

JAPAN'S

● SETOUCHI REGION ●

THE CALL OF THE INLAND SEA



SETOUCHI
REFLECTION TRIP

Avanti[®]
Destinations

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INTRODUCTION

Many travelers automatically equate Japan with visuals of Tokyo's futuristic cityscape, Kyoto's traditional temples and shrines, or even bashful Mt. Fuji on a clear day. There is certainly nothing wrong with that, but there's a lot more to the 'Land of the Rising Sun' than just the popular and obvious draws. To those looking for a destination that seamlessly blends old-style authenticity, inimitable Japanese modernism, and off-the-beaten-path qualities, there are few places in the country that compares to Setouchi and its hidden gems.

Since ancient times up and until the advent of transit innovations like sea-spanning bridges and the world-famous Shinkansen (bullet train), the calm waters of Seto — Japan's largest inland sea — has served as the country's main transport hub. This long-standing maritime history was critical in fostering local culture that's distinctly influenced by the sea.

NEXT STOP: SETOUCHI

[ACCESS MAP](#)

Air travel and high-speed rail are the fastest and most convenient methods of going to Setouchi for visitors passing through Japanese gateway cities like Tokyo and Osaka. Travelers can then move around the region by train, bus, and ferry; the latter being the most scenic option amongst the three. Those who are on the active side can opt for popular inter-island routes that allow cyclists to take in spectacular views of the inland sea while pedaling from one island to another.



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OMISHIMA BRIDGE

PREFECTURES

Composed of seven picturesque prefectures that suit due to its mild climate, geographic layout, and abundance of feudal-era castles, delectable cuisine, contemporary



YAMAGUCHI

In the westernmost part of Honshu lies Yamaguchi, a coastal prefecture that played a key role in ending Japanese feudalism during the Meiji era. Apart from being blessed with over 900 miles of immaculate shoreline, Yamaguchi is home to tourist draws like the antique multi-arched Kintaikyo Bridge and the 123 torii gates of Motonosumi Inari Shrine. It's also the best and safest place to enjoy the masterfully prepared delicacy known as Fugu (puffer fish).

OKAYAMA

Dubbed as the 'Land of Sunshine', Okayama is a gorgeous subtropical destination that has plenty of attractions such as the magnificent Kōraku-en formal garden and the well-preserved Edo and Meiji era buildings and canals of Kurashiki Bikan Historical Quarter. Okayama is also renowned for numerous handicrafts such as traditional pottery, exquisite swords, and even high-quality western-style denim.



around Seto's emerald-blue waters, Setouchi is rightfully regarded as the 'Aegean Sea of the Orient' mainly because of stunning seascapes. With a wealth of attractions sprinkled throughout the archipelago — including art, rich history, and jaw-dropping vistas — there are many reasons to explore this relatively unknown region.



EHIME

Attracting keen cyclists and adventurous voyagers from all over the globe, the famed Shimanami Kaidō bike route goes through nine islands and connects Ehime with Hiroshima. It's one of the best ways to absorb the region's fantastic scenery while experiencing local culture and sampling abundant citrus fruits. Ehime is also known for Matsuyama's pilgrimage temples and for Dōgo Onsen, one of the oldest and most revered hot springs in Japan.

HYŌGO

Bordered by Kyoto, Osaka, and Okayama, Hyōgo is an easily accessible destination that offers plenty of attractions such as Himeji-jō — Japan's biggest and most-preserved feudal-era castle — and the relaxing onsens of Arima and Kinosaki. Kobe, the prefecture's cosmopolitan capital, was one of the country's first international ports. It's also the origin of the acclaimed wagyū variant called Kobe beef.

RED LIGHTHOUSE ON THE SETO INLAND SEA



HIROSHIMA

Bordered by Seto to the south and the Chūgoku Mountains in the northwest, Hiroshima is probably the most recognizable among the seven prefectures of the region. It is the home of two UNESCO World Heritage Sites — Genbaku Dome, one of the few remnants of Hiroshima that survived the atomic bombing in 1945; and Itsukushima Shrine in Miyajima, famous for its torii gate which appears to ‘float’ on water during high tide.

The charming port town of Onomichi nestles itself between the Seto Inland Sea and the many hills that define its landscape. One of the gateways of the Setouchi region, Onomichi itself is home to over 25 Buddhist temples that are linked together via the famous Temple Walk with various museums and other attractions along the way. From Onomichi, travelers can make the journey to Shikoku via ferry or by bike along the Shimanami Kaido route. Traversing 6 islands in the Seto Inland Sea, this cycling route allows visitors to enjoy breathtaking vistas and to visit quaint small towns along this ride.

HIROSHIMA SEA PASEO FERRY

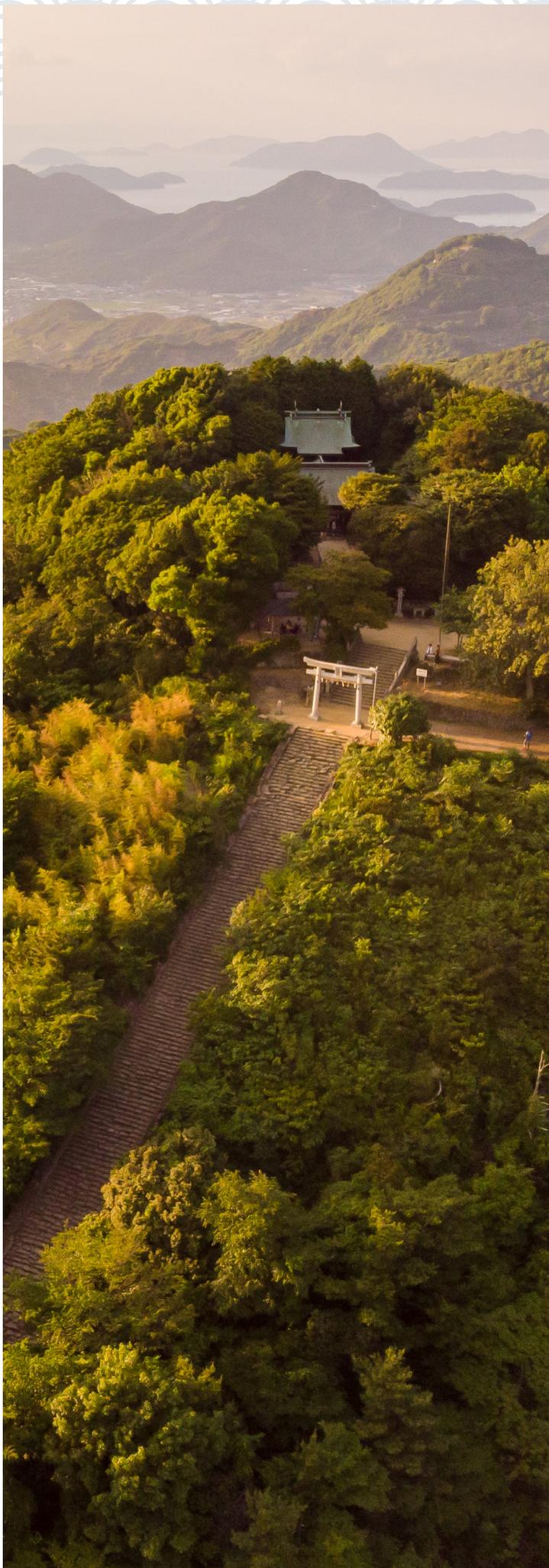
The high-end Sea Paseo luxury cruise ship takes travelers between Kure, Hiroshima, and Matsuyama, complete with accommodations like gazebos, comfortable seating, panoramic viewpoints, and food courts providing a tranquil way to experience the Seto Inland Sea.



TOKUSHIMA

Tokushima is a fine example of what ‘true Japan’ is like — verdant landscapes, culturally-rich locales, traditional lifestyles, and plenty of off-the-beaten-track vibes. The prefecture is the age-old starting point for the ‘Shikoku Pilgrimage’, an island-wide journey that covers 88 Buddhist temples spread across 745 miles. Tokushima is best known though for Awa Odori, a festival that attracts 1.3 million tourists, and for the mesmerizing Naruto whirlpools.

Linked with Honshu by the Akashi Kaikyo and Naruto Bridges, Tokushima is an easy trip from Osaka full of beautiful mountain scenery, the iconic Naruto whirlpools, and sweeping vistas of the sea. The further west in the prefecture, the more that old world Japan makes itself known. In the scenic Iya Valley, vine bridges span across rivers and canyons, thatched-roof houses sit perched on mountainsides, and the Iya River cuts a deep path through the mountains of Shikoku. Seemingly untouched by modernization, the Iya Valley’s expansive scenery is incredible regardless of season.



KAGAWA

Despite being the smallest prefecture in the country, Kagawa can hold its own against more popular Japanese destinations. Not only is it the birthplace of the celebrated and delightfully chewy Sanuki Udon, it's also the home of the scenic Kankakei Gorge and the well-manicured Ritsukin Garden. Kagawa's small islands, like Naoshima and Teshima, provide the setting for the Setouchi Triennale, one of the nation's most prestigious contemporary art festivals.

Kagawa is jam-packed with historic, cultural, and natural attractions. Enjoy the pristine beauty of the Ritsurin Garden, the surreal art that meshes nature and craft on Naoshima Island, or the untouched natural beauty of Shodoshima Island. Home to over 20 temples and the popular Kotohira-gu Shrine, Kagawa is an ideal destination for an island-hopping, cultural adventure.

The second largest island in the Seto Inland Sea, Shodoshima (whose name means "island of small beans") attracts visitors for its Mediterranean feel. As the first place in Japan to grow olives, its Mediterranean reputation is doubly earned through its plentiful beaches, resorts, rugged coasts, and mountainous interior. The Kankakei Gorge at the center of Shodoshima Island is one of Japan's most beautiful becoming especially gorgeous when the trees change color for autumn. The top of the gorge is accessible by cable car and views from the top are not to be missed. This warm island attracts visitors with its traditional Japanese ambience and spectacular beauty.

TRADITIONAL JAPANESE EXPERIENCES

SHRINES & TEMPLES

Setouchi has its fair share of iconic and must-visit Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. The most admired among these aged religious structures within the region is arguably Miyajima's Itsukushima Shrine, the UNESCO World Heritage Site that's celebrated for its 'floating' vermilion torii gate. Other notable examples include Motonosumi Inari Shrine and the multi-storied Rurikoji Temple — considered to be one of Japan's greatest pagodas.

GARDENS

A big part of Setouchi's charm lies in the equilibrium between the region's gentle weather, the stunning views of the inland sea, and the exquisite gardens and ancient structures that accentuate the lovely environment. Setouchi is home to Kōraku-en, one of the 'Three Great Gardens of Japan' and regarded as a prime example of Japanese landscape design. The expansive Ritsurin Garden is another example that's truly worth visiting.

RYOKAN

Ryokan — a traditional Japanese inn that typically features tatami-matted rooms, futon bedding, and inclusive meals — have existed since the 8th century AD. Staying in one is an ideal way to immerse oneself in Japanese culture. The oldest hotel in the world is a ryokan, which speaks volumes about its role in the country's history. Visitors have a wealth of options to choose from in Setouchi, like Miyajima's 165-year-old Iwaso Inn or the 151-year-old Yamatoya-Honten in Matsuyama.

ONSEN

The onsen — a traditional bathing facility built over natural hot springs, many of which have existed for centuries — is the Japanese equivalent of the western world's thermal spa. There are over 3,000 onsen scattered across the volcanic archipelago, and it's a cultural aspect that's deeply ingrained in Japanese society. Two of the nation's oldest and most popular, Dōgo Onsen and Arima Onsen, can be found in Setouchi.

YAMAGUCHI – MOTONOSUMI INARI SHRINE



奉納
豊原
月子

奉納
豊原
月子

奉納
豊原
月子

奉納
豊原
月子

FOOD & DRINK



TEMPURA

Influenced by fritter-cooking techniques introduced by the Portuguese during the 16th-century, Tempura has come a long way and is one of Japan's most recognizable dishes. One of the best places to savor these lightly battered deep-fried delights is by going to Tenkou Honten — an esteemed Hiroshima restaurant with two Michelin stars.



KOBE BEEF

Japanese wagyū has long been the pinnacle of what beef should feel and taste like — luxuriously tender and supremely palatable. Its marbled texture is legendary; the same goes for its stellar price tag. Hyōgo prefecture's Kobe beef is arguably the most globally recognizable among the Sandai Wagyū — the 'Three Big Beefs' of Japan.



SEAFOOD

The Seto Inland Sea has significantly defined the nature of Setouchi's cuisine since time immemorial. Thus, it is no surprise that the region is abundant with fresh seafood like puffer fish, mackerel, yellowtail, and bream. Hiroshima, for example, is Japan's top oyster-producing prefecture and is well known for the velvety texture and the distinct umami flavor of its high-quality oysters.

SAKE

Nihonshu, better known as sake, has been around for more than 2,000 years. Like many of Japan's cultural treasures, the acclaimed rice wine is intertwined with Japanese life and features heavily in age-old rituals and customs. Setouchi has the distinction of having two of the three major brewing sites in the country. Producing several of the nation's top-shelf sake, around 275 breweries are spread across Nada in Hyōgo and Saijo in Hiroshima.



KAISEKI

Although kaiseki can be regarded as Japan's answer to haute cuisine, there's so much more to this luxurious, meticulously prepared, and elegantly served multi-course meal. Kaiseki is a must-try culinary experience that provides a fascinating insight on the principles of respect and wholehearted hospitality that are so pervasive within Japanese culture.



OKONOMIYAKI

Okonomiyaki is a delightful savory pancake that contains various components and fixings in its batter such as cabbage, udon, pork, and even cheese. The dish is mainly associated with Osaka and Hiroshima, but is very popular throughout Japan. In Hiroshima, these ingredients are layered instead of mixed, and then topped with copious amounts of flavorful okonomiyaki sauce.

HIROSHIMA CITY SKYLINE



HIROSHIMA CITY BREAK



HIROSHIMA CASTLE - DETAILS >>

Originally built in the 1590s, Hiroshima Castle was unfortunately destroyed by the atomic bomb blast. Nicknamed the 'Carp Castle', it was reconstructed in 1958 and now serves as a museum focused on Hiroshima's pre-WWII history.



SHUKKEI-EN GARDEN - DETAILS >>

Shukkei-en — which roughly means 'shrunken-scenery garden' — dates back to 1620 and mimics a variety of scenic landscapes and natural formations.

MAZDA MUSEUM - DETAILS >>

Visitors enjoy a guided glimpse of the Hiroshima-based automobile giant's innovative history. Reservations are required and can be made online or by telephone.



PEACE MEMORIAL PARK & MUSEUM - DETAILS >>

In the center of Hiroshima lies its most prominent, moving, and profound tourist draw: Peace Memorial Park. The site — and everything within the grounds, including Genbaku Dome and the primary museum — is dedicated to the victims of the world’s first atomic bomb attack and stands as a poignant reminder of the horrors of nuclear war.



OUTSIDE THE CITY



KURASHIKI VILLAGES EXCURSION - DETAILS >>>

Kurashiki, located in the west side of Okayama Prefecture, was a bustling river port during Japan’s Edo period. Bikan Historical Quarter, the city’s feudal-era merchant district, continually attracts travelers who want to admire the 17th-century wooden storehouses lined along the picturesque canal while basking in the area’s authentic vibe.



NAOSHIMA ART ISLAND - DETAILS >>>

Despite its idyllic seascape and laidback rural atmosphere, Naoshima is an integral component to the region’s contemporary art scene. The island, which is populated with creations by eminent artists like Yayoi Kusama and Pritzker Architecture Prize-winner Tadao Ando, routinely serves as the main venue for the acclaimed Setouchi Triennale art festival.



OVERNIGHT IN MIYAJIMA



ITSUKUSHIMA TORII GATE

FLOATING TORII GATE - DETAILS >>>

In the northwest part of Hiroshima Bay lies Itsukushima, the island known to most visitors as Miyajima — which means ‘Shrine Island’ in Japanese. Among its multiple attractions, the area’s most popular tourist draw is the Itsukushima Shrine. During high tide, the water rises and ultimately covers the seabed underneath the complex. The vermilion shrine, and its renowned torii gate, appears to float atop the sea as result.

STAY OVERNIGHT - DETAILS >>>

Miyajima is home to several prominent historical structures, including the aforementioned UNESCO World Heritage Site of Itsukushima Shrine, which is why the island is best experienced by staying overnight. Travelers are bound to enjoy Miyajima’s romantic vibe and breathtaking scenery as they spend the night in one of the island’s excellent ryokan.

SECRETS OF THE INLAND SEA

KYOTO, HIROSHIMA & OKAYAMA

7 DAYS / 6 NIGHTS

Japan's Setouchi Region — a sprawling scenic area that flanks the Seto Inland Sea — is noted for its shrines, temples, historic palaces, beautiful gardens, and astonishingly diverse cuisine. This experience provides a broad sampling of these cultural highlights, which includes tours of Miyajima and Tomonoura. It's time for travelers to discover what many of those already in the know consider as the country's 'best-kept secret'.



FEATURED INCLUSIONS:

- 2 Nights Kyoto, Hiroshima & Okayama
- Private Arrival & Departure Transfers
- Private Classic Kyoto Tour
- Private Hiroshima & Miyajima Tour
- Private Okayama Tour
- Private Tomonoura Tour
- Green Class Rail Between Cities
- Daily Breakfast

VIEW EXPERIENCE



TATARA BRIDGE

WONDERS OF SHIMANAMI KAIDO

ONOMICHI, SHIMANAMI KAIDO & MATSUYAMA

4 DAYS / 3 NIGHTS

Experience Japan with an entirely different perspective as you take this scenic self-guided cycle tour through several islands in the Seto Island Sea. The 44-mile long Setouchi Shimanami Kaido includes Japan's first strait-traversing cycling road, and is well known as a "cyclist's paradise." Your tour combines unique culture, incredible landscape, great food, and the hospitality of traditional ryokans. And at the end, you'll have the opportunity to relax your body in Japan's oldest bath house.

FEATURED INCLUSIONS:

- 1 Night Onomichi, Shimanami Kaido & Matsuyama
- Private Evening Onomichi Foodie Tour via Public Transportation
- Standard Train Tickets Imabari to Matsuyama
- 2-Day Road Bike Reservation
- 2 Dinners
- Daily Breakfast

* This package is a self-guided package, so there will be no guide to accommodate you during your stay.

SHIMANAMI KAIDO CYCLING ROUTE

[VIEW EXPERIENCE](#)





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