

MOMENTS

by On the Road Experiences

on the road

The Soul of Japan: Kyushu (九州) and Shikoku (四國) -
(12 Days)

Welcome!

In 1984, a friend said to me “I’ve decided to take Japanese lessons. Want to join me?” At that time I knew nothing about Asia, let alone about Japan. Why I agreed to join the classes remains a mystery. But the consequences of this decision have been far-reaching. I studied Japanese for three years, spent a year living in Japan, and have lived in Asia since 1993.

Despite my enthusiastic study of the Japanese language, with every step forward my understanding of Japan’s culture seemed to recede two steps. The more I knew, the more I realised how little I understood. Over the years, my interests shifted, but – while Japan dropped out of my day-to-day activities – my sense of wonder about Japan’s culture remained as strong as ever.

On the Road’s central themes are “Back Roads” and “Hidden Gems”. With each journey, we hope to pull back (even if only partway) the veil that covers the traditions, habits, achievements and struggles of the people living in the regions we take you to.

For years, I played with the idea of creating an itinerary in Japan and – at last – we’ve decided to give it a try. What follows, our first Japan itinerary, is our way of offering a unique glimpse of Japanese culture.

In our research we discovered off-the-beaten-path scenic beauty, visited masterful artisans and witnessed time-honoured tradition – in addition, of course, to the wonderful roads, delightful cuisine and beautiful accommodation en route.

The places this itinerary runs through – the more sparsely populated regions of Kyushu (九州) and Shikoku (四國) – are a treasure trove of hidden gems best accessed and experienced by car. We therefore take great pleasure in introducing this new journey. Please turn the page and find out what we’ve come to love so much...

Yours truly,



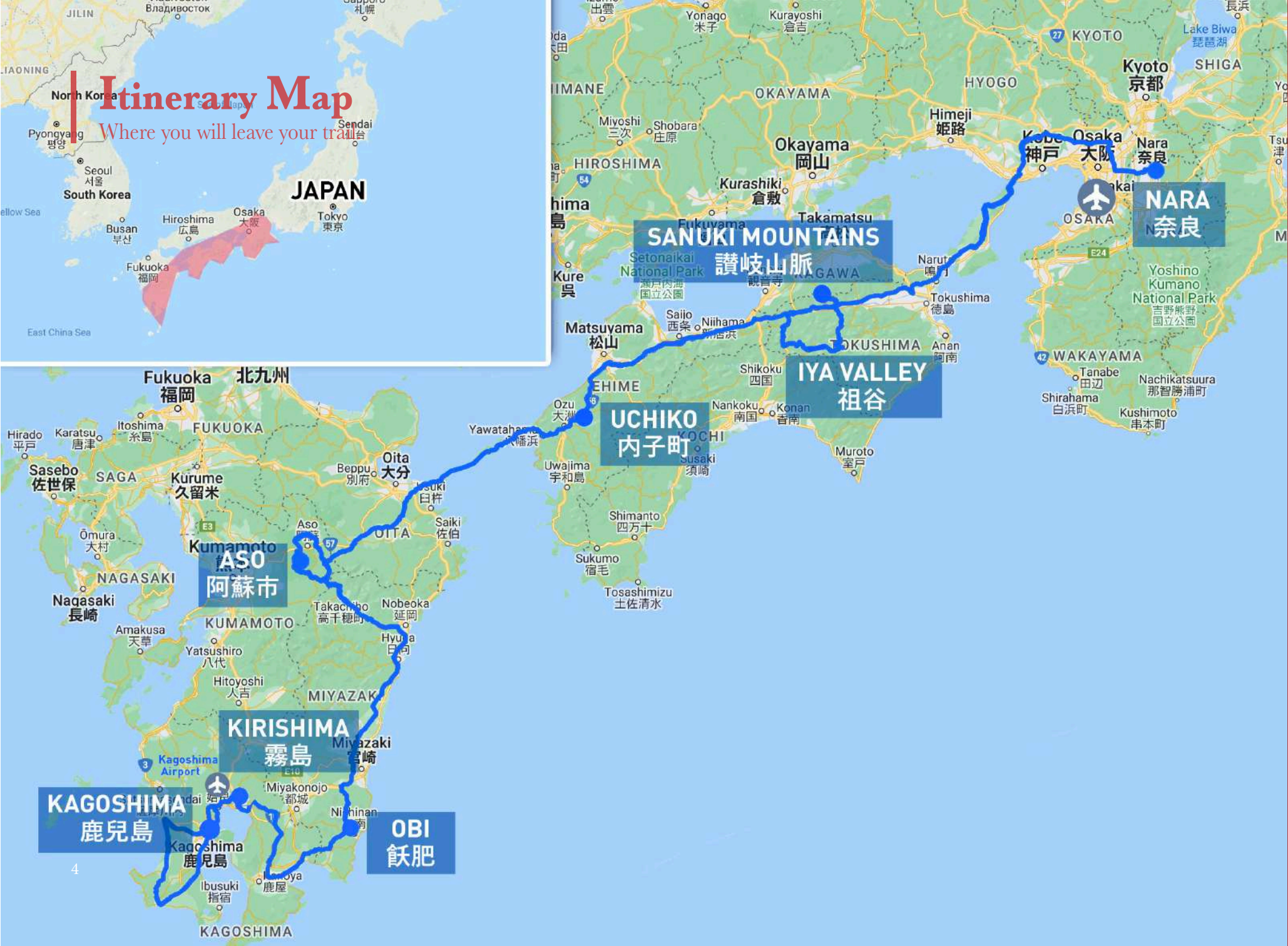
Peter Schindler



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1 Day by Day

- Day1

Arrival in Kagoshima (鹿児島) – Start the journey in Kagoshima with a view of the majestic Sakurajima
- Day2

In & around Kagoshima (鹿児島) – Explore the Satsuma Peninsula (薩摩半島) and discover Kagoshima’s rich history and artisanal culture
- Day3

Kagoshima (鹿児島) to Obi (飫肥) – Discover the hidden gems of Nichinan (日南)
- Day4

Obi (飫肥) to Aso (阿蘇市) – Drive north through Miyazaki - towards the majestic volcanic lands of central Kyushu (九州)
- Day5

In and around Aso (阿蘇市) – Mount Aso – Explore the Aso-Kuju National Park, the land and its people
- Day6

Ferry across to Shikoku Island (四國) – Drive the narrowest peninsula in Japan and onward to your relaxing resort by a lake
- Day7

In and around Uchiko (内子町) – A day of relaxation - or, explore Uchiko, a little-known town dating from the Edo period, nestled in the mountains south of Matsuyama (松山)
- Day 8

Sanuki Mountains (讃岐山脈) – A leisurely morning before driving to your mountain lodge in Kotonami
- Day9

Deep into Iya Valley (祖谷) – Discover a remote valley and the mountains of Shikoku (四國)
- Day10

Iya Valley (祖谷) to Nara (奈良) – Drive across Awaji Island (淡路島) to the ancient capital of Nara (奈良)
- Day11

In and around Nara (奈良) – Experience Nara’s historic town, temples and traditions
- Day12

Farewell – Fly home, or extend your stay in Nara (奈良) or Kyoto (京都)

Japan – Roads less travelled.

Mono no aware and shokunin (職人)

Wistful moments and masterful artisans

Japan is an infinitely fascinating country, but it can be challenging to explore in depth, to seek out hidden gems and comprehend their significance.

This journey will take you through the two smaller of Japan’s four main islands – Kyushu (九州) and Shikoku (四國). From the comfort of your car, you will drive through and experience

- Japan’s rich and varied natural landscape, from mountains, seas and lakes to dramatic volcanoes, hot springs and gorges
- Stay in characterful and comfortable accommodation, ranging from quaint ryokan (旅館) and former samurai residences to boutique inns and lodges, and 5-star luxury hotels
- Visit small villages where time seems to have stood still for centuries
- Enjoy memorable encounters with local people who live isolated lives in harmony with nature; hear their life stories and be cradled by their hospitality

Throughout the journey, you will be moved by the spirit of “mono no aware” (物の哀れ/物哀), a Japanese term referring to the bittersweet awareness that each moment is transient. Accepting that this transience is the reality of life encourages greater sensitivity to the beauty of each moment.

There is also much beauty to be found in each meeting with a master craftsman (shokunin, 職人) on this journey, in observing their skill, focus and pursuit of perfection. Most of these artisans are continuing family traditions, their skill honed by generations. Be immersed in the moment as they share the spirit of their art.

The term shokunin literally means “craftsman”, but really it denotes “mastery” and originates from the days of the samurai. From the moment they woke, a samurai would dedicate himself to attaining perfection in whatever activity he chose to pursue. of a classic overland journey without any of the logistical headaches that typically accompany such journeys...



Japan's Real Hidden Gems: Her people, their traditions & culture



In Aso (阿蘇市)

- Takachiho (高千穂) – a chef who shares the best of the delicious local beef
- Kumamoto (熊本) – a university professor & photographer



NARA 奈良

In Awaji Island (淡路島) & Nara (奈良)

- Awaji Island (淡路島) – meet a family who runs a tiny restaurant specializing only in grilled sea eels
- Nara (奈良) – meet a passionate and dedicated *washi* paper *shokunin*

AWAJI ISLAND 淡路島

IYA VALLEY 祖谷

In the Iya Valley (祖谷)

- Ochiai (落合町) – visit a very friendly couple who are active in their community
- Nagoro (名頃) – meet a lady who has put her tiny village on the map through a creative idea and her passion

UCHIKO 内子町

In Uchiko (内子町)

- Uchiko (内子町) – meet a well-respected couple very active in the their township & community

ASO 阿蘇市

KIRISHIMA 霧島

KAGOSHIMA 鹿兒島

OBI 飫肥

In Kagoshima (鹿兒島), Kirishima (霧島) & Obi (飫肥)

- Sengan-en (仙巖園) – a Komadzu family member
- Makurazaki (枕崎市) – a family who have made smoked bonito for three generations
- Obi (飫肥市) – the Secretary General of the Obi preservation initiatives; lunch in a unique family-run restaurant



Please note: The people mentioned here are representative of the people and families you will meet on this trip. Meeting *en route* are always subject to our being able to arrange early confirmation in a respectful way. Some of these individuals are friends of *On the Road Experiences* with other full-time professions.



Journey of Discovery

Back Roads. Hidden Gems.

“

ON YOUR FIRST DAY,
THE GENTLY PUFFING
SAKURAJIMA (櫻島)
GREETES YOU...”

ACROSS THE KAGOSHIMA
(鹿児島) BAY SITS JAPAN'S
MOST ACTIVE VOLCANO



“

DISCOVER THE SKILL
THAT GOES INTO
MAKING DELICATE AND
RICHLY COLOURED
SATSUMA KIRIKO
(薩摩切子) GLASSWARE...”

KAGOSHIMA (鹿児島)



“
LUNCH...
WITH A VIEW OF
SAKURAJIMA (櫻島)...”

KAGOSHIMA (鹿児島)



“

SANDALS...
FOR THOSE WITH
SMALL DELICATE
STEPS...”

KAGOSHIMA (鹿児島)



“

TAKE A RIDE IN A
TEA HARVESTER AND
EXPERIENCE FIRST-
HAND THE FERTILE
SOIL, FRESH AIR
AND MILD CLIMATE
THAT CREATE THIS
FRAGRANT TEA...”

MINAMIKYŪSHŪ
(南九州)



“
DISCOVER THE
ORIGINS OF
UMAMI (鮮味), THE
FIFTH FLAVOUR
DIMENSION –
MAKING OF *DASHI*...”

A FISHING VILLAGE IN
MAKURAZAKI (枕崎市)



“

OBI (飫肥),
AN EDO PERIOD
TOWN WHERE TIME
SEEMS TO HAVE
STOOD STILL...”

OBI (飫肥)



“

ORNATE ROOFED
GATES AND STONE
WALLS; ALL SIGNS OF
A BUKE YASHIKI
(武家屋敷), OR
SAMURAI RESIDENCE,
CAREFULLY PRESERVED
FOR GENERATIONS...”

OBI (飫肥)



“

STROLL IN THE
SHADE OF OBI'S
ANCIENT CEDAR
TREES...”

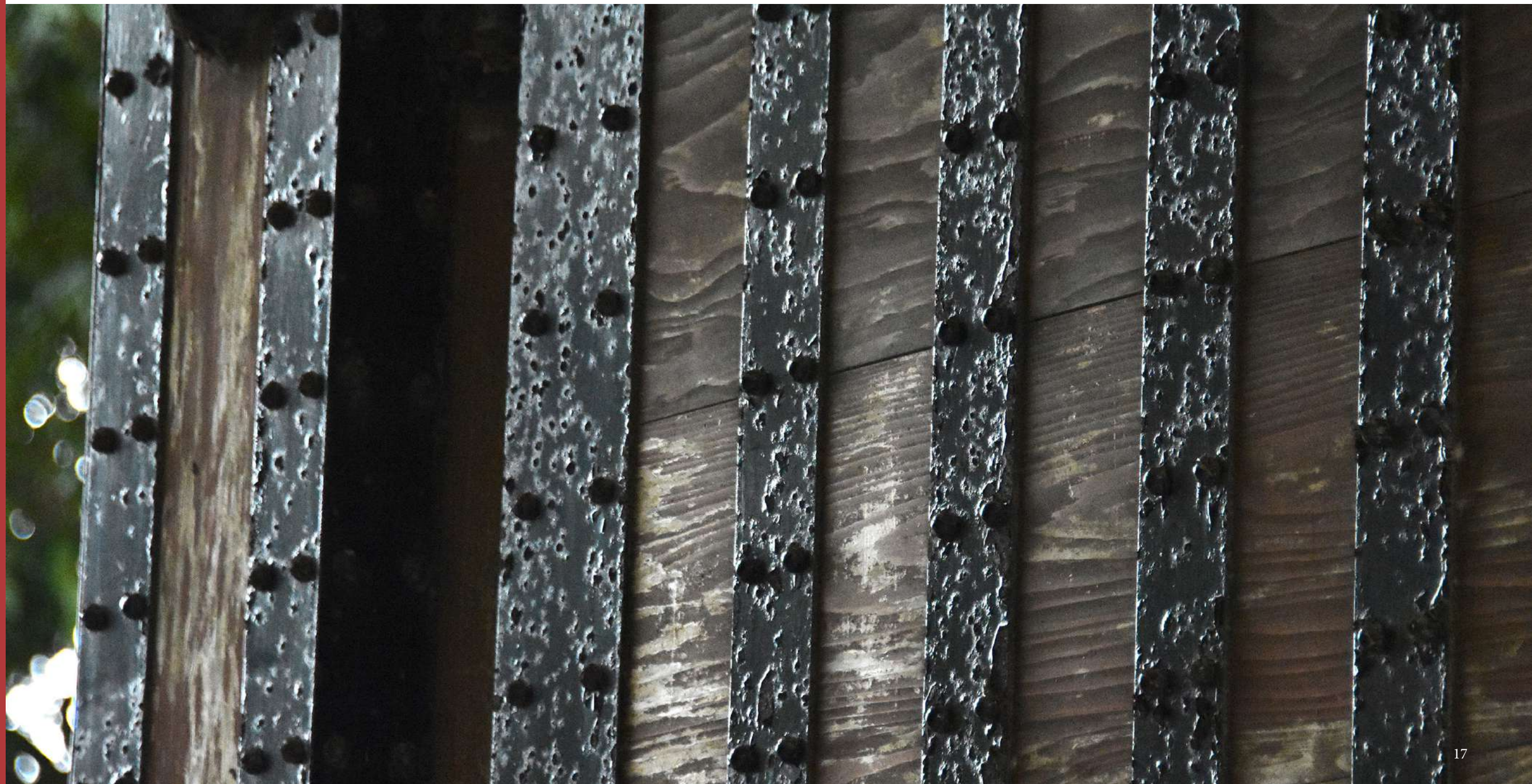
OBI (飫肥)



“

FIND BEAUTY AND
PRECISION IN THE
DETAILS...
BUILT OVER 400
YEARS AGO...”

OBI (飫肥)



“

...AND WATCH KOI
CARP (錦鯉) SWIM
HAPPILY IN THE
STREAMS THAT RUN
ALONGSIDE OBI'S
QUIET STREETS...”

OBI (飫肥)



“

LUNCH ON THE BEST
CHICKEN YAKITORI
(焼鳥) THAT YOU'LL
EVER TASTE,
PREPARED TO A
SECRET RECIPE
IN THIS FAMILY
RESTAURANT...”

IN THE WOODS
OF MIYAZAKI
PREFECTURE (宮崎縣)



“

VOLCANIC TERRAIN...
RICH AND BEAUTIFUL...
AS YOU DRIVE
NORTH TOWARDS
ASO (阿蘇市)...”

ASO (阿蘇市)



“

SOAK UP THE
SCENERY AS YOU
EXPLORE ONE
OF THE LARGEST
CALDERAS IN
THE WORLD...”

THE FIVE CENTRAL
PEAKS INSIDE MOUNT
ASO'S (阿蘇山) VAST
CALDERA



“

A MOMENT OF AWE...
MOUNT ASO (阿蘇山)
CLOSE UP..”

NAKADAKE PEAK
(中岳) WITHIN THE
MOUNT ASO (阿蘇山)
CALDERA



“

ARRIVE IN SHIKOKU
(四國) BY FERRY AND
DRIVE ALONG THE
SLENDER SADAMISAKI
PENINSULA
(佐田岬半島)...”

SADAMISAKI PENINSULA,
SHIKOKU ISLAND
(佐田岬半島, 四國)



“

A LITTLE REST...
AT A JAPANESE
CAFE...”

UCHIKO (内子町)



“

UCHIKO (内子町):
QUAINT, QUIET AND
STEEPED IN
SUBTLE TRADITION
AND CULTURE...”

UCHIKO (内子町)



“

UCHIKO (内子町)...
THE STREETS
THEMSELVES
WILL DRAW YOUR
CURIOSITY...”

UCHIKO (内子町)



“

WHO EVER
THOUGHT TWO
UMBRELLAS WOULD
BE SO WELCOMING...”

UCHIKO (内子町)



“

OBSERVE A
TRADITIONAL
CANDLE SHOKUNIN
(職人) AT WORK...”

UCHIKO (内子町)



“

VISIT THE HOME OF
A FRIENDLY COUPLE
WHO ARE ACTIVE IN
THE UCHIKO (内子町)
COMMUNITY...”

UCHIKO (内子町)



“

BRIDGES MADE OF
VINES SPAN CLEAR
MOUNTAIN
STREAMS - DARE YOU
TRY ONE?”

IYA VALLEY (祖谷)



“

MEET A LOVELY
COUPLE WHO
HAVE MADE THEIR
HOME IN THIS
BEAUTIFUL PLACE -
AND A FEW QUIETER
RESIDENTS...”

OCHIAI VILLAGE,
IYA VALLEY
(落合集落, 祖谷)



“

MEET THESE
RESIDENTS ENJOYING
THE SUN IN THE
VALLEY...”

IYA VALLEY (祖谷)



“

LEAVE SHIKOKU
(四國), AND CROSS
AWAJI ISLAND (淡路島)
TO NARA (奈良)...”

NAROTO SUSPENSION
BRIDGE (大鳴門橋) AND
ITS WHIRLPOOLS



“

A LUNCH OF FRESH
ANAGO (CONGER EEL,
穴子), GRILLED OVER
CHARCOAL ON AWAJI
ISLAND IS SURE TO
HIT THE SPOT...”

AWAJI ISLAND (淡路島)



“

EXPLORE THE
ANCIENT CAPITAL
NARA (奈良)...
CITY OF TEMPLES
AND TRADITION...”

A SHOP IN NARA (奈良)



“

EXPLORE A SHRINE
WITH MANY LANTERNS
INCLUDING
MOSS-COVERED
STONE ONES...”

KASUGA TAISHA
SHRINE, NARA
(春日大社, 奈良)



“

WHERE EVEN
YOUNG DEER...
FIND MEANING IN ITS
GROUNDS...”

A SHRINE IN NARA
(奈良)



“

APPRECIATE THE
BEAUTY OF THE
DELICATE WASHI
PAPER (和紙)
PRODUCED BY THIS
6TH-GENERATION
SHOKUNIN (職人)...”

NARA PREFECTURE
(奈良縣)



“

YOUR LAST CHANCE
TO BE CHARMED IN
NARA'S TRADITIONAL
MERCHANT
DISTRICT...”

NARA (奈良)



“

OR...
STEAL A QUIET
MOMENT AWAY FROM
THE CROWDS...”

NARA (奈良)



“

AS YOUR JOURNEY
COMES TO AN END,
TAKE A MOMENT
TO APPRECIATE THE
POIGNANCY OF
MONO NO AWARE
(物の哀れ/物哀)
AND THE BEAUTY OF
EACH WISTFUL
MOMENT...”





Accommodation

Immerse yourself in luxury stays

A historic luxury hotel in Kagoshima



An excellent ryokan in Krishima



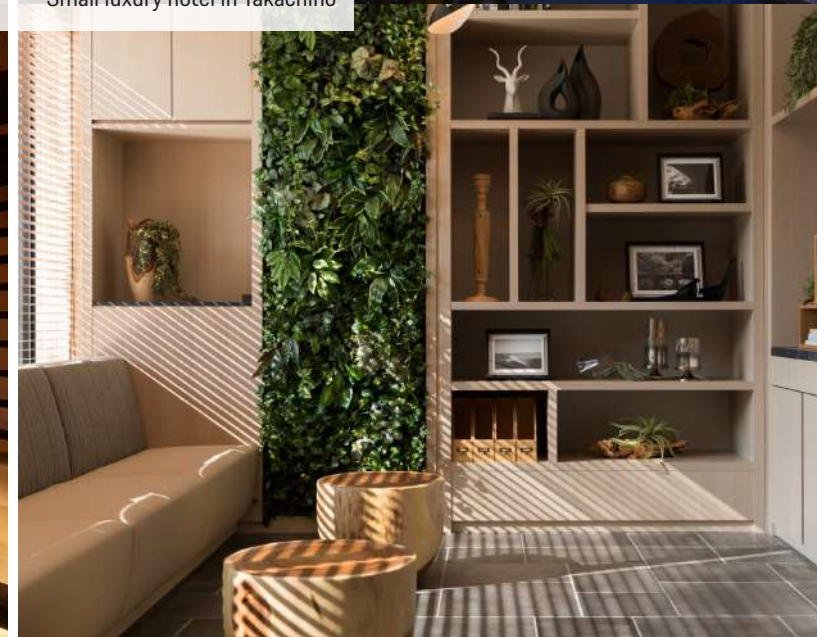
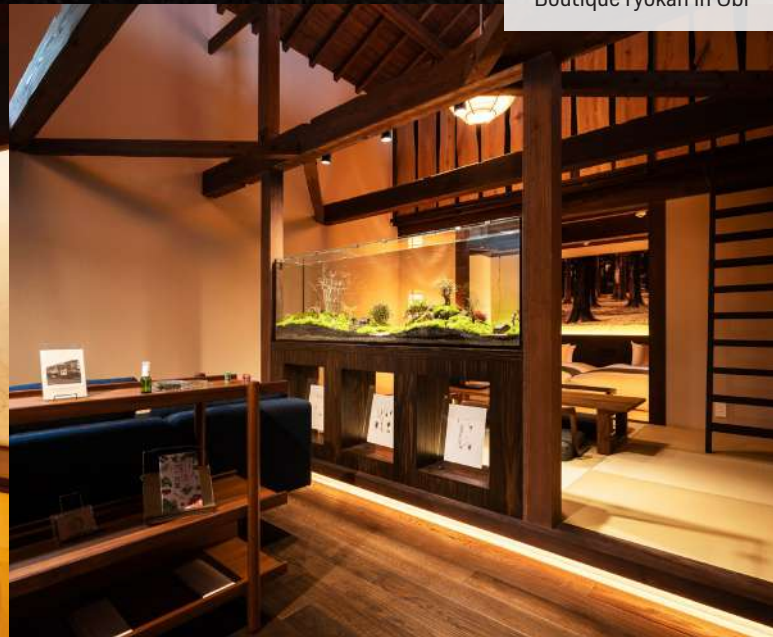
Immerse yourself in luxury stays

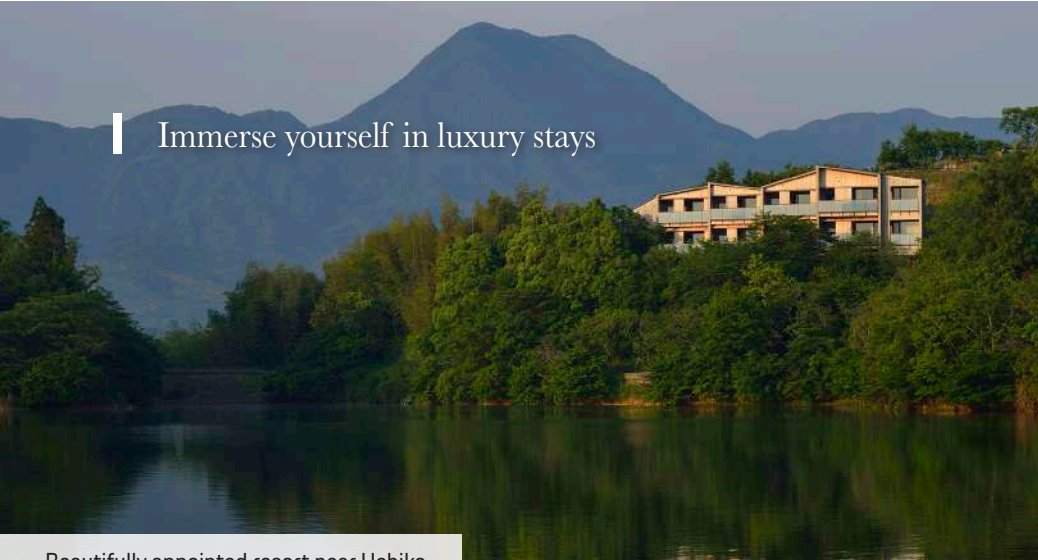


Boutique ryokan in Obi



Small luxury hotel in Takachiho





Immerse yourself in luxury stays

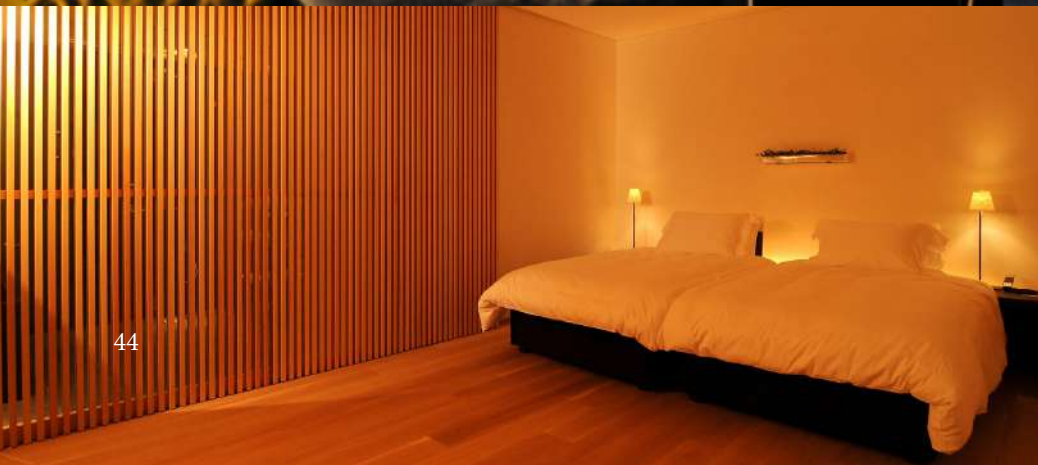
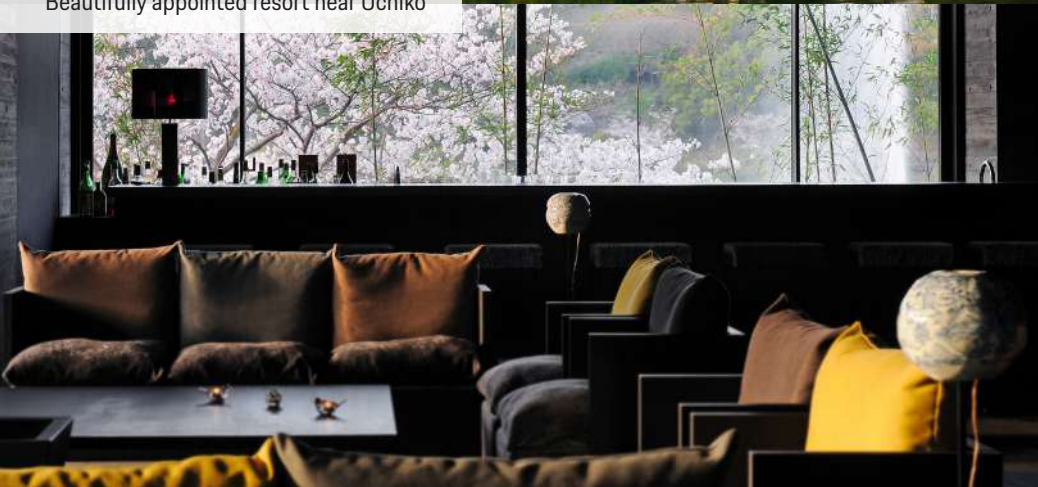
Beautifully appointed resort near Uchiko



A small mountain lodge in Kotonami



Contemporary boutique hotel in Nara

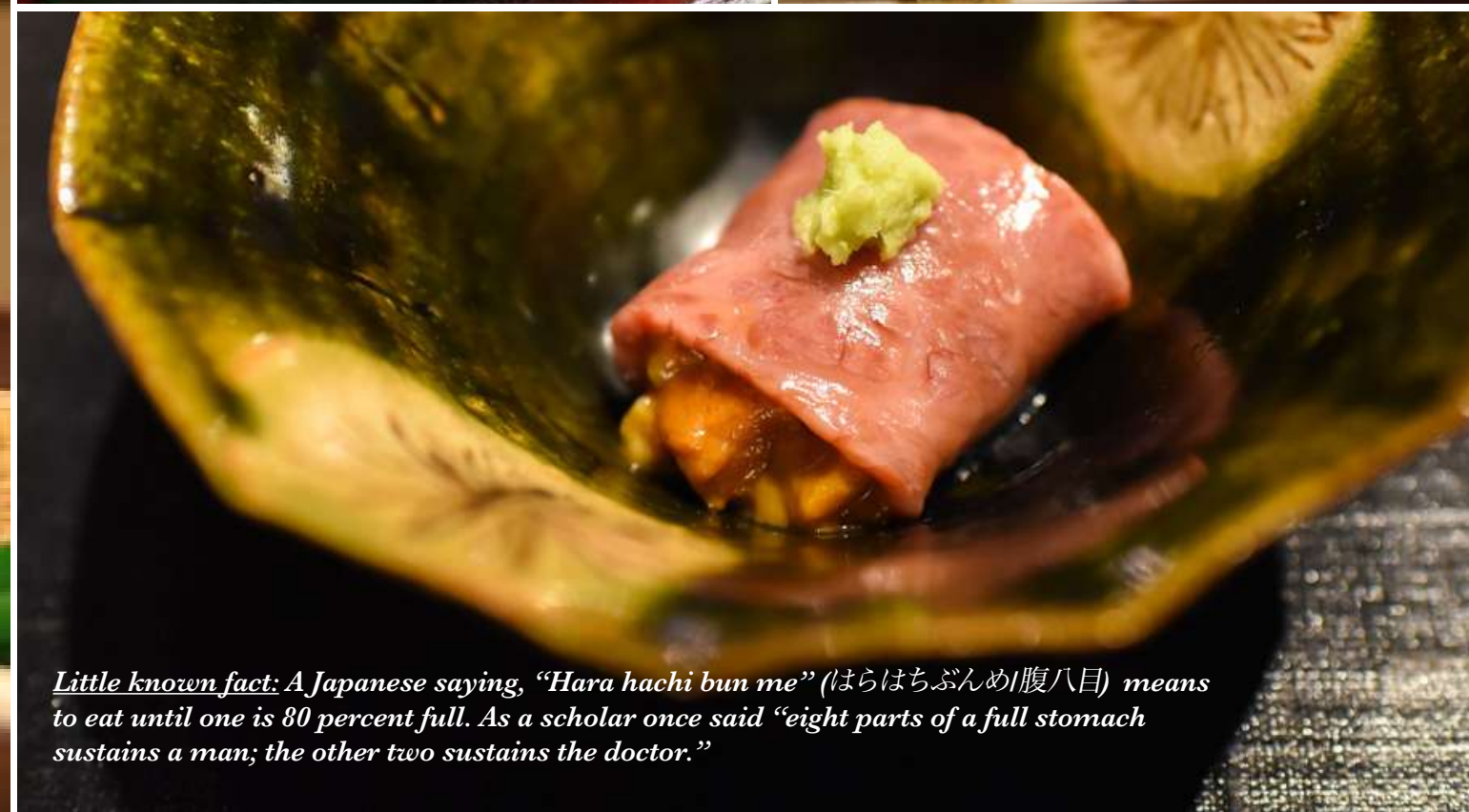


Culinary Discovery

Travel and fine food go together

While this itinerary is not specifically a food-themed journey, we do believe that understanding more about the Japanese approach to food will enrich your experience.

Have you ever sat in a sushi bar in Japan and observed how slowly the Japanese consume their food? Punctuated by conversation and sips of beer or sake, diners savour what the chef places in front of them even before taking a bite.



Little known fact: A Japanese saying, “Hara hachi bun me” (はらはちぶんめ/腹八目) means to eat until one is 80 percent full. As a scholar once said “eight parts of a full stomach sustains a man; the other two sustains the doctor.”

Travel and fine food go together

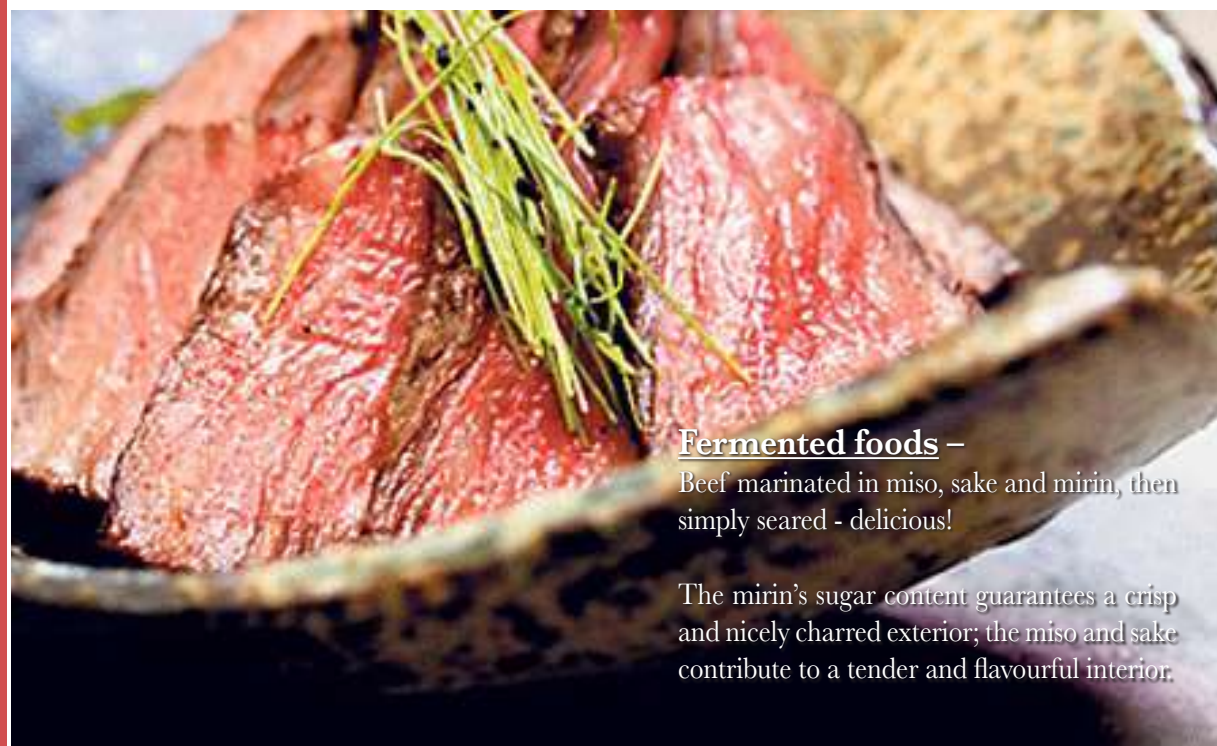
Japanese cuisine is both **SIMPLE and REFINED**. Many of us are already fans of everyday Japanese dishes from sushi and sashimi to light and crispy tempura.

On this trip, you will discover the essence of Japanese flavours and gain an understanding that will deepen your appreciation of Japanese cuisine long after your holiday ends. While there are regional and local differences in usage of seasonings – **DISCOVER** the subtle ways that umami (鮮味) and **fermented foods** are layered thoughtfully into each dish.



Umami (鮮味) –

Smoked bonito fish, freshly shredded over a dish or added to a savoury dashi stock, adds both umami and smokiness to a dish, no matter how simple.



Fermented foods –

Beef marinated in miso, sake and mirin, then simply seared - delicious!

The mirin's sugar content guarantees a crisp and nicely charred exterior; the miso and sake contribute to a tender and flavourful interior.

The Basic – Japanese Rice

The Japanese pursuit of perfection is most prominent in their appreciation of a simple bowl of rice. Every grain perfect. Whole yet sticky. Firm yet soft inside, perfectly toothsome.

Topped with a single pickled plum, an appetite inducer to the meal.

The Hinomaru bento (日の丸弁当/日本国旗便當) - a bed of plain white rice, topped with a single umeboshi plum (梅干) in the middle - is designed to resemble the Japanese flag, and wets the appetite for a meal.



Fermented foods –

Homemade miso, a dip with the freshest of vegetables.





DAY 1

START THE JOURNEY WITH A SHORT DRIVE TO KAGOSHIMA, SETTLE INTO YOUR ROOM WITH A VIEW OF THE MAJESTIC SAKURAJIMA

Your journey will begin in Kagoshima (鹿児島). We suggest you aim to arrive in Kagoshima before 2pm.

Weather permitting, the Sakurajima Volcano (櫻島火山), Japan's most active, can be seen across the bay, puffing gently away. Enjoy views of Sakurajima (櫻島) from your hotel room perched at a hill top above Kagoshima.

Over the next 12 days, free your mind of everything

you've grown up with, just so that you may seize the opportunity to totally immerse yourself and appreciate Japan through experiences that few get the opportunity to.

Starting with Dinner tonight - some of the freshest fish in Kagoshima prefecture!

You will stay in Kagoshima for one night.

Details

Driving Distance & Duration*

Distance: 0 km

Duration: No driving

Hotel

A historic luxury hotel in Kagoshima (*****)

**All driving distances & durations are approximate*



DAY 2
EXPLORE THE SATSUMA PENINSULA (薩摩半島) AND DISCOVER KAGOSHIMA'S (鹿児島) RICH HISTORY AND ARTISANAL CULTURE

[OPTIONAL: Early morning visit to local fish market, with breakfast at the market]

Today will be a day of discovery of the beautiful and varied landscape of Satsuma Peninsula, named after the former Satsuma feudal domain.

Start your morning through the mountainous terrain of the Satsuma Peninsula, passing lush tea plantations. And at the very south of the peninsula, discover the fishing village of Makurazaki (枕崎市) and learn about the origins of the fifth taste, umami (鮮味), a Japanese term usually translated in English as “savoriness” - though you would be justified in thinking of it simply as “yumminess”!

You will then drive north towards Kagoshima (鹿児島) Bay.

Lunch will be in a private room overlooking Sakurajima (櫻島).

After lunch, take a trip back in time to discover the Peninsula’s important role in Japanese history. We will visit a few artisans in their workshops, and take time to learn about their traditions and time-honoured skills.

Tonight, you will stay in a boutique ryokan that is luxury defined in local Japanese terms. Your room will have a private onsen, should you decide on a relaxing soak before dinner.



Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 160 km

Duration: 4 hours

Hotel

An excellent ryokan in Kirishima, Kagoshima prefecture (****)





DAY 3
DISCOVER THE HIDDEN GEMS OF
NICHINAN(日南市)

This morning, you will leave Kagoshima Prefecture and enjoy an easy drive to Obi (飫肥) town in Miyazaki Prefecture (宮崎縣).

In Obi town (飫肥), you will meet the town’s mayor, who will share stories from Obi’s long history while you walk the town’s Edo-period (江戸時代, 1603-1868) streets. In the past, Obi was home to several samurai (武家) clans, and their impressive homes are regular landmarks around the town.

Lunch will be in a small restaurant tucked so far into the woods that there is no mobile signal available. Please make and finish your calls before you arrive!

In this tiny family-run restaurant, the father makes his own charcoal from the bamboo that grows nearby.

This type of charcoal burns hotter and for longer than most other kinds.

Each bite of the yakitori chicken (焼鳥) served here is crisp, tender

and delicately scented with bamboo smoke. In fact the taste is so delicious that you may never see yakitori chicken in the same way again!

Dinner will be at the home of Chef Kuroki (黒木) and his lovely wife.

You will stay in Obi for one night.



Details

Day 3
Driving Distance & Duration
Distance: 120 km
Duration: 2.5 hours

Hotel
Boutique ryokan in Obi (****)

DAY 4
DRIVE NORTH THROUGH MIYAZAKI -
TOWARDS THE MAJESTIC VOLCANIC LANDS
OF CENTRAL KYUSHU (九州)

Today is a day of driving with a few artisanal pit-stops along the way.

You will drive up the eastern part of Kyushu, towards Kumamoto Prefecture (熊本縣), home to the world’s largest caldera, a plateau formed from volcanic eruptions some 400,000 years ago. The Aso caldera stretches 25km north- south and 18km east-west. Today there is only one active volcano in the region, Mount Nakadake (中岳). Tomorrow will be a rare opportunity for a day in this volcanic region where the earth is stable enough to cultivate land, build highways and lay railroads!

On the way, we will stop at an orchard for refreshments with the owner Ogata-san

and his lovely wife. Then, drive onwards to lunch, a café serving an interesting Japanese interpretation of western lunch.

After lunch, visit the only sake distillery of Takachiho. You will be greeted by the passionate owner and master brewer, Kadota-san.

In the mid-afternoon, drive to your hotel in Takachiho. Takachiho (高千穂) is well-known for gorge formations of Mount Aso (阿蘇山) lava which over time eroded to to create 80~100m high cliffs of volcanic basalt columns.

You will stay in Takachiho for the next two nights.

Details

Day 4
Driving Distance & Duration
Distance: 210 km
Duration: 4.5 hours

Hotel
Small luxury hotel in Takachiho (****)



DAY 5
ASO (阿蘇) – EXPLORE THE ASO-KUJU NATIONAL PARK, THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

You will spend today exploring one of the largest volcanic calderas in the world. The Mount Aso (阿蘇山) caldera was formed by millennia of volcanic activity. Today, the caldera’s outer rim encloses a fertile plain, a central cone of five smaller volcanoes, as well as Aso City and several local townships.

We will start the morning by exploring the southern rim of the caldera and enjoying the views from there, before continuing to the sole remaining active volcano in the crater of Mount Nakadake (中岳山).

In the afternoon, we will explore the amazing landscape of the caldera’s southern flanks, and learning about how local people live amidst this geologically dynamic landscape.

Dinner tonight will be a special kaiseki meal (懷石料理) a 5-minute stroll from your hotel.

Enjoy an early slumber in this very comfortable room - ready for an early start tomorrow!

Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 170 km

Duration: 4.5 hours

Hotel

Small luxury hotel in Takachiho
(****)





DAY 6
DRIVE THE NARROWEST PENINSULA IN JAPAN AND ONWARD TO
YOUR RELAXING RESORT BY A LAKE

Today requires an early start to catch the Saganoseki (佐賀關) ferry to Shikoku (四國).

On a fine day, the ferry ride across the Bungo Channel is scenic, and you may sight seabirds and, occasionally, dolphins. It is also one of the best fishing areas in Japan. Upon arriving on Shikoku, enjoy the drive along the slender Sadamisaki Peninsula (佐田岬半島).

Depending on the time available, either today or tomorrow, we will visit the home of a friendly couple and learn about

their hometown of Uchiko as well as the active life they live. This will be a nice introduction to tomorrow - when you will explore Uchiko town itself.

You will stay near Uchiko for two nights.

Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 270 km

Duration: 5 hours

Hotel

Beautifully appointed resort near Uchiko [*****]



DAY 7
**A DAY OF RELAXATION - OR, EXPLORE UCHIKO, A LITTLE-
KNOWN TOWN DATING FROM THE EDO PERIOD, NESTLED IN
THE MOUNTAINS SOUTH OF MATSUYAMA (松山)**

Today will be an easy day to explore the well-preserved town of Uchiko (内子町). You will meet some locals who will take you through their village, sharing stories as you go.

Uchiko’s many merchant townhouses date from the Edo period (江戸時代), each with its own rich history.

Lunch will be at a restaurant which is a favourite amongst those that live here.

After lunch, stroll the streets at your leisure, maybe pick up a few items from

the quaint stores along the way.

The rest of the afternoon and early evening is free.

Dinner this evening will be at your hotel, with freshest produce from their garden.



Details

Driving Distance & Duration
Distance: 95 km
Duration: 2 hours

Hotel
Beautifully appointed resort near Uchiko {*****}

53

DAY 8
A LEISURELY MORNING BEFORE DRIVING TO YOUR MOUNTAIN LODGE IN KOTONAMI

This morning, relax at your hotel and enjoy a late breakfast. Today will be a short and easy drive to Kagawa mountains. Along the way, we will make rest-stops at small local places that offer service from the heart.

Enjoy an easy drive to the Kagawa (香川) mountains where a lovely mountain lodge in Kotonami (琴南) will be your base for the next two nights.

Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 200 km

Duration: 3.5 hours

Hotel

A small mountain lodge in Kotonami (****)

DAY 9
DISCOVER A REMOTE VALLEY AND THE MOUNTAINS OF SHIKOKU (四國)

Today, you will set out early for a day of discovery in Shikoku’s Iya Valley (祖谷村). If there ever was a place to ‘get away from it all’ in Japan, this might just be it!

Historically known as a place to hide, the depths of the Iya Valley were inaccessible by road until the middle

of the 20th century! Most of this valley and surrounding mountains still remains remote, unspoiled, and traditional.

You will drive into and through Oku-Iya (奥祖谷) which means ‘deep Iya’ and other less-visited mountainside hamlets that will give you a glimpse



of a way of life that has vanished elsewhere in Japan.

The people of Oku-Iya have developed their own sources of nutrition as alternatives to the typical Japanese staples of rice and seafood.

Visit a soba-making Atelier and watch your noodles being hand made from scratch, before sitting down for a lunch prepared by her from her garden, and whatever is seasonally available from this mountainous region.

After lunch, drive a short distance to meet a lady who returned from city life to save her little hamlet from being totally deserted.

Your route will take you through a dramatic, thickly wooded valley, where the landscape is completed by numerous gorges, waterfalls and thatched mountain huts.

Dinner will be in your hotel.



Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 180 km

Duration: 5 hours

Hotel

A small mountain lodge in Kotonami (****)



DAY 9
DRIVE ACROSS AWAJI ISLAND (淡路島)
TO THE ANCIENT CAPITAL OF NARA (奈良)

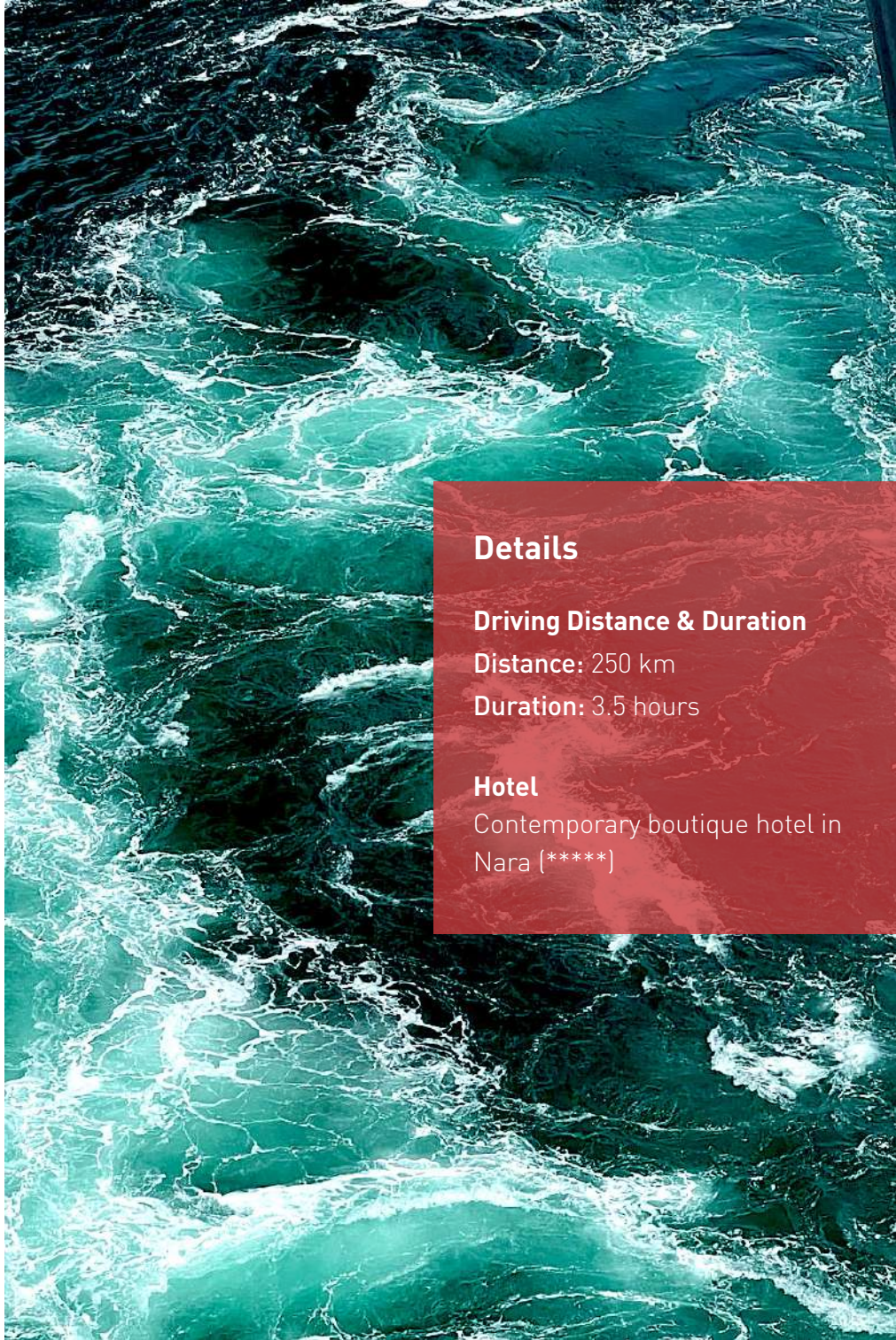
Today, you will cross the Inland Sea to Honshu (本州), Japan’s main island. Just before leaving Shikoku island, we will make at stop just before the Naruto Strait, a channel between Naruto in Shikoku island and Awaji Island. Weather permitting, you may see first hand the amazing tidal whirlpools formed when large volumes of water moving between the Seto Inland Sea and the Pacific Ocean between high and low tide.

Continue onwards to enjoy a leisurely lunch in Awaji island.

After lunch, your drive will pass the outskirts of Osaka before arriving at Nara (奈良). There will be some leisure time before dinner.

Dinner this evening is your first of two farewell dinner. This formal one has been specially arranged in the private room of a restaurant that was, over a century ago, one of the guesthouses of Nara’s governor.

Your last two nights will be in a wonderful boutique hotel that exudes warmth and comfort the moment you step through its front door.



Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 250 km

Duration: 3.5 hours

Hotel

Contemporary boutique hotel in
Nara (*****)

DAY 11
IN AND AROUND NARA (奈良)

Once the capital of Japan (between 710-784), Nara is home to a collection of ancient temples, shrines and ruins that make up Ancient Nara, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Handmade Japanese paper, or washi (和紙), was introduced more than 1,300 years ago. It is made

from plant fibres and soft water drawn from the Yoshino Mountains (吉野山) and is said to be strong enough to last for 1,000 years.

After breakfast, we will drive to the home of a reputable washi shokunin (master craftsman, 職人). He will explain the meticulous and detailed

process of making washi. You will also have the opportunity to make a simplified version yourself.

Lunch will be at a lovely local restaurant upstream from the shokunin's workshop - and may be a little late, depending on how long you spend with this skilled, but humble man.

After lunch, drive back to your hotel in Nara. You will have some free time before dinner.

Tonight, this second of your two farewell dinners will be in an izakaya tucked away in the quaint streets of Naramachi. It will be an interesting evening to look forward to!

Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 100 km

Duration: 3 hours

Hotel

Contemporary boutique hotel in Nara
(*****)



DAY 12
FLY HOME, OR EXTEND
YOUR STAY IN NARA (奈良)
OR KYOTO (京都)

Today will be a free day for you to do last minute shopping. We can provide you with a list of our recommendations of places to explore and shop.

Depending on whether you can extend your stay or must head to Kansai (關西) International Airport, we can help you with transfers and connections.

All good things must come to an end. We wish you a safe and enjoyable onward journey, wherever it takes you!



Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 80 km

Duration: 2 hours

Cars

What will you be driving?

The package price includes a Nissan X-Trail ePower, a thoroughly modern mid-sized SUV. We have to reserve the right to provide a similar car since the rental car company imposes this caveat on us.

If you are interested in upgrading to another choice of car, please let us know. We will let you know the availability of other models and the upgrade price.

What's Included / Best Travel Time

Sit back and enjoy.

Generally speaking, our journey packages and prices are all-inclusive. Once you've paid and you arrive at the starting point, you really won't have to take out your wallet again except for liquids (alcoholic drinks and petrol) and presents to take home!

- Hand-crafted *On the Road in Japan – Back Roads. Hidden Gems.* – Itinerary design as described in this Journey Dossier
- A crew consisting of a journey host, subject matter experts/destination guides in various locations and a lead car driver. Depending on the group size, we will add additional crew members
- All meals included, unless otherwise stated
- All accommodations
- A touring car is provided for all driving days, expertly maintained and serviced by reputable car rental companies, and covered by the best insurance available
- All ground transportation and airport transfers
- Pre-programmed GPSs and printed maps
- Walky-talkies to stay in touch with fellow travelers and your crew
- All toll fees and parking fees
- Petrol for your car
- Entrance fees for all attended activities
- Lead car for your crew
- *On the Road in Japan* service (goodies basket and other treats along the way: wet towels, daily picnic, basket containing fresh fruit, fruit juice, water, and a mixture of sweets and nibbles)

What's Not Included

- Your transport to Kagoshima (鹿児島) & from Osaka (大阪)
- Personal shopping
- Visas (if required)
- Alcoholic drinks (unless explicitly included)
- Activities, Meals, Transport during 'free times' as indicated in this Journey Dossier
- Top-up Collision Damage Waiver insurance

JAN

FEB

MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEPT

OCT

NOV

DEC

The Making of this Itinerary

Researching Beautiful Roads

Designing this, our first Japan itinerary, proved an enjoyable challenge. We sought to find and include some of the more inaccessible yet particularly fascinating places in this part of Japan. Places where English is rarely spoken and where non-Japanese visitors are seldom seen.

Chief among our aims was to find and gain access to places and people that offered a unique and authentic experience of Japan's traditional culture. In the case of many craftsmen, their humility and an understandable desire to protect their privacy meant that finding such examples was often a challenge. By visiting in person and demonstrating respect, curiosity and understanding we

were able to connect with a handful of remarkable artisans.

Secondly, we needed to find a way to present these experiences in an enjoyable and affordable way, given the local constraints. We passed over several *ryokan* (旅館) due to their too-hard futons, and likewise, several restaurants with low tables, seating at floor level and particularly inaccessible cuisine did not make the cut. We have striven to balance comfort, luxury and convenience without detracting from an authentic experience of travelling in Japan. This itinerary is the outcome of this balancing act, and we hope that you enjoy it as we ourselves do!



