Ichi (yew) woodcarvings, utilizing the prefecture's official tree, are produced. Another highlight is witnessing the grand floats constructed 300 years ago for the Takayama Festival, which are still used today. The restored Kusakabe residence, Taniya, offers overnight stays for a single group each night. Unwind in the evening at the adjacent Kusakabe Folk Museum, which serves as a lounge complete with a traditional sunken hearth.

This experience was curated in collaboration with the Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs and inspired by the Japan Heritage Story #029 "The Wood Artisans of Hida Takayama"

29 *Story*

The Wood Artisans of Hida Takayama

Gifu Prefecture (Takayama City)



The carpenters and craftsmen of the Hida area are known in Japan as the “Hida no Takumi,” or the Master Builders of Hida, because of the excellence of their woodworking skills. The skills of these master builders have been refined for over 1,300 years. For almost 500 years from the 8th century, laborers were in demand to work in the capital instead of paying taxes. Demand was exceptionally high for skilled carpenters due to the many temples and palaces being built. Around 40,000 to 50,000 carpenters are believed to have traveled from Hida to the capital cities under this system, bringing back new skills which they shared with other artisans. Skilled carpenters continued to be in demand for many centuries, even after the system ended. The craftsmanship of the Hida no Takumi includes Ichii itto (yew wood) carving and Hida Shunkei lacquerware, which uses clear lacquer. Both crafts showcase the natural beauty of the wood grain by not using coloring. The artistry of the Hida no Takumi can also be seen at its finest in the elegantly decorated festival floats that pass through the streets during the Takayama Festival, held twice yearly.





孔雀の間

07

Sendai, Miyagi

Trace the Footsteps of a Refined Samurai in Sendai

The modern city of Sendai, founded around 1600 by Date Masamune, a prominent and highly cultured lord of feudal Japan, has a rich history tied to Masamune and his family. Discover the beauties of Sendai with visits to Zuiganji Temple, the ornately designed mausoleum of Date Masamune known as Zuihouden, and a boat tour around the Matsushima islands, renowned as one of the “Three Most Scenic Spots of Japan.” Tour the former Date residence before indulging in “Tansu Ryori,” a unique meal served in a small dresser or tansu. To immerse in the culture, meet a samurai descendant and craftsman behind Matsukawa Daruma—a Japanese doll symbolizing perseverance and luck. Learn about the techniques preserved for over 200 years, and acquire one to bring the essence of tradition home.

This experience was curated in collaboration with the Japan’s Agency for Cultural Affairs and inspired by the Japan Heritage Story #019 “Sendai — Home of the Sophisticated Samurai”



19 *Story*

Sendai – Home of the Sophisticated Samurai

Miyagi Prefecture (Sendai City, Shiogama City, Tagajo City, Matsushima Town)

Date Masamune (1567-1636), the feudal lord of the Sendai domain, is renowned both as a skillful warlord in the political and military spheres, and as a highly cultured individual. He contributed greatly to the development of today's Sendai City, where his power base was located, and to the culture of Miyagi Prefecture as a whole. In Masamune's days, the Tohoku Region was called Mutsu, or "further beyond," because of the region's remoteness from the centers of politics and culture. Undeterred, Masamune, who ruled nearly half of Mutsu, decided to make his fiefdom as culturally rich as the capital. After building his castle in Sendai, he had the country's top carpenters and craftsmen construct magnificent temples and shrines in the castle town and the beautiful coastal town of Matsushima. He restored and modernized Matsushima's historic buildings and built lodging facilities to make visiting scenic spots around Sendai easier for people outside of Mutsu. His successors inherited Masamune's enthusiasm for a cultured life and also influenced popular culture at the time. Visitors can see this influence today in Sendai's unique traditional culture and crafts.





Story **19** Cultural Properties
Zuiganji Temple/Zuihoden/Tsutsumi-yaki Pottery/Sendai Tansu
/Sendai Hariko



08

Tamba-Sasayama, Hyogo

Dive into the Six Ancient Kilns' Heritage in Tamba-Sasayama

“The Six Ancient Kilns” refers to six villages renowned for their deeply ingrained pottery-making traditions: Echizen, Seto, Tokoname, Shigaraki, Tamba, and Bizen. These kilns boast a legacy of producing pottery from medieval times. Visit one of these regions, such as Tamba-Sasayama in Hyogo Prefecture. Nestled amid mountains and not too far from Kyoto and Osaka, this quiet town has thrived in pottery-making since the late Heian period (794-1185). Begin your exploration at the Tamba Antique Pottery Museum, and visit the next-door Cafe Oito, where drinks and delicacies are served on Tamba pottery. Explore various kilns and try your hand at pottery-making or acquire a unique piece to take home.

This experience was curated in collaboration with the Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs and inspired by the Japan Heritage Story #050 “Six Ancient Kilns ~ Ceramics Born and Raised in Japan ~”



50
Story

Six Ancient Kilns ~ Ceramics Born and Raised in Japan ~

Okayama Prefecture (Bizen City), Fukui Prefecture (Echizen Town), Aichi Prefecture (Seto City, Tokoname City), Shiga Prefecture (Koka City), Hyogo Prefecture (Tanba Sasayama City)

The "Six Ancient Kilns" of Japan are historic ceramic production sites known for crafting glazed Seto ware and unglazed Echizen, Tokoname, Shigaraki, Tanba, and Bizen ware. All six styles were conceived and developed in Japan and are the foundation of the domestic ceramics industry. Production from these kilns has continued uninterrupted for nearly 1,000 years, and the kilns and their pottery techniques, some dating back as far as the prehistoric Jomon period (c. 14,000-300 BCE), have been

preserved to the present day. These kilns hold not only great significance in Japan but also play a crucial role in the global history of ceramics. Towards the end of the 12th century, Japan's political system of rule by the imperial court was replaced by a military regime controlled by samurai. Around this time, many kilns were built to produce unglazed yamajawan (mountain tea bowls). The largest production site was Tokoname in present-day Aichi Prefecture. Inspired by this early style, Echizen ware emerged in Fukui

Prefecture during the 13th century, soon followed by Tanba ware (Hyogo Prefecture) and Shigaraki ware (Shiga Prefecture). Meanwhile, Seto ware (Aichi Prefecture) and Bizen ware (Okayama prefecture) had begun commercial production by the late 12th century. The Seto style was based on the medieval Aichi-based Sanage ware tradition, which included more than 1,000 kilns before the development of the new style. Bizen ware, on the other hand, traces its roots back to Sue ware, a type of unglazed pottery first made in Western

Japan in the 5th century. All six of the ancient kilns benefited from the availability of high-quality clay near their production sites, and the production of this pottery is still a flourishing traditional craft industry in each region. Each of these six ancient pottery regions boasts unique, well-preserved landscapes, and the cities associated with each kiln host ceramics festivals, with the Setomono Fair in Seto being particularly noteworthy. These festivities draw attendees from both Japan and around the globe.





09



Obama, Fukui

Discover an Ancient Port Town in Fukui

The coastal town of Obama once served as a seaport, supplying the old capital Kyoto with goods from mainland Asia and seafood, such as its primary catch, saba (mackerel), leading to the moniker “the Mackerel Road.” Experience Obama, where cultural traditions thrive, through its celebrated Wakasanuri lacquerware, the Myōtsū-ji temple founded in 806, and renowned pressed mackerel sushi in Kumagawa-juku, a post town along the famed Mackerel Road. For the night, enjoy the comfort of a thoughtfully restored townhouse that preserves its traditional architectural charm.

This experience was curated in collaboration with the Japan’s Agency for Cultural Affairs and inspired by [the Japan Heritage Story #005](#) “Wakasa Heritage – Connecting the Sea and Kyoto ~ Imperial food purveyors and the Mackerel Road~.”

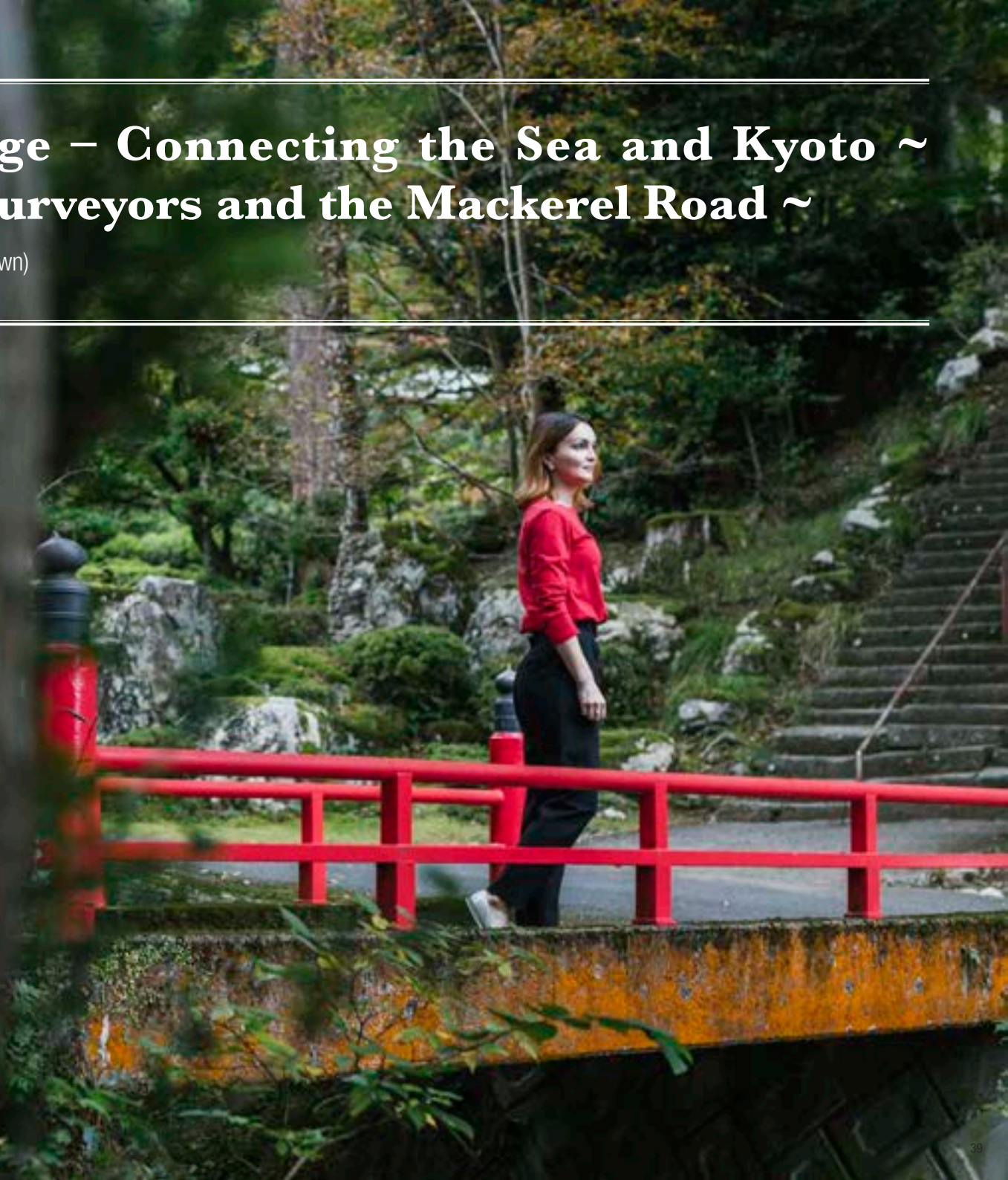


05 *Story*

Wakasa Heritage – Connecting the Sea and Kyoto ~ Imperial food purveyors and the Mackerel Road ~

Fukui Prefecture (Obama City, Wakasa Town)

The province of Wakasa was situated along the Sea of Japan's coastline in what is now Fukui Prefecture and held the esteemed title of 'miketsukuni' – a region responsible for producing food offerings for the Imperial Court. It played a pivotal role in supplying essential foodstuffs like sea salt, mackerel, and various marine products to Nara and Kyoto's ancient, landlocked capitals. This role as a vital food source birthed a unique culinary culture in Wakasa. The coastal hub of Wakasa also connected the sea trade from China and Korea to the inland trade routes. Along this route, local ports and castle towns emerged, thriving as vibrant centers of trade. Traveling merchants brought their festival customs, forms of entertainment, and Buddhist traditions that soon spread far and wide into rural farming areas and fishing villages. This rich exchange ultimately resulted in distinct cultures and customs evolving in villages and hamlets. Today, this historic route is known as the 'saba-kaido' or 'Mackerel Road,' offering visitors an opportunity to experience nature, savor delicious traditional foods, partake in festive celebrations, and admire traditional houses and roads that harken back to the earlier days of great prosperity.





Story 05 **Cultural Properties**
Uriwari Falls/Kumagawa-juku/Wakasa Lacquerware/Goshoen/
Myotsuji

10





Satsuma, Kagoshima

Experience the Samurai Way of Life in Satsuma

Izumi-Fumoto, nestled in Kagoshima Prefecture, is one of the notable fumoto villages once home to distinguished samurai of the Satsuma Domain. A key attraction is staying at RITA Izumifumoto, a transformed samurai residence offering a modern, minimalist hotel experience. Each suite is exquisitely designed to ensure a restful sleep. At the Izumi-Fumoto History Museum, immerse yourself in culture by trying on a kimono and partake in a tea ceremony at one of the historic residences. While the area is easily walkable, opting for the Izumi Cow Carriage tour presents a unique way to sightsee. Witness the historic Samurai homes and reflect on the life of a Satsuma samurai.

This experience was curated in collaboration with the Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs and inspired by the Japan Heritage Story #082 "The Martial Towns of the Satsuma Samurai"

02 *Story*

The Martial Towns of the Satsuma Samurai

Kagoshima Prefecture (Kagoshima City, Izumi City, Tarumizu City, Satsumasendai City, Ichiki-Kushikino City, Minami-Satsuma City, Shibushi City, Minami-Kyushu City, Aira City)

When Japan ended its national isolation policy during the second half of the 19th century, many samurai who played key roles in the nation's emergence as a modern state came from the Satsuma clan in southern Kyushu. During the Edo period (1603 - 1867), the Satsuma clan ruled an area corresponding to present-day Kagoshima Prefecture and parts of neighboring Miyazaki Prefecture. This large clan used its unique system to sub-divide its domain among its many samurai. These small villages, known as fumoto, were located close to a castle—either the clan's main castle in what is now Kagoshima City or smaller local castles called yamajiro, scattered around its domain. At the beginning of the 19th century, there were said to be as many as 120 such settlements. The fumoto were built with broad streets linking samurai residences that were surrounded by hedges and stone walls to protect them from intruders. The Edo period was a time of peace for Japan, but the samurai of the Satsuma clan continued to hone their martial skills. These men played pivotal roles in the dawn of the new Meiji period (1868 - 1912), steering the country towards modernization. Many of the fumoto have been preserved, and visitors can still see the streets and residences and get a sense of the culture of the samurai who led Japan through a critical period in its history.









Toba City and Shima City, Mie

Discover the Legacy of Ama Divers in Mie

The coastal areas of Toba and Shima in Mie Prefecture, renowned for their delicious seafood like abalone and Ise ebi lobster, are also home to the ancient tradition of ama divers. Join these skilled women as they dive without modern equipment and experience their way of life in their seashore huts, where they grill freshly caught shellfish and share their stories of ama culture. Later, visit the Shinmei Shrine, known as a place of worship for ama divers, and its special blessings that “grant at least one wish of a woman.” To end your day, unwind at the Amanemu, a luxurious spa resort and onsen retreat that offers the perfect blend of privacy and comfort.

This experience was curated in collaboration with Japan’s Agency for Cultural Affairs and inspired by the Japan Heritage Story #073 “Meet the Ama Female Divers of Toba and Shima.”



73 *Story*

Meet the Ama Female Divers of Toba and Shima

Mie Prefecture (Toba City, Shima City)

Toba and Shima, located on the Shima Peninsula in Mie Prefecture, host the largest community of ama—professional female divers known as “women of the sea”—in Japan. These divers engage in an ancient practice of harvesting shellfish, continuing a fishing tradition that has existed in Mie for thousands of years. Archaeological findings from the Shirahama Ruins in Toba suggest this tradition dates back 3,000 years. Ama fishing, which prevails only in Japan and Korea today, has been sustained through careful protection of marine resources, including seasonal fishing limits and catch regulations. Each year, from April to July, ama divers dedicate their catch to local and the Ise Jingu shrines through rituals praying for safety and a bountiful harvest. The distinctive hood-like towels worn by the divers are embroidered with patterns believed to protect them from evil and bad luck.



73

Cultural Properties

Mount Aomine Shofuku-ji Temple/Shimmei Shrine/Diving Techniques of the Toba and Shima Ama Divers

12



Inami Town and Ainokura Village,
Toyama

Wood Carving Artistry in Inami

Tucked in the valley of Toyama Prefecture, a remote village boasts UNESCO-certified gassho-zukuri farmhouses, including a shrine and museums that exhibit a vast array of local crafts. Nearby, the town of Inami, famous for its wood carving heritage, comes alive with the sounds of mallets from traditional merchant houses. Here, visitors can watch artisans create from sketch to finish and purchase unique artwork or handcraft personalized sake cups to later enjoy local sake while savoring the scent of freshly carved hinoki wood. Throughout the town, carvings are showcased, including in a museum featuring works from numerous past artisans. The exquisite wooden Zuisenji Temple is another highlight, offering private tours and cultural activities like Sutra copying. After taking in the temple's evening views, visitors can savor Japanese cuisine made from local ingredients and relax in beautifully restored artisan accommodations.

This experience was curated in collaboration with Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs and inspired by the Japan Heritage Story #059 "Born from the Chisels of Master Woodcarvers."



59
Story

Born from the Chisels of Master Woodcarvers

Toyama Prefecture (Inami Town, Ainokura Village)

Woodcarving in the Inami District of Nanto City, Toyama Prefecture, boasts a rich history spanning almost 250 years, originating after the 18th-century fire that destroyed the Zuisenji Temple. Renowned sculptor, Maekawa Sanshiro from Kyoto, was commissioned to rebuild the temple, and local carpenters who apprenticed under him adopted and refined his woodcarving techniques, establishing Inami's reputation for bold and intricate woodwork. Today, visitors to Zuisenji Temple can admire Sanshiro's original dragon carving at the temple's main gate and numerous other carvings within Taishido Hall. Along Yokamachi Street, the district's main thoroughfare, numerous workshops display the exquisite craftsmanship of Inami carvers, whose skills beautify not only local temples and shrines across Japan but also everyday items like shop signs and home decor. During local spring and fall festivals, these exceptional carvings enhance parade floats and traditional lion dance masks, showcasing the community's enduring artistic heritage.





Story **Cultural Properties**
Ainokura Village/Inami Sculpture/Inami Betsuin Zuisenji Temple/
Yokamachi Street

13





Kunisaki City and Bungotakada
City, Oita

Scenic Hikes and Sacred Heritages in Kunisaki

The Kunisaki Peninsula in Oita Prefecture is home to stunning historical and natural sites, including rocky mountains once thought by locals to be home to ogres. Unlike other parts of Japan, where ogres symbolize misfortune, the people of Kunisaki see them as bringers of happiness. Visitors can hike scenic trails featuring stone Buddhas and enjoy Michelin Bib Gourmand soba noodles, a local specialty. At Fukiji Temple, one of Japan's oldest wooden structures, guests can partake in private Zen meditation in English and stay overnight at the nearby temple lodge for an immersive cultural experience.

This experience was curated in collaboration with Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs and inspired by the Japan Heritage Story #066 "The Kunisaki Peninsula – Where Ogres Bring Happiness"

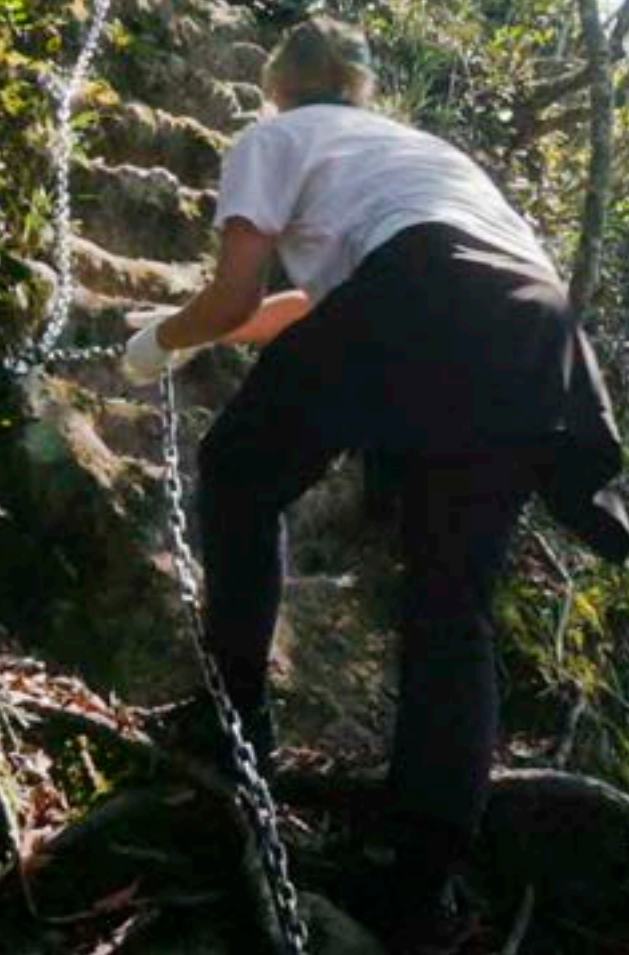


66
Story

The Kunisaki Peninsula – Where Ogres Bring Happiness

Oita Prefecture (Kunisaki City)

The Kunisaki Peninsula in northeastern Oita Prefecture is steeped in ancient traditions and surrounded by rugged mountains, which locals historically considered to be the dwelling place of ogres. Unlike other parts of Japan where ogres are seen as bearers of misfortune, in Kunisaki, they are believed to bring happiness. This belief is celebrated during the Shujo Onie rituals, held every January according to the lunar calendar. During these rituals, ogres wielding wooden torches believed to hold the power of Buddhism bless participants by striking them, which is thought to grant health and a prosperous harvest. Additionally, these ogres visit local homes where they are welcomed with food and sake. The peninsula's unique landscape, characterized by oddly shaped cliffs with Buddha figures, rugged peaks, and caves, adds to the mystical aura of the area, reinforcing the local lore of ogre inhabitants.





Story 6 **Cultural Properties**
Fukiji Temple/Tennen Temple/Ofudo Iwaya/Kyu-Sento-ji Temple
Ruins/Itsutsuji Fudou/Maki Odo



14



Setouchi Islands, Hiroshima and Ehime

The Legacy of Police Pirates in Setouchi

Explore the Seto Inland Sea islands and uncover the legacy of the Murakami Kaizoku, or ‘police pirates,’ who were pivotal naval forces ensuring safe sea navigation and trade. Visit the Murakami Kaizoku Museum to view over 1,300 artifacts, including fine arts and crafts from a notable family and items excavated from Noshima Castle. Try on traditional armor for a hands-on historical experience. For stunning views over the Seto Inland Sea, climb up to the 226-meter summit of Mt. Shirataki, passing more than 500 Arhat statues along the way. On Innoshima, historically known as a pirate stronghold, the Innoshima Suigun Castle displays an array of historical exhibits, including authentic pirate armor. The ideal route to explore these sites is by cycling the Shimanami Kaido, where you can also sample Hōroku-yaki, a traditional seafood dish favored by the Murakami Kaizoku.

This experience was curated in collaboration with Japan’s Agency for Cultural Affairs and inspired by the Japan Heritage Story #036 “The Murakami Kaizoku of the Geiyo Islands.”



36 *Story*

The Murakami Kaizoku of the Geiyo Islands

Hiroshima Prefecture (Geiyo Islands, Onomichi), Ehime Prefecture (Geiyo Islands, Imabari)

The Murakami Kaizoku, originating from the Geiyo Islands, were not typical pirates but were skilled navigators who controlled the Seto Inland Sea between the 14th and 16th centuries, an essential trade route linking Japan's major islands of Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu. Although feared as pirates, they effectively acted as maritime police, ensuring safe passage for ships through the challenging and tidal waters in exchange for fees. These pirates, documented by the Portuguese missionary Luis Fróis during Japan's Warring States period, were not only fierce but also cultured and educated, deeply devoted to their beliefs. Today, their legacy can still be observed in the Geiyo Islands and the cities of Imabari and Onomichi, with traces found in temples and cultural artifacts, and celebrated through local festivals like the Innoshima Suigun Matsuri, featuring rowboat races and giant torches.





Story **36** Cultural Properties
Mount Shirataki and the Gohyaku Rakan/Horakuyaki/Ruins of Noshima Castle

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Izumo, Shimane

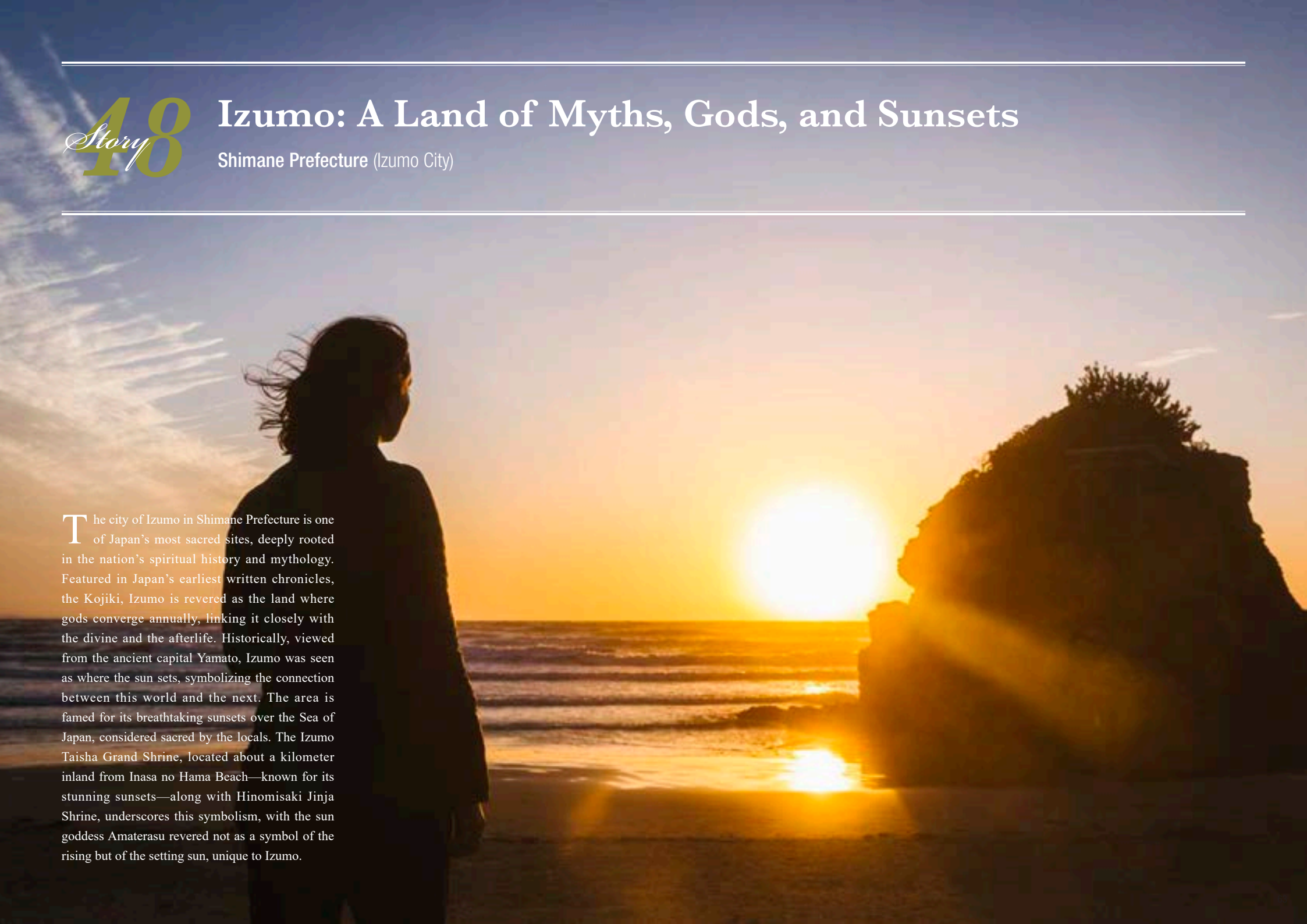
Spiritual Sanctuaries and Sunsets in Izumo

Revered as the “Land of Gods,” Izumo is known for its spiritual significance and scenic sunsets. It is home to Izumo Taisha Grand Shrine, one of Japan’s oldest and most important shrines, where a profound sense of sanctity prevails. North of the Izumo Taisha Grand Shrine, Hinomisaki Shrine, an Important Cultural Property, stands out with its vibrant vermilion lacquer and intricate carvings. Nearby, Izumo Hinomisaki Lighthouse invites visitors to climb its 163 steps for stunning views of the Japan Sea. Inasa Beach, a renowned spiritual power spot, is the perfect place to catch a spectacular sunset before unwinding at Izumo Hotel The Cliff, a MICHELIN Key-awarded hotel, featuring private balconies with outdoor jacuzzis and a restaurant serving dishes crafted from local seasonal ingredients. □ Before your journey home, savor the local specialty, Izumo Buckwheat Noodles. This experience was curated in collaboration with Japan’s Agency for Cultural Affairs and inspired by the Japan Heritage Story #048 “Izumo: A Land of Myths, Gods, and Sunsets.”

48 *Story*

Izumo: A Land of Myths, Gods, and Sunsets

Shimane Prefecture (Izumo City)



The city of Izumo in Shimane Prefecture is one of Japan's most sacred sites, deeply rooted in the nation's spiritual history and mythology. Featured in Japan's earliest written chronicles, the *Kojiki*, Izumo is revered as the land where gods converge annually, linking it closely with the divine and the afterlife. Historically, viewed from the ancient capital Yamato, Izumo was seen as where the sun sets, symbolizing the connection between this world and the next. The area is famed for its breathtaking sunsets over the Sea of Japan, considered sacred by the locals. The Izumo Taisha Grand Shrine, located about a kilometer inland from Inasa no Hama Beach—known for its stunning sunsets—along with Hinomisaki Jinja Shrine, underscores this symbolism, with the sun goddess Amaterasu revered not as a symbol of the rising but of the setting sun, unique to Izumo.



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Cultural Properties

Izumo Taisha Grand Shrine/Hinomisaki Shrine/Izumo Hinomisaki Lighthouse/Fumishima Island

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