

Western Honshū

本州西部



A land of exquisite ceramics, tranquil mountain villages and urban vibrance, Western Honshū is most known for the legacy of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. But this region, known as Chūgoku, offers much more. The Inland Sea (Seto-nai-kai) prefectures of Okayama and Hiroshima boast charming coastal communities, islands dotted with modern art and cities with room to breathe. Superlative museums crowd the canal quarter of Kurashiki, while Bizen abounds in kilns. Yamaguchi prefecture, a trade hub at the end of Honshū, has its 'Kyoto of the west' and limestone caves. Shimonoseki delights in fresh seafood, especially the potentially fatal *fugu* (blowfish). The Inland Sea, meanwhile, is a peaceful microcosm ringed by the twinkling night lights of Honshū and Shikoku.

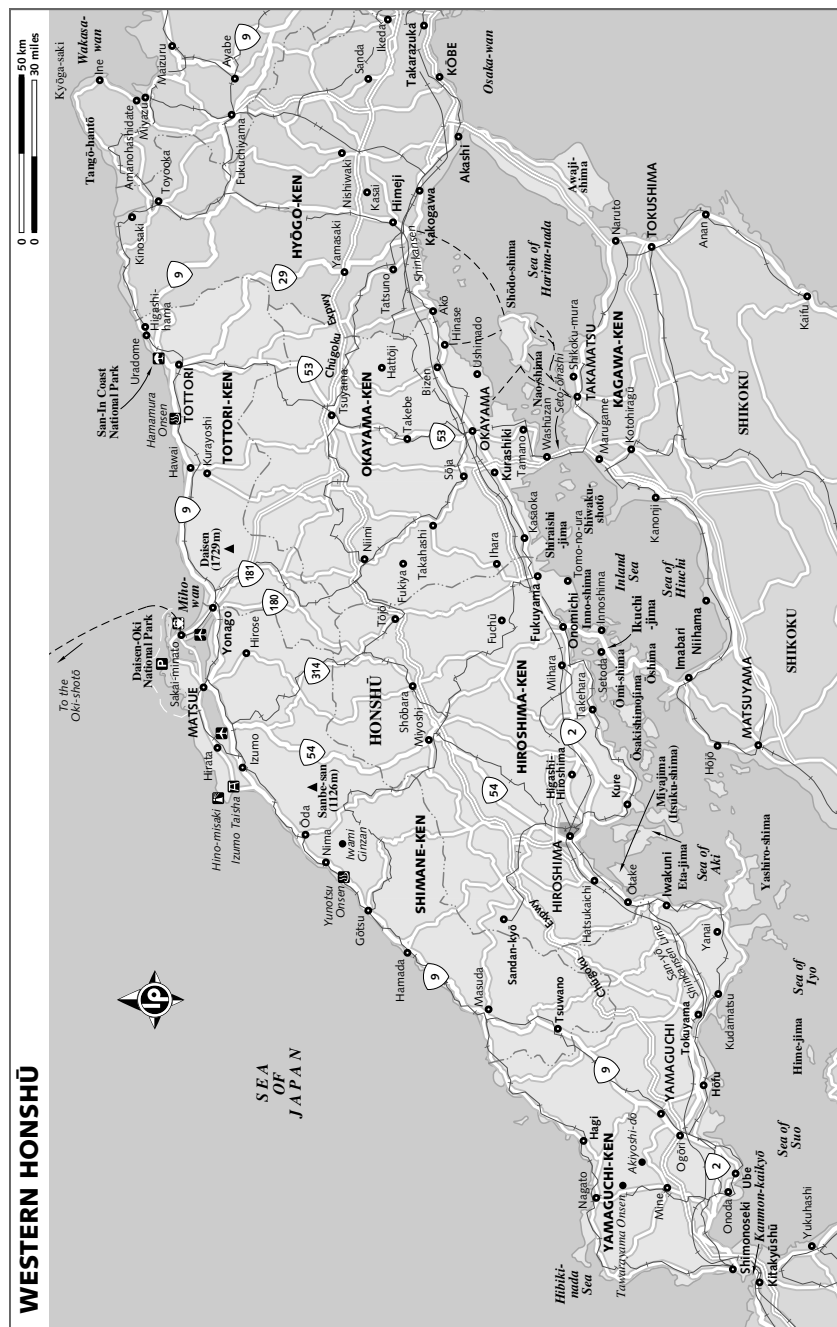
Shimane and Tottori prefectures, part of an area once pejoratively termed *ura-nihon* (Japan's rear), are especially hospitable. Former gateways for continental culture, they now enjoy a slower pace dedicated to *onsen* (hot springs), rugged nature and quiet mountain towns. With an original castle in Matsue and sand dunes in Tottori, the Sea of Japan coast is like a leisurely historical park stroll. Izumo Taisha, one of the oldest and most important shrines in Japan, is the rendezvous for Shinto's myriad gods.

The Chūgoku mountain range divides Western Honshū. On the southern San-yō coast (literally, 'the sunny side of the mountains'), the mild Inland Sea weather nurtures populous cities; to the north, the San-in coast (literally, 'in the shade of the mountains') is on the cooler Sea of Japan, where nature takes priority.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Ponder the significance of **Hiroshima's** (p453) past and capture its cosmopolitan present
- Clamber up the crumbling volcano of **Daisen** (p494) from the ancient temple Daisen-ji
- Sleep in an old thatched-roof farmhouse **Okayama-ken International Villa** (p464) at Hattōji, on a high plateau
- Gobble up the intriguing marine life from **Karato Ichiba** (p473) in Shimonoseki and watch the sun rise over the Kanmon Strait
- Seek out hidden-away rural health spa **Tawarayama Onsen** (p477) and its curious phallic temple
- Explore the carefully preserved village of **Ōmori** (p486) and the historic Iwami Ginzan silver mines
- Contemplate **Izumo Taisha** (p487), where the Shintō gods go on holiday
- Potter through the well-preserved warehouses and museums along the canal in **Kurashiki** (p447)
- Have a mountaintop to yourself and your own castle ruins in **Tsuwano** (p483)





History

If you tell a Japanese person that you're going to Chūgoku, they might think you're going to China since the region and the country share a name and Chinese characters (kanji). Chūgoku is thus called *chūgoku-chiho* (the Chūgoku region).

Because of its proximity to the Korean peninsula and China, the Chūgoku region was a gateway for Continental influences. There are countless historical reminders of how close Japan, the Koreans and China really are. From the 2nd century AD, China demanded that Japan become a tribute state, and from the 4th century AD it was common for Japanese emperors to take Korean brides. Buddhism and kanji came through from China in the 6th century. During his Korean peninsula campaigns in 1592 and 1598 Toyotomi Hideyoshi abducted whole families of potters as growing interest in the tea ceremony generated desire for *punch'ong* (powder green) ceramics. The campaigns failed to secure the peninsula for Japan and the elusive entrée into China, but the firing techniques and glazes from the period live on in Japanese ceramics today. Up to 10% of Hiroshima bomb victims were Korean (see p456), and the Japanese nationals abducted by North Korea are the focus of constant public outcry and media attention.

Shimonoseki, closer to Seoul than to Tokyo, has always played a vital role in trade and cultural exchange. In 1895 it hosted a Chinese delegation, which, with their Japanese counterparts, took almost a month to sign the Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty. In the 19th century 150 Christians from Nagasaki were sent to and imprisoned in Tsuwano, chosen for its inaccessibility. Hagi was home to 19th-century reformists who were instrumental in bringing about the Meiji Restoration.

Climate

The Chūgoku region is generally mild and comfortable. On the San-yō coast rainfall is light during winter and the air tends to be dry. On the San-in coast the temperatures are a couple of degrees lower, so winters can be cold. The Inland Sea is known as the 'land of fair weather' (*hare no kuni*) due to its moderate temperatures and low rainfall. It's also known for its periodic red tides (*akashio*), caused by dense concentrations of phytoplankton, which kill large numbers of fish.

Getting There & Away

The *shinkansen* (bullet train) along the San-yō coast is the fastest way to travel in the Chūgoku region from the east or west. Along the San-in coast, express trains will limit train changes and shorten travel times by up to half. Between the San-yō and San-in coasts it's often quicker to go by bus, but most services are not covered by the Japan Rail Pass (see p823). The San-in coast is great to explore by car – Rte 9 is the only major road. An alternative is to take the Chūgoku Expressway, which runs the full length of Western Honshū more or less equidistant from the north and south coasts. Attractions along this route are limited, so it's a quick way to get to Kyūshū or Central Honshū.

OKAYAMA-KEN 岡山県

Okayama-ken is known for its *inaka* (rural) character among the Japanese, and its International Villas (see p445) offer countryside getaways. The cities of Kurashiki and Okayama have compelling cultural charms, while Bizen is perfect for pottery lovers. Okayama-ken is a gateway for Shikoku via the Seto-Ōhashi bridge, the main road and rail link from Honshū. Some of Okayama's islands are included in the Inland Sea section (p463).

OKAYAMA 岡山

☎ 086 / pop 630,000

Prefectural capital Okayama prides itself on its copious sunshine and its connection to Momotarō, a demon-quelling folklore hero. Within easy reach of Kurashiki, this laid-back city offers one of the top three gardens in Japan (Kōraku-en), Okayama Castle and some excellent museums. Most of the sights can be seen in a day.

Orientation

The main street, Momotarō-Ōdōri, leads eastward from the train station to near the castle, Okayama-jō, and the garden, Kōraku-en. Trams (¥100 for the castle area) run down the middle of the street. The *Okayama Culture Zone* map gives a brief overview of the city sights, but the trilingual *Okayama* pamphlet with maps is more useful as it has a larger-scale map of the Kibi Plain bicycle route (see p450).

**INFORMATION**

Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ

三菱東京UFJ銀行.....1 B3

Club Mont Blanc

クラブモンブラン.....2 B3

Kinokuniya 紀伊国屋書店.....3 D3

Megalo メガロ.....4 D3

Okayama Central Post Office

岡山中央郵便局.....5 D4

Okayama Ekimae Post Office

岡山駅前郵便局.....6 B2

Okayama International Centre

岡山国際交流センター.....7 A2

Okayama Prefectural Office (Kenchō)

岡山県庁.....8 E4

Okayama-ken Kankō Bussan Centre

岡山県観光物産センター.....9 D3

Tourist Information Counter

観光案内所.....10 B2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Hayashibara Museum of Art

林原美術館.....11 E3

Okayama Orient Museum

市立オリент美術館.....12 D2

Okayama Prefectural Museum of

Art 県立美術館.....13 D2

Okayama Prefectural Museum

県立博物館.....14 E2

Okayama-jō 岡山城.....15 F3

Symphony Hall

シンフォニーホール.....(see 9)

Yumeji Art Museum

夢二郷土美術館.....16 F1

SLEEPING

ANA Hotel Okayama

岡山全日空ホテル.....17 A2

Comfort Hotel Okayama

コンフォートホテル岡山.....18 E3

Kōraku Hotel 後楽ホテル.....19 C3

Matsunoki Ryokan まつのき旅館.....20 A2

Saiwai-ō 幸荘.....21 A2

EATING

Den でん.....(see 2)

Gonta 権太.....22 C2

Okabe おかべ.....23 D3

Padang Padang パダンパダン.....24 D3

Quiet Village Curry Shop

クワイエットビレッジカレ

ーショップ.....25 D3

Saudade Na Yoru

サウダーデな夜.....26 D2

Tori-soba

元祖岡山とりそば太田.....27 D3

TRANSPORT

Eki Rent-a-Car 駅レンタカー.....28 A3

JR Rent-a-cycle レンタサイクル.....29 A3

The **Okayama-ken Kankō Bussan Centre** (☎ 234-2270; ☎ 10am-8pm) has products from Okayama-ken, including Bizen-yaki pottery, lacquerware and Kurashiki glass.

Information**BOOKSHOPS****Kinokuniya** (☎ 212-2551; 1-8-45 Naka Sange;

☎ 10am-8pm) Has a decent English-language section.

INTERNET ACCESS**Club Mont Blanc** (☎ 224-7050; 6-30 Honmachi; 1st 30min ¥290, then per 15min ¥100; ☎ 24hr) Internet café east of the train station.**Okayama International Centre** (☎ 256-2000; www.opief.or.jp; 2-2-1 Hōkan-chō; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) To the west of the train station. Offers free internet access (until 5pm).**Okayama Prefectural Office** (Okayama Kenchō; ☎ 224-2111; 2-4-6 Uchisange; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) Free internet access.**Megalo** (☎ 231-6696; 1-10-25 Omote-chō; per 30min/3hr ¥241/1029; ☎ 24hr) In the Omote-chō arcade.**MONEY**

There's an exchange service (9am to 5pm) at the Okayama Central Post Office, where travellers cheques (not Thomas Cook) and cash are exchanged.

Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ (☎ 223-9211; 6-36 Honmachi; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri) Cashes travellers cheques.**POST****Okayama Central Post Office** (☎ 227-2755; 2-1-1 Naka Sange; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-5pm Sun) On Kenchō-dōri.**Okayama Ekimae Post Office** (☎ 224-0809; 1-3-1 Ekimae-chō; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) West of the train station.**TOURIST INFORMATION****Okayama International Centre** (☎ 256-2000; www.opief.or.jp; 2-2-1 Hōkan-chō; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Good information source.**Tourist information counter** (☎ 222-2912; 1-1 Ekimoto-machi; ☎ 9am-6pm) On the ground floor of the newly renovated JR Okayama station. The *Okayama Culture Zone* brochure covers all the main sights, while *Frontier 21 Okayama* has extensive food coverage.**Sights****KōRAKU-EN 後楽園**Built by *daimyō* (domain lord) Ikeda Tsunemasa and completed in 1700, **Kōraku-en** (☎ 272-1148; 1-5 Kōraku-en; admission ¥350; ☎ 7.30am-6pm Apr-Sep, 8am-5pm Oct-Mar; (P)) has been called one of the three most beautiful gardens in Japan since the Edo period, along with Kairaku-en in Mito (p196) and Kenroku-en in Kanazawa (p294). Initial impressions may disappoint somewhat since much of it is grass. But several attractive ponds break up the lawns, and structures like the unique Ryuten Pavillion, which has a stream running through it, more than make up for this. Kōrakuen is little changed from feudal times, and you can get a feel for what a *daimyō* did for relaxation here.Next to the tea plantation you can have a bowl of green tea and try the local dessert, *kibi-dango*, a soft, sweet rice cake, for ¥300. From the station take the Higashi-yama tram to the Shiro-shita stop (¥100) in front of the cylindrical Okayama Symphony Hall building. Then walk east to the riverside (200m, you can't miss it), then north 400m to the bridge, cross it and then turn south and follow the signs to the garden (about 170m from the bridge).

MOMOTARŌ, THE PEACH BOY

Okayama-ken and neighbouring Kagawa-ken, on the island of Shikoku, are linked by the legend of Momotarō, the tiny Peach Boy who emerged from the stone of a peach and, backed up by a monkey, a pheasant and a dog, defeated a three-eyed, three-toed people-eating demon. There are statues of Momotarō at JR Okayama station, and the main road of Okayama is named after him. The island of Megi-jima, off Takamatsu in Shikoku, is said to be the site of the clash with the demon.

Momotarō may actually have been a Yamato prince who was deified as Kibitsu-hiko. His shrine, Kibitsu-jinja, lies along the route of the Kibi Plain bicycle ride (p450).

OKAYAMA-JŌ 岡山城

Known to locals as U-jō (Crow Castle), the striking black **Okayama Castle** (☎ 225-2096; 2-3-1 Marunouchi; admission ¥800; 🕒 9am-5pm) was built in 1597 by Ukita Hideyoshi and once boasted 35 turrets and 21 gates. It was ruled by 15 successive lords for three centuries. Rebuilt in 1966 after Allied bombing destroyed it in 1945, with only the small *tsukima-yagura* (moon-viewing turret) surviving, its interiors may strike purists as too modern, but the top of the donjon (central tower) has great views of Korakuen. In another room, visitors can dress up in Edo-period costumes and have their photo taken.

MUSEUMS

The Okayama Culture Zone has some fine museums and galleries. Close to the castle's back entrance, near the corner of the moat, the **Hayashibara Museum of Art** (☎ 223-1733; 2-7-15 Marunouchi; admission ¥300; 🕒 9am-5pm; 📍) houses a private collection of Japanese and Chinese artefacts handed down from the local Ikeda clan. Opposite the main entrance to Kōraku-en is the **Okayama Prefectural Museum** (☎ 272-1149; 1-5 Kōraku-en; admission ¥200; 🕒 9am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Oct-Mar; 📍), which has displays on local history including Bizen swords and pottery. North of Kōraku-en is the **Yumeji Art Museum** (☎ 271-1000; 2-1-32 Hama; admission ¥700; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sun; 📍), displaying works by famed local painter Yumeji Takehisa (1884-1934), who has been called Japan's Toulouse-Lautrec.

North of the end of Momotarō-Ōdōri, where the tramline turns south, is the excellent **Okayama Orient Museum** (☎ 232-3636; 9-31 Tenjin-chō; admission ¥300; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), which houses around 3000 artefacts from the prehistoric to the Islamic Age. Not far behind it is the **Okayama Prefectural Museum of Art** (☎ 225-4800; 8-48 Tenjin-chō; admission ¥300; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sun; 📍).

Festivals & Events

The **Saidai-ji Eyo** (Naked Festival) takes place from midnight on the third Saturday in February at the Kannon-in temple in the Saidai-ji area. A large crowd of near-naked men fight for two sacred *shingi* (wooden sticks), while freezing water is poured over them.

Sleeping

Okayama Seinen-kaikan Youth Hostel (岡山青年会館; ☎ 252-0651; http://homepage3.nifty.com/okayama-yh; 1-7-6 Tsukura-chō; dm members/nonmembers ¥2940/3570; 📍 🕒 📍) This welcoming old hostel is in a suburban area about 1km west of Okayama station. Catch bus 5 or 15 from the station to Seinen-kaikan Mae bus stop. The manager speaks English and meals are available. Internet access (lobby computer) costs ¥10 per minute and parking is available for ¥500 a night.

Saiwai-sō (☎ 254-0020; http://w150.j.fiw-web.net/in Japanese; 24-8 Ekimoto-chō; s/tw from ¥4200/7600; 📍 🕒 📍) In a quiet area west of the station, this friendly place has Western- and Japanese-style rooms and communal baths.

Matsunoki Ryokan (☎ 253-411; www.matunoki.com; 19-1 Ekimoto-chō; s/tw ¥2520/8400; 📍 🕒 📍) The Matsunoki has bright, clean rooms with Western- and Japanese-style private bathrooms. There are public laundry facilities, and the friendly staff is very attentive.

Comfort Hotel Okayama (☎ 898-1111; www.choicehotels.com; 1-1-13 Marunouchi; s/tw from ¥5800/7000; 📍 🕒 📍 wi-fi) This newly renovated hotel close to the castle has stylish rooms, free breakfast and bicycles that can be borrowed.

Kōraku Hotel (☎ 221-7111; www.hotel.kooraku.co.jp in Japanese; 5-1 Heiwa-chō; s/tw from ¥7500/13,800; 📍 🕒 📍) The Kōraku has spacious rooms and very friendly staff. Laptop computers are available for ¥1050 a night, and the Japanese restaurant on the premises serves Okayama *barazushi* (a kind of chirashi-zushi served in

a large bowl topped with fresh seafood, mainly Spanish mackerel and vegetables).

ANA Hotel Okayama (☎ 898-1111; www.anahotel-okayama.com in Japanese; 15-1 Ekimoto-chō; s/tw from ¥13,860/24,255; 📍 🕒 📍) Opened in 2005 right by the station, this luxurious hotel features gorgeous rooms and a chrome-tinted lobby with a wall waterfall behind the front desk. Its 20th-floor bar and restaurant has teppan-yaki and exquisite night views.

Eating & Drinking

Padang Padang (☎ 223-6665; 1-7-10 Omote-chō; dishes ¥550-1900; 🕒 dinner Wed-Mon) Despite its Indonesian name, this cosy new restaurant run by chef Daisuke Akagi focuses on French and Italian fare, like herb *peperoncino* pasta (chilli pepper pasta; ¥1500). Located along Shiroshita-suji near the castle, it's a good spot to have a glass of wine after a day of sightseeing.

Den (☎ 803-3400; 6-36 Honmachi; dishes ¥500-3800; 🕒 dinner) Enjoy bone-warming *nabe* (stew) and grilled dishes like *mochibuta sukiyaki* (fatty pork hot pot; ¥1800) in this chic, low-lit hotpot spot in the underground arcade by the station. There's a sign outside saying 'Den'.

Tori-soba (☎ 236-0310; 1-7-24 Omote-chō; dishes ¥600-1000; 🕒 11am-8pm) The name of this jazzy little countertop eatery is also its speciality: *tori-soba* (¥630) means chicken noodles. If one bowl isn't enough, order a small serving of sushi to go with it. Look for the white sign across from Chugoku Bank.

Gonta (☎ 233-4430; 1-2-1 Nodaya-chō; dishes ¥500-10,000; 🕒 11am-11pm Thu-Tue) There are 38 kinds of sushi to choose from at this corner shop. Ask for the Okayama speciality, *barazushi*. There are big green kanji on the outside wall.

Okabe (☎ 222-1404; 1-10-1 Omote-chō; dishes ¥700-750; 🕒 lunch Mon-Sat) Order the Okabe *teishoku* (set menu; ¥700) and be surprised by how filling tofu can be. Located on the corner by a bakery, this is a friendly, homey spot.

Saudade Na Yoru (☎ 234-5306; 2nd fl, Shiroshita bldg, 10-16 Tenjin-chō; dishes ¥650-1000; 🕒 12pm-3am) Enjoy views of the symphony hall from this 2nd-floor lounge bar. There are drink and cake set menus until 6pm, after which time the bar takes priority. DJs occasionally play and the desserts are generous.

Quiet Village Curry Shop (☎ 231-4100; 1-6-43 Omote-chō; dishes ¥780-1000; 🕒 11.30am-8.30pm Tue-Sun) This cheerful place is a serious curry house with good service. The chicken curry (¥780) and

dhal are good lunchtime options. There's an English sign outside.

Getting There & Away

Okayama airport (☎ 294-5550; 1277 Nichiyōji) is 20km northwest of the station. There are flights to Japan's major cities as well as Seoul, Shanghai and Guam. A bus (¥680, 30 minutes) runs to the airport from platforms 1 and 3 in front of Okayama station. The first bus leaves at 6.15am, the last at 6.30pm.

Okayama is connected by the San-yō Hikari *shinkansen* to Hakata (Fukuoka; ¥11,550, two hours) to the west; and to Osaka (¥5350, 45 minutes), Kyoto (¥6820, one hour, 16 daily) and Tokyo (¥15,850, 3½ hours, 14 daily). The JR Hakubi line runs between Okayama and Yonago (¥4620, two hours), in Tottori-ken on the San-in coast.

When travelling west to Kurashiki, it's quicker to transfer from the *shinkansen* at Okayama than at Shin-Kurashiki. You also change trains at Okayama if you're heading to Shikoku across the Seto-Ōhashi.

Getting Around

Getting around Okayama is a breeze, since the Higashi-yama tram route will take you to all the main attractions. Trams charge ¥100 to anywhere in the central area.

JR Rent-a-cycle (☎ 223-7081; 🕒 7am-11pm) rents out bikes, costing ¥300 per day. **Eki Rent-a-Car** (☎ 224-1363; 1-1 Ekimoto-chō; 🕒 8am-8pm) is next door.

AROUND OKAYAMA Okayama International Villas

To attract foreign travellers to the frequently visited areas of the region, Okayama Prefecture established a group of International Villas in 1988. They provide a rare chance for visitors to escape Japan's urban sprawl and get a taste of country living. They are highly recommended, especially Hattōji and Fukiya, but are showing signs of wear and tear.

The villas are in remote locations with few eateries, but they have kitchens and English directions to local attractions, shops and any restaurants. Arrive well before dark, especially for Fukiya and Hattōji, or you'll have trouble finding the way.

Members pay ¥2500 per night and there's a ¥500 joining fee. For reservations and information, contact the **Okayama International Villa Group** (☎ 086-256-2535; fax 086-256-2576; www.harenet

.ne.jp/villa) at the Okayama International Centre (p443). Staff speak English, and English brochures are available.

FUKIYA 吹屋

This is a remote, picture-postcard town of old wooden buildings lining a road that winds through the mountains; time seems to have stood still here for the past century.

The **Fukiya villa** (吹屋国際交流ヴィラ; ☎ 0866-29-2222; 836 Fukiya Nariwa-chō Takahashi-shi), modelled on a traditional *shoyu-gura* (soya sauce storehouse), has a wood-burning stove and free firewood. The town's history is tied to the making of reddish-brown *bengara* (iron sulphate) seen on the roof tiles, and a nearby former copper mine, the **Sasaune Historic Mine Shaft** (吹屋銅山笹畦坑道; ☎ 0866-29-2145; admission ¥300; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun), is open to the public. Buses (¥950, one hour, three daily) connect Takahashi station on the JR Hakubi line with Fukiya.

TAKEBE 建部

Takebe is an *onsen* town along the JR Tsuyama line in central Okayama. The modern **Takebe villa** (建部国際交流ヴィラ; ☎ 0867-22-2500; 586 Takebekami Takebe-chō Mitsu-gun) is beside the Asahi River and right next door is Yahata Onsen, with a variety of hot baths. This is perhaps the most faded of the villas; the surrounding town isn't exactly pastoral, but it is definitely slow-paced. From Okayama, take the JR Tsuyama line to Fukuwatari station. The villa is a 1.5km walk or taxi ride to the south.

HATTŌJI 八塔寺

This is the most picturesque and worthwhile villa destination. Hattōji is a tranquil farming village high up on a plateau in the east of the prefecture.

The **Hattōji villa** (八塔寺国際交流ヴィラ; ☎ 0869-85-0254; 1193 Kagami Yoshinaga-chō Bizen-shi) is a gorgeous, well-preserved thatched-roof farmhouse with an *irori* (hearth) in the floor. The village also has a unique country and western-themed café, **Nozomigaoka** (望ヶ丘; ☎ 0869-85-0252; 1393 Kagami Yoshinaga-chō, Bizen-shi; dishes ¥150-3500; ☎ 9am-9pm Wed-Mon) run by a one-time Japanese cowboy! Try his hearty *kamonabe* (duck hot pot; ¥2500) in colder months. Buses (¥690, 30 minutes) run to Hattōji from Yoshinaga station on the JR Sanyō line, which links with Okayama.

USHIMADO 牛窓

Ushimado is a quiet Inland Sea coastal community with lots of sailboats and olive trees. The **Ushimado villa** (牛窓国際交流ヴィラ; ☎ 0869-34-4218; 496 Ushimado Ushimado-chō Setouchi-shi) is a modern glass-enclosed curved structure perched high above the village. The villa is rather comfortable but the views are stunning; local attractions include an olive garden and Ushimado Beach. From Okayama, take the train to Oku on the JR Akō line, then a bus for Ushimado. Get off at Konnoura (¥370, 25 minutes). The check-in is at Ushimado Town Hall.

SHIRAIISHI-JIMA 白石島

our pick On the relaxing island of Shiraishi-jima in the Inland Sea, in the west of the prefecture, the excellent **Shiraishi Island villa** (白石島国際交流ヴィラ; ☎ 0865-68-2095; 317 Shiraishi-jima Kasaoka-shi) has superb views and easy access to the island's main beach and hiking trails (p464). In July and August resident expats Amy Chavez and Paul Hoogland operate **Inland Sea sailboat cruises** (☎ 090-6433-4542; www.moooooobar.com; cruises from ¥3000). From Okayama, take the JR Sanyō line to Kasaoka, then the ferry (¥500, 35 minutes) to Shiraishi. The check-in is in the ferry office.

BIZEN 備前

☎ 0869 / pop 42,000

East of Okayama city on the JR Akō line is the 700-year-old pottery region of Bizen, renowned for its unglazed Bizen-yaki pottery and swords. Much prized by tea-ceremony connoisseurs, Bizen ceramics are earthy and dramatic. They're often referred to as 'expensive accidents', as firing can have such mixed results. A morning or afternoon is enough time to enjoy Bizen.

At Imbe station, the drop-off point to explore the area, there's a **tourist information counter** (☎ 64-1100; 1657-7 Imbe; ☎ 9am-6pm), with useful English pamphlets on the history of Bizen-yaki. Accommodation in the pottery area of Bizen is sparse, so it's best to see it as a day trip.

On the 2nd floor of the station is the **Bizen Ceramic Crafts Museum** (備前焼陶友会; ☎ 64-1001; 1657-7 Imbe; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Wed-Mon), and on the north side of the station are the **Okayama Prefectural Bizen Ceramics Art Museum** (岡山県備前陶芸美術館; ☎ 64-1400; admission ¥500; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun) and, further north,

the **Bizen Ceramics Centre** (備前陶芸センター; ☎ 64-2453; 974-2 Imbe; admission free; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Tue-Sun), all of which display the pottery of the area. Of the galleries in Bizen's main street, **Takei-dō** (桃蹊堂; ☎ 64-2147; 1527 Imbe; ☎ 9am-5pm) is the oldest and most interesting; the staff can show you the kilns out the back. The area's tutelary shrine, Amatsu-jinja, is lovingly decorated with Bizen ceramics.

There are several kilns in the area that offer a chance to try your hand at making Bizen-yaki. The cost is around ¥3000; reservations are necessary. Try **Bishū Gama** (備州窯; ☎ 64-1160; 302-2 Imbe Bizen-shi; ☎ 9am-3pm), where some English is spoken. In about two hours you can sculpt a masterpiece, but you'll need to arrange to have your creation shipped to you after it's been fired. **Bizen-yaki Traditional Pottery Centre** (備前焼伝統産業会館; ☎ 64-1001; 1657-7 Imbe; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Wed-Mon), on the 3rd floor of Imbe station, holds workshops (¥3150 to ¥3675) on weekends and holidays from April to November.

The station eatery **Shikisai** (四季彩; ☎ 63-0088; dishes ¥500-3000; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) serves everything from simple Japanese dishes to mini-*kaiseki* (Japanese formal cuisine, ¥3150) course meals.

If you have come from Himeji or points east by train, you'll need to change to the JR Akō line at Aioi and get off at Imbe station, possibly after changing trains at Banshū-Akō. You can carry on along the JR Akō line to get to Okayama.

KURASHIKI 倉敷

☎ 086 / pop 476,000

Kurashiki's appeal is a quarter of pretty canal-side buildings. Old black-tiled warehouses have been converted into an eclectic collection of museums, which have become Kurashiki's main draw. Bridges arch over, willows dip into the water, carp cruise the canal and the whole effect is quite delightful.

In the feudal era the warehouses were used to store rice brought by boat from the surrounding rich farmlands. Later, the town's importance as a textile centre increased and the Kurabō Textile Company expanded. Owner Ohara Keisaburō built up a collection of European art, and opened the Ohara Museum in the 1920s. It was the first of the museums and is still the finest. Note that many of Kurashiki's main attractions, and most eateries, close on Monday.

Orientation

It's about 1km from the station to the old Bikan area, and Ivy Sq is just beyond. A number of shops along the main street, Kurashiki Chūō-dōri, sell Bizen-yaki.

Information

Just out of the station and to the right, the **tourist information counter** (☎ 424-1220; 2nd fl, Kurashiki City Plaza, 1-7-2 Achi; ☎ 9am-7pm) has English-speaking staff who can make accommodation bookings. The **Kurashikikan** (☎ 422-0542; 1-4-8 Chūō; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Oct, 9am-5.15pm Nov-Mar), at the bend in the canal, also has a tourist information office and rest area. The **Kurashiki Community Centre** (☎ 423-2135; 2-21 Honmachi; ☎ 10am-4pm) near Seigan-ji Temple has a computer with free internet access. Travelers can also log on to the net at a computer in the **Terminal Hotel** (倉敷ターミナルホテル; ☎ 426-9001; 1-7-2 Achi) by the front desk (¥200 for the first 30 minutes).

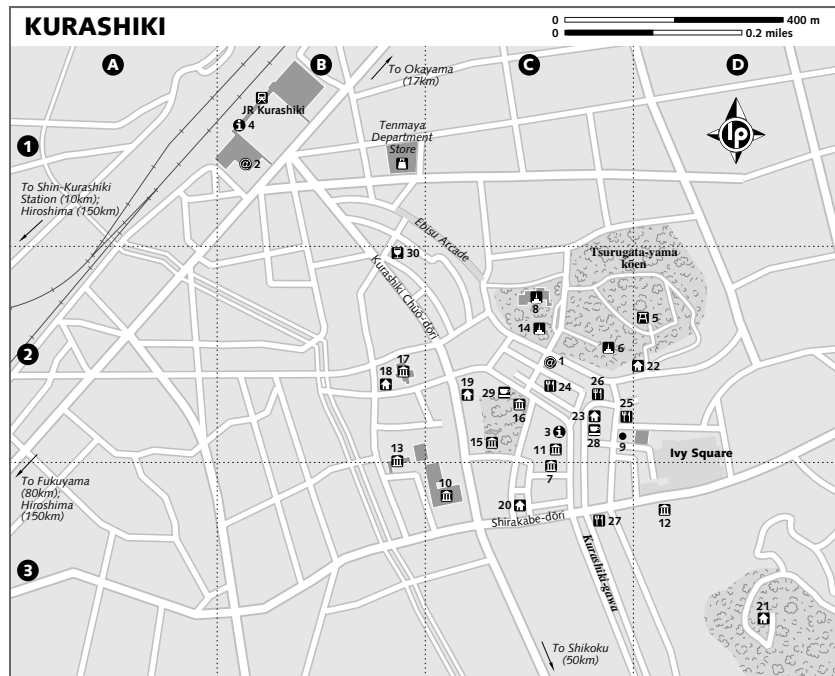
Sights

Ohara Museum of Art (☎ 422-0005; 1-1-15 Chūō; admission ¥1000; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) is undoubtedly Kurashiki's premier museum and houses the predominantly European art collection of textile magnate Ohara Keisaburō (1880-1943). Rodin, Matisse, Picasso, Pissarro, Monet, Cézanne, Renoir, El Greco, Toulouse-Lautrec, Gauguin, Degas and Munch are all represented in this superlative collection. The museum's neoclassical façade is Kurashiki's best-known landmark after the canal.

Your ticket is valid all day, allowing multiple entries. It also gives you admission to the museum's folk-art and Chinese-art collections, and to the contemporary-art collection housed in an **annex** behind the main building.

The impressive collection at the **Kurashiki Museum of Folk-craft** (☎ 4221637; 1-4-11 Chūō; admission ¥700; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Mar-Nov, 9am-4.15pm Dec-Feb) is mainly Japanese but also includes furniture and items from other countries. The collection is housed in a rustic complex of linked *kura* (warehouses) dating from the 18th century.

The **Japan Rural Toy Museum** (☎ 422-8058; 1-4-16 Chūō; admission ¥500; ☎ 9am-5pm) is full of surprises, with folk-craft toys from Japan and around the world in old warehouses. A record-setting giant top that spun for over an hour is housed in a back room.



INFORMATION

Kurashiki Community Centre	1 C2
Kurashiki Terminal Hotel 敷ターミナルホテル	2 B1
Kurashikikan Tourist Information 敷館観光案内所	3 C2
Tourist Information Counter 光案内所	4 B1
Travellers' Rest Area 敷民芸館 倉敷館観光案内所	(see 3)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Achi-jinja 阿智神社	5 D2
Honei-ji 栄寺	6 C2
Japan Rural Toy Museum 本郷土玩具館	7 C3
Kanryū-ji 龍寺	8 C2
Kojima Torajirō Memorial Hall 島虎次郎記念館	9 C2

Kurashiki City Art Museum 立美術館	10 C3
Kurashiki Museum of Folk-craft 敷民芸館	11 C2
Kurashiki Piggy Banks Museum 敷貯金箱博物館	12 D3
Museum of Natural History 然史博物館	13 B2
Orient Museum 島虎次郎記念館	(see 9)
Seigan-ji 願寺	14 C2
Ōhara Museum Annex 原美術館分館	15 C2
Ōhara Museum of Art 原美術館	16 C2
Ōhashi-ke 橋家	17 B2

SLEEPING

Hotel Nikkō Kurashiki テル日航倉敷	18 B2
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Kurashiki Kokusai Hotel 敷国際ホテル	19 C2
Kurashiki Sakura Stay テル倉敷サクラステイ	20 C3
Kurashiki Youth Hostel 敷ユースホテル	21 D3
Minshuku Kamoi 宿カモ井	22 D2
Ryokan Kurashiki 館くらしき	23 C2

DRINKING

Coffee-Kan 珈館	28 C2
El Greco ルグレコ	29 C2
SWLABR	30 B2

The **Kurashiki City Art Museum** (☎ 425-6034; 2-6-1 Chūō; admission ¥200; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), featuring works by local artists such as Yoson Ikeda, is worth a look for those with extra time. The restored **Ōhashi-ke** (Ōhashi House; ☎ 422-0007; 3-21-31 Achi; admission ¥500; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) is a fine example of a late-18th-century merchant's house and represents this group's rising social status.

IVY SQUARE アイビースクエア

The Kurabō textile factories have moved to more modern premises, and the fine Meiji-era red-brick factory buildings (dating from 1889 and remodelled in 1974) now house a hotel, restaurants, shops and yet more museums. Ivy Sq, with its ivy-covered walls and open-air café, is the centre of the complex. The **Kojima Torajirō Memorial Hall** (☎ 426-1010; 7-1-10 Honmachi;

admission ¥500, Ōhara Museum ticket holders ¥300; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) displays work by the impressionist painter who helped Ōhara establish his European collection. Middle Eastern pieces are in the associated **Orient Museum**.

South of the square, the **Kurashiki Piggy Banks Museum** (☎ 425-4577; 1224 Funagura-chō; admission ¥200; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm Fri-Wed) is a remarkable collection of over two thousand coin receptacles. It's on the 2nd floor of the fascinating Sanyo-do antiques shop. Just look for the dozens of porcelain RCA Victor dogs on the roof!

SHRINES & TEMPLES

The shrine **Achi-jinja** (☎ 425-4898; 12-1 Honmachi; ☎ 7am-5pm) tops the **Tsurugata-yama-kōen** park, which overlooks the old area of town. The Honei-ji, Kanryū-ji and Seigan-ji temples are also in the park.

Sleeping

Kurashiki is a great town if you're keen to stay in a traditional Japanese inn.

Kurashiki Youth Hostel (☎ 422-7355; fax 422-7364; www.jyh.or.jp/english/chugoku/kurashiki/index.html; 1537-1 Mukoyama; dm members/nonmembers ¥2940/3540; ☎ ☎ ☎) South of the canal area and a 10-minute climb from Ivy Sq through the cemetery, this tidy hostel's hilltop location overlooks the Bikan area. Meals are available.

Minshuku Kamoi (☎ 422-4898; www.kamoi-jp.biz in Japanese; 1-24 Honmachi; s/tw with shared bathroom incl 2 meals ¥6300/12,600; ☎ ☎ ☎) Easy to find at the bottom of the steps to Achi-jinja, this place is very quiet and well managed.

Kurashiki Sakura Stay (☎ 435-7001; fax 435-7002; www.sakurastay.jp in Japanese; 1-9-4 Chūō; s/tw ¥6300/10,500; ☎ ☎ ☎) This very white hotel, five minutes west of the canal, is a business hotel masquerading as a wedding centre. The rooms, all Western, are small but clean. There's a scrumptious breakfast for ¥900.

Kurashiki Kokusai Hotel (☎ 422-5141; fax 422-5192; www.kurashiki-kokusai-hotel.co.jp; 1-44-1 Chūō; s/tw from ¥9450/14,700; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Though somewhat faded and with stiff personnel, this excellently located hotel features woodwork, tiles and murals by artists. East-facing rooms have fine views of the Ōhara Museum and its gardens.

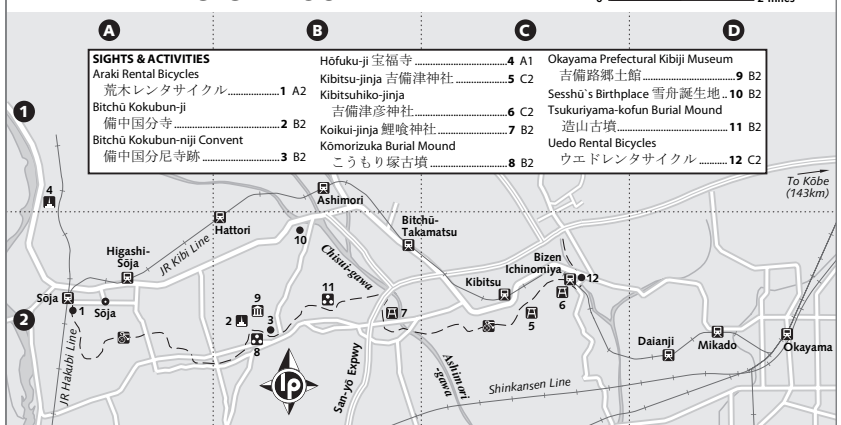
Hotel Nikkō Kurashiki (☎ 423-2400; fax 423-2401; www.nikko-kurashiki.com; 3-21-19 Achi; s/tw from ¥19,000/27,000; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) A modern high-rise behind the Ōhashi House, this hotel's rooms are over 40 sq metres and have fine city views.

Ryokan Kurashiki (☎ 422-0730; fax 422-0990; www.ryokan-kurashiki.jp; 4-1 Honmachi; s/tw incl 2 meals from ¥34,500/56,000; ☎ ☎) With views overlooking the canal, professional service and vast rooms, this is the best ryokan in Kurashiki. The Terrace de Ryokan Kurashiki serves delicious green tea and local sweets in a room overlooking a garden.

Eating

Kamoi Restaurant (☎ 422-0606; 1-3-17 Chūō; dishes ¥500-2000; ☎ 10am-6pm Thu-Tue) The canalside Kamoi, facing the Ōhara Museum, serves Japanese noodle dishes, sushi and the

KIBI PLAIN BICYCLE ROUTE



SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Araki Rental Bicycles	1 A2
荒木レンタサイクル	1 A2
Bitchū Kokubun-ji	2 B2
備中国分寺	2 B2
Bitchū Kokubun-niji Convent	3 B2
備中国分尼寺跡	3 B2
Hōfuku-ji 宝福寺	4 A1
Kibitsu-jinja 吉備津神社	5 C2
Kibitsu-hiko-jinja	6 C2
吉備彦神社	6 C2
Koikui-jinja 鯉喰神社	7 B2
Kōmorizuka Burial Mound	8 B2
こうもり塚古墳	8 B2
Okayama Prefectural Kibiji Museum	9 B2
吉備路郷土館	9 B2
Sesshū's Birthplace 雪舟誕生地	10 B2
Tsukuriyama-kofun Burial Mound	11 B2
造山古墳	11 B2
Uedo Rental Bicycles	12 C2
ウエドレンタサイクル	12 C2

KIBI PLAIN BICYCLE ROUTE

To access this excellent cycling course, take a local JR Kibi line train from Okayama for three stops to Bizen Ichinomiya. You can ride the 15km route to Sōja, drop off your bike and take a JR Hakubi line train back through Kurashiki to Okayama. Most of the course is on a cycling road that cars are not allowed to use.

Rental Bicycles (☎ 0862-84-2311; 🕒 9am-6pm) is just outside JR Bizen Ichinomiya station; if no one is there, call the phone number. Pick up your bike (¥200/1000 per hour/day) and free Japanese-language route map here. You'll want to use this map in conjunction with the one here as it is of a larger scale. Turn right and then right again to cross the railway track and in just 300m you'll reach **Kibitsu-hiko-jinja**, a shrine that fronts a large pond. From here you'll soon pick up the bicycle path, which follows a canal through the fields until it rejoins the road just before the temple Fudenkai-ji. Just 200m further on is **Kibitsu-jinja**. This major shrine, built in 1425, is unusual in that it has the oratory and main sanctum topped by a single roof. The legendary Peach Boy, Momotarō (p444), is connected with the shrine.

Pedalling on, you'll pass **Koikui-jinja**, which is connected with the legendary figure of Kibitsu-hiko, to reach the huge 5th-century **Tsukuriyama-kofun Burial Mound**, rising like a gentle hill from the surrounding plain. Ideally, you need to be in a hot-air balloon or helicopter to appreciate that it's a 350m-long keyhole-shaped mound, not a natural hill. Just north of here is the birthplace of famous artist **Sesshū** (1420-1506). He was once a novice monk at **Hōfuku-ji**, which is 3km northwest of JR Sōja station.

Finally, you pass the foundation stones of the **Bitchū Kokubun-niji Convent**, the nearby **Okayama Prefectural Kibiji Museum** (🕒 9am-4.30pm Tue-Sun; admission ¥150), the excavated **Kōmorizuka Burial Mound**, and **Bitchū Kokubun-ji** with its picturesque five-storey pagoda. From here it's a few more kilometres into Sōja.

It's worth taking your own water, but occasionally the bicycle path passes close enough to a main road to divert for food. On arrival at Sōja station, return your bicycle to **Araki Rental Bicycles** (☎ 0866-92-0233; 🕒 9am-6pm). If this ride appeals to you, you can easily plot others on the network of tracks that cover the area.

mamakari teishoku (sardine set; ¥1365) from a photo menu.

Kana Izumi (☎ 421-7254; 8-33 Honmachi; dishes ¥500-2000; 🕒 10.30am-8pm Tue-Sun) Freshly made udon noodles are served in this modern restaurant with a traditional exterior, just back from the canal. Meals are displayed in the window. Also on offer is *kayaku gohan teishoku* (rice and mixed veggies set; ¥714).

Mamakari-tei (☎ 427-7112; 3-12 Honmachi; dishes ¥600-3500; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Not far from the Ryokan Kurashiki, this is a cosy, traditional spot named after and famed for the local sardine-like fish it serves up daily (both raw and cooked). If you're not a sardine lover, try the *tōfu manjū* (fried tofu patties; ¥525). In an old-fashioned white building with tile trim.

Pasta Marché (☎ 434-4355; 1253-1 Funagura-chō; dishes ¥500-8000; 🕒 lunch & dinner Thu-Tue; E) On a corner at the southern part of the canal, this sunny little trattoria has great ¥1000 pasta set lunches and dinner items, like beef fillet capriccio (¥1200).

Drinking

El Greco (☎ 422-0297; 1-1-11 Chuō; coffees ¥500; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun; E) By the canal near the Ohara Museum (you can't miss its ivy-clad walls), it's a friendly, spacious spot for coffee and cakes.

Coffee-Kan (☎ 424-5516; 4-1 Honmachi; drinks ¥500-1000; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) This dark tavern beside the Ryokan Kurashiki is another great coffee spot, and has a garden at the rear. No food served. It has an ornate wooden door.

SWLABR (☎ 434-3099; 2-18-2 Achū; dishes ¥680-1000; 🕒 12pm-3am Fri-Wed) After the Bikan area closes down, relax with the good music and friendly staff at SWLABR. The food stops at 6pm, but the cosy bar-lounge goes until 3am. It's the green weatherboard house on the east side of Kurashiki Chūō-dōri a couple of blocks south of the station.

Getting There & Away

Kurashiki, only 17km from Okayama, is not on the *shinkansen* line. Travelling westwards, it's usually faster to disembark at Okayama and take a San-yō line *futsū* (local train) to

Kurashiki. The trip takes 17 minutes, and *futsū* run frequently. If you're heading east, get off at Shin-Kurashiki station, two stops from Kurashiki on the San-yō line.

Getting Around

It's only a 15-minute walk from the station to the canal area, where almost everything is within a few minutes' stroll. Walking is best for Kurashiki.

HIROSHIMA-KEN 広島県

In addition to Hiroshima city's atomic bomb-related attractions, Hiroshima-ken prefecture boasts Miyajima and its famed shrine, Itsukushima-jinja, the quaint fishing village of Tomo-no-ura and the rather spectacular Sandan-kyō gorge in the north of the prefecture.

SOUTHERN HIROSHIMA-KEN

広島県南部

Fukuyama 福山

☎ 0849 / pop 462,000

Fukuyama is an industrial city, and its convenient location on the Osaka-Hakata *shinkansen* route makes it a good jumping-off point for the pretty fishing port of Tomo-no-Ura or for Onomichi, a gateway to the Inland Sea.

If you have a few hours to spend in Fukuyama, you can visit the art gallery and museum and the reconstructed castle. There's a **tourist information office** (☎ 22-2869; 30-1 San-nomaru-chō; 🕒 8.30am-5.15pm) in the station. The unique **Japan Footwear Museum** (日本はきもの博物館; ☎ 34-6644; 4-16-27 Matsunaga-chō; admission ¥1000; 🕒 9am-5pm; P) at nearby Matsunaga station chronicles footwear from sandals to moon boots. The excellent **Japan Folk Toy & Doll Museum** is part of it, along with a very elegant coffee house at the entrance.

Tomo-no-ura 鞆の浦

☎ 0849 / 5000

The delightful fishing port of Tomo-no-ura, with its picturesque old streets, is just half an hour south of Fukuyama station by bus. Due to its central location on the Inland Sea, in feudal days the port played an important role as host to fishing boats, which would wait in the harbour to determine the next shift in the tides and winds before heading back out to sea.

Pick up an English-language brochure at JR Fukuyama station information. An enjoyable few hours can be had on foot or by bicycle exploring the village. Bikes can be hired (¥100 for two hours) next to the ferry building.

Sensui-jima island has some accommodation, including a camping area, and some quiet walking trails. Regular ferries to the island run from the harbour area (¥240 return, five minutes).

SIGHTS

Up on the hill behind the ferry terminal, the **Taichōrō** (対潮楼; admission ¥200; 🕒 8am-5pm Tue-Sun) temple hall was built at the end of the 17th century to house a Korean delegation that would sometimes pay its respects. The view is quite lovely, and the resident attendant will happily show you the memorabilia on display.

A fascinating snack-food factory, **Uonosato** (うのを里; ☎ 82-3333; 1567-1 Ushiroji Tomo-chō; admission free, food lessons from ¥600; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) processes most of the locally caught fish. You can watch the workers making prawn *sembei* (rice crackers) and *chikuwa* (ground-fish snacks), and you can even have a go at it yourself. Lessons are worth the price and great for children. Tomo-no-ura is also famed for *houmei-shu*, a sweet Chinese herb liquor. There are breweries offering samples among the houses a few blocks back from the waterfront.

SLEEPING & EATING

Tomo Seaside Hotel (鞆シーサイドホテル; ☎ 83-5111; www.tomonoura.co.jp in Japanese; 555 Tomo Tomo-chō; s/tw incl 2 meals from ¥6800/15,600; P 🕒) Close to the sights on the mainland and with great views, this hotel is a little run down and caters to group tours. All rooms are Japanese style with their own bathroom, and the hotel also has a rooftop bath.

Kokuminshukusha Sensui-jima (国民宿舎仙酔島; ☎ 70-5050; fax 70-5035; www.tomonoura.co.jp in Japanese; 3373-2 Ushiroji Tomo-chō; s/tw with shared bathroom incl 2 meals from ¥7800/15,600; P 🕒) Right in front of the beach and boasting sea views, this is the most reasonably priced accommodation on nearby Sensui-jima. There are Japanese- and Western-style rooms and wonderful baths. Beware: for dinner you may be served *taikabuto* (boiled head of sea bream)!

@Cafe (☎ 82-0131; Jōyatōmae Tomo-chō; meals ¥400-900; 🕒 11am-8pm Thu-Tue) This is a hip new café

in a 150-year-old *nagaya* building beside the old harbour lighthouse. Panini, parfaits and pastas like *baziru sōsu omakase pasuta* (basil pasta; ¥900) make for a tasty break. **Tabuchiya** (田淵屋; ☎ 83-5085; 838 Tomo Tomo-chō; meals ¥400-1400; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Thu-Tue) A location for the recent film *Yamato*, this lovingly restored, elegant coffee shop on a corner a few blocks back from the harbour has light meals like *hayashi raisu* (hashed beef on rice; ¥1400). Look for the green *noren* (door curtain) with white Chinese characters.

Sensuan (仙酔庵; ☎ 82-2565; 555 Tomo Tomo-chō; dishes ¥580; ☎ 11am-5pm) Right by the Tomo Seaside Hotel is this tea shop in an old white and black house. Sip some green tea and enjoy a sweet like *tai-yaki* (buns baked in a mold; ¥100) while looking out to sea.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

It's only 14km from Fukuyama to Tomo-no-Ura; buses run every 15 minutes from bus stop 11 outside JR Fukuyama station (¥530, 30 minutes).

Onomichi 尾道

☎ 0848 / pop 150,000

Onomichi may look like an undistinguished industrial town, but give it a chance and you'll warm to its friendly locals and slower pace. Most sights are in the hills. The **tourist information office** (☎ 20-0005; 10-1 Higashigoshō-machi; ☎ 9am-6pm) is to the right of Onomichi station in the Teatro Shell-rune building.

SIGHTS

The Onomichi **Historical Temple Walk** takes in 25 important temples of the original 48. The tourist information office has a very detailed brochure in English about the temple walk and Onomichi. You can catch the **ropeway** (cable car; one way/return ¥280/440) up to **Senkō-ji-kōen**, which is covered with cherry and azalea blossoms in spring. Follow the paths on the way back down and take in the **Path of Literature** on the way, which has memorials to some of the writers who have visited Onomichi. On the waterfront is an old storehouse that's now home to the **Onomichi Motion Picture Museum** (おのみち映画資料館; ☎ 37-8141; 1-14-10 Kubo; admission ¥500; ☎ 9am-6pm Wed-Mon). It has an evocative collection of old movie posters, magazines and memorabilia. *Tokyo Story* (1953) is the most famous movie filmed in Onomichi, and five-minute segments of the film are on show.

SLEEPING & EATING

Onomichi Royal Hotel (尾道ロイヤルホテル; ☎ 23-2111; fax 23-6058; www.kokusai-hotel.com in Japanese; 2-9-27 Tsuchido-chō; s/tw ¥5300/10,500; ☎ ☎ ☎) On the waterfront, it has simple business-hotel décor and good views. Internet access is dial-up only.

Nishiyama Ryokan (西山旅館; ☎ 37-3145; fax 37-3885; 3-27 Toyohimotomachi; s/tw incl 2 meals ¥15,750/31,500; ☎ ☎) A block before the waterfront, the Nishiyama features traditional wooden interiors and gardens.

Uonobu Ryokan (魚信旅館; ☎ 37-4175; fax 37-3849; www.uonobu.jp in Japanese; 2-27-6 Kubo; s/tw from ¥15,000/30,000; ☎ ☎) Right on the waterfront, this elegantly old-fashioned furnished place is renowned for its innovative and delicious food.

Onomichi Rāmen Ichibankan (尾道ラーメン壹番館; ☎ 21-1119; 2-9-26 Tsuchidō-chō; dishes ¥380-1800; ☎ 11am-8pm Thu-Tue) Just past the Royal Hotel on the waterfront, this boisterous noodle shop is the tastiest spot for Onomichi ramen (¥490), characterised by thin noodles and a thick slab of pork.

Yamaneko (やまねこ; ☎ 21-5355; 2-9-33 Tsuchidō-chō; dishes ¥400-900; ☎ 11.30am-10pm Tue-Fri, to midnight Sat & Sun) By the waterfront next to a lurid junk shop, this very funky corner café serves modern Japanese food, pizza, pasta and a wide range of drinks. The *gyokai no gaarikku supagetti* (garlic seafood spaghetti; ¥780) is a fine choice. It has good music and English-speaking staff.

Casalunga Deux Table (カサリンガ・ドゥテーブル; ☎ 722-0035; 1st fl, 1-9-10 Tsuchidō-chō; dishes ¥2000-3000; ☎ lunch & dinner Fri-Wed, closed every 3rd Wed monthly; ☎ ☎) For groovy Italian food, look for this place between the shopping arcade and the waterfront about four blocks east of the station; there's a bright red sign outside. Pastas include *bēkon to nasu to tsuna no tomato sōsu* (bacon, eggplant and tuna pasta with tomato sauce; ¥1300).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Onomichi is at the Honshū end of the island-hopping Shimanami-kaidō bridge system to Shikoku. As such it's a gateway to Inno-shima (p467), Ikuchi-jima (p467) and Omi-shima (p467). The islands can be reached by bus or ferry from Onomichi. The tourist information office has a *Shimanami Kaido Guide Map* in Japanese and a multilingual *I Love Onomichi* brochure.

The Shin-Onomichi *shinkansen* station is 3km north of the JR San-yō line station. Buses connect the two stations, but it's easier to reach Onomichi on the JR San-yō line and change to the *shinkansen* line either at Fukuyama or Mihara.

Mihara 三原

☎ 0848 / pop 105,000

Mihara is on the San-yō *shinkansen* line and on the JR San-yō line. It's a convenient ferry departure and arrival point for Setoda on Ikuchi-jima, for other islands of the Inland Sea and for Shikoku. The harbour is directly south of the station. There's a **tourist information office** (☎ 67-5877; 1-1-1 Shiromachi; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) in the modern JR station.

NORTHERN HIROSHIMA-KEN

広島県北部

Sandan-kyō 三段峡

The Sandan-kyō gorge, about 50km northwest of Hiroshima, is an area that you could get lost in for a few days. A mostly paved trail follows the Shiki-gawa through an 11km gorge, providing visitors to Hiroshima with accessible, beautiful Japanese nature. The hike is very popular in autumn when the leaves change colour. Pick up a copy of Lonely Planet's *Hiking in Japan* for details.

Buses run from the Hiroshima bus centre to Sandan-kyō station (¥1400, two hours), at the southern end of the gorge. There is no longer a rail service. The gorge is also accessible by car from Shimane-ken along Rte 191.

HIROSHIMA 広島

☎ 082 / pop 1,154,000

A busy, prosperous, attractive city, Hiroshima will be remembered for that terrible instant on 6 August 1945 when it became the world's first atomic-bomb target. Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Park is a constant reminder of that tragic day and it attracts visitors from all over the world. Yet Hiroshima is a far from depressing place; on the contrary, its citizens have recovered from nuclear holocaust to build a thriving and internationally minded community.

The city dates back to 1589, when feudal lord Mōri Terumoto named the town and established a castle.

Orientation

Hiroshima (literally, 'broad island') is built on a series of sandy islands on the delta of Ōta-

gawa. JR Hiroshima station is east of the city centre and, although there are several hotels around the station, the central area, with its very lively entertainment district, is much more interesting.

Peace Memorial Park and most of the atomic-bomb reminders are at the northern end of the island, immediately west of the city centre.

Hiroshima's main east-west avenue is Heiwa-Ōdōri (Peace Blvd), but the busiest road (with the main trams from the station) is Aioi-dōri, which runs parallel to Heiwa-Ōdōri. Just south of Aioi-dōri, and again parallel to it, is the busy Hon-dōri shopping arcade.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Book Nook (☎ 244-8415; 5-17 Kamiya-chō; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sat, 1-6pm Sun; ☎ ☎) Has second-hand Western books, mostly trade paperbacks, a notice board and free internet. It's in a language school called Outsider behind Iyo Bank and Yamaha music store. Look for the 2nd-floor sign.

INTERNET ACCESS

The **International Exchange Lounge** (see p455) has free internet access, and there are several Kinko's branches in town.

Futaba@Cafe (per hr from ¥409; ☎ 24hr) JR Hiroshima Station (☎ 568-4792; 2-22 Matsubara-chō, Minami-ku) On the 6th floor of the Futaba Toshō GIGA building with a yellow sign down the side east of JR Hiroshima station; Hondōri Arcade (☎ 542-5455; Basement, Futaba Toshō Kamiya-chō Bldg, 2-2-33 Kamiya-chō, Nakaku-ku) Near the Peace Memorial Park end of Hondōri Arcade. Free drinks are available; there's a ¥105 membership fee.

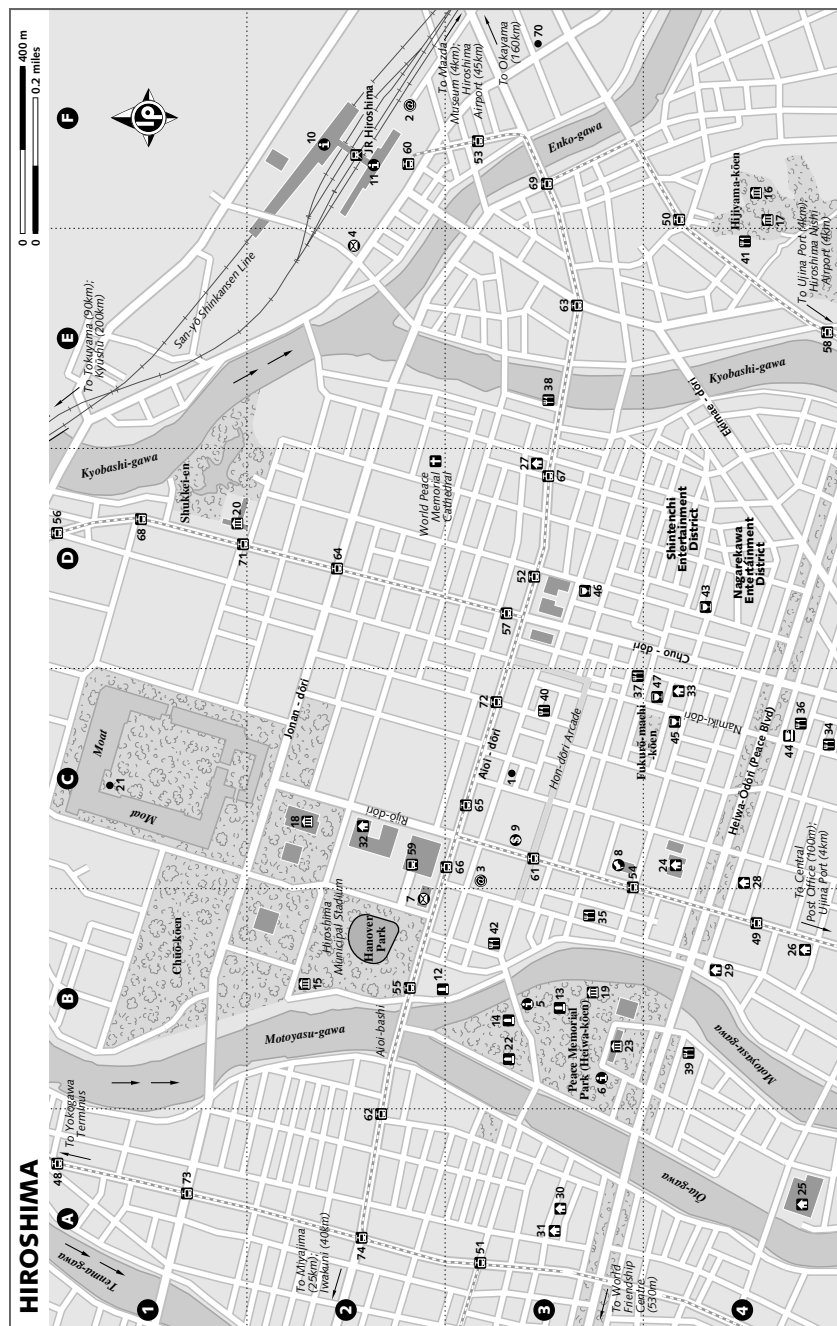
MONEY

The central post office (see below) changes money during the week, and on weekends the major international hotels have exchange services. The Hiroshima Rest House (see p455) has an extensive list of post offices that change travellers cheques, banks that do cash advances and international ATMs.

Sumitomo Mitsui Bank (☎ 247-2121; 1-3-2 Kamiya-chō, Naka-ku; ☎ 8am-11pm) International cards are accepted by the 1st-floor ATM. Two blocks south of Aioi-Dōri.

POST

Central post office (広島中央郵便局; ☎ 245-5335; 1-4-1 Kokutaiji-chō, Naka-ku; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat, to 12.30pm Sun) Near the Shiyakusho-mae



INFORMATION

Book Nook ブックヌック	1 C3	
Futaba@Cafe		
フタバ@アットカフェ	2 F2	
Futaba@Cafe		
フタバ@アットカフェ	3 C3	
Higashi Post Office 東郵便局	4 E2	
Hiroshima Rest House		
広島市レストハウス	5 B3	
International Exchange Lounge		
国際交流ラウンジ	6 B3	
Naka Post Office 中郵便局	7 B2	
South Korean Consulate	8 C3	
Sumitomo Mitsui Bank		
三井住友銀行	9 C3	
Tourist Information Office		
観光案内所	10 F2	
Tourist Information Office		
観光案内所	11 F2	
A-Bomb Dome 原爆ドーム	12 B2	
Cenotaph 原爆慰霊碑	13 B3	
Children's Peace Memorial		
原爆の子像	14 B3	
Flame of Peace 平和の灯	(see 13)	
Hiroshima Children's Museum		
広島市子ども文化科学館	(プラネタリウム)	15 B2
Hiroshima City Manga Library		
広島まんが図書館	16 F4	
Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art		
広島現代美術館	17 F4	
Hiroshima Museum of Art		
ひろしま美術館	18 C2	
Hiroshima National Peace Memorial Hall for the Atomic Bomb Victims		
国立広島原爆死没者追悼平和記念館	19 B3	
Hiroshima Prefectural Art Museum		
広島県立美術館	20 D1	
Hiroshima-jō 広島城	21 C1	

Korean A-Bomb Memorial

韓国原爆犠牲者慰霊碑	22 B3	
Peace Memorial Museum		
広島平和記念資料館	23 B3	
Futaba@アットカフェ	3 C3	
Higashi Post Office 東郵便局	4 E2	
Hiroshima Rest House		
広島市レストハウス	5 B3	
International Exchange Lounge		
国際交流ラウンジ	6 B3	
Naka Post Office 中郵便局	7 B2	
South Korean Consulate	8 C3	
Sumitomo Mitsui Bank		
三井住友銀行	9 C3	
Tourist Information Office		
観光案内所	10 F2	
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観光案内所	11 F2	
A-Bomb Dome 原爆ドーム	12 B2	
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Children's Peace Memorial		
原爆の子像	14 B3	
Flame of Peace 平和の灯	(see 13)	
Hiroshima Children's Museum		
広島市子ども文化科学館	(プラネタリウム)	15 B2
Hiroshima City Manga Library		
広島まんが図書館	16 F4	
Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art		
広島現代美術館	17 F4	
Hiroshima Museum of Art		
ひろしま美術館	18 C2	
Hiroshima National Peace Memorial Hall for the Atomic Bomb Victims		
国立広島原爆死没者追悼平和記念館	19 B3	
Hiroshima Prefectural Art Museum		
広島県立美術館	20 D1	
Hiroshima-jō 広島城	21 C1	

SLEEPING

ANA Hotel Hiroshima	
広島全日空ホテル	24 C4
Aster Plaza International Youth	
House 広島市国際青年会館	25 A4
Comfort Hotel Hiroshima Otemachi	
コンフォートホテル広島	26 B4
Hotel Active!	
ホテルアクティブ! 広島	27 D3
Hotel Dormy Inn Hiroshima	
ドリーミン広島	28 C4
Hotel Sunroute Hiroshima	
ホテルサンルート広島	29 B4
Ikawa Ryokan いかわ旅館	30 A3
J-Hoppers Hiroshima	
ジェイホッパーズ広島	31 A3
Rigma Royal Hotel Hiroshima	
リーガロイヤルホテル広島	32 C2
Sera Bekkan 世羅別館	33 C4
Bakudanya ばくだん屋	34 C4
Cha Cha Ni Moon 茶茶武ムーン	35 B3
Hassei 八誠	36 C4
Okonomi-mura お好み村	37 C3
Peace Pot ピースポット	38 E3
Ristorante Mario	
リストランテマリオ	39 B4
Spicy Bar La's	
スパイシーバーラルズ	40 C3
Toشو 豆匠	41 E4
Zucchini ズッキーニ	42 B3
Bar Alcoholiday	
バー アルコホリディ	43 D4

DRINKING

Bar Alcoholiday	
バー アルコホリディ	43 D4

J-Café ジェイカフェ	44 C4
Koba コバ	45 C4
Kuro-sawa 黒澤	46 D3
Lotus ロータス	(see 47)
Opium オピウム	47 C4

TRANSPORT

Betsuin-mae 別院前	48 A1
Chūden-mae 中電前	49 B4
Danbara 1 chome 段原一丁目	50 F4
Dobashi 土橋	51 A3
Ebisu-chō 胡町	52 D3
Enkōbashi-chō 猿猴橋町	53 F3
Fukuro-machi 袋町	54 C3
Genbaku Domū-mae (A-Bomb Dome) 原爆ドーム前	55 B2
Hakushima Line Terminus	
白島	56 D1
Hatchō-bori 八丁堀	57 D3
Hijiyama-shita 比治山下	58 E4
Hiroshima Bus Centre	
広島バスセンター	59 C2
Hiroshima Eki 広島駅	60 F2
Hon-dōri 本通	61 C3
Honkawa-chō 本川町	62 A2
Inari-machi 稲荷町	63 E3
Jogakuin-mae 女学院前	64 D2
Kamiya-chō-higashi 紙屋町東	65 C3
Kamiya-chō-nishi 紙屋町西	66 C3
Kanayama-chō 銀山町	67 D3
Katei Saibansho-mae	
家庭裁判所前	68 D1
Matoba-chō 的場町	69 F3
Nippon Rent-a-car	
ニッポンレンタカー	70 F3
Shukkeien-mae 縮景院前	71 D1
Tate-machi 立町	72 C3
Tera-machi 寺町	73 A1
Tōkaichimachi 十日市町	74 A2

tram stop. You can change money here between 9am and 4pm Monday to Friday.

Higashi Post Office ☎ 261-6401; 2-62 Matsubara-chō, Minami-ku; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat, to 12.30pm Sun) Near the south exit of the station, this branch is more convenient than the 'Central'.

Naka Post Office ☎ 222-1314; 6-36 Motomachi, Naka-ku; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat) Next to the Sōgō department store.

TOURIST INFORMATION

There are two excellent websites about Hiroshima. The **Hiroshima Convention & Visitors Bureau** (www.hiroshima-navi.or.jp) has extensive information on sightseeing, accommodation and access to/from the city. Check out www.gethiroshima.com for good food and nightlife recommendations, and insights into the local culture not covered by the tourist brochures.

For the benefit of those arriving by sea, Hiroshima's port, Ujina, has an information counter with basic information.

Hiroshima Rest House ☎ 247-6738; 1-1 Nakajima-machi, Naka-ku; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Sep, 8.30am-5pm Oct-Mar) In Peace Memorial Park, next to Motoyasu-bashi. Offers the most comprehensive information about the city and the island of Miyajima.

International Exchange Lounge ☎ 247-9715; 1-5 Nakajima-machi, Naka-ku ☎ 9am-7pm Apr-Sep, to 6pm Oct-Mar; ☎) Beside the Peace Memorial Museum. Has information in English, newspapers and magazines, a library and a study room. The lounge is geared towards foreigners living in Japan.

Tourist information office JR Hiroshima Station South ☎ 261-1877; 2-31 Matsubara-chō, Minami-ku; ☎ 9am-5.30pm) At the south exit of the station; JR Hiroshima Station North ☎ 263-6822; 2-37 Matsubara-chō, Minami-ku; ☎ 9am-7pm) At the north exit. The English-speaking staff can make accommodation bookings.

Sights

A-BOMB DOME 原爆ドーム

The symbol of the destruction visited upon Hiroshima is the **A-Bomb Dome** (Gembaku Dōmu), across the river from Peace Memorial Park. Declared a Unesco World Heritage site in December 1996, the building was the Industrial Promotion Hall until the bomb exploded almost directly above it. Its propped-up ruins, floodlit at night, have been left as an eternal reminder of the tragedy.

PEACE MEMORIAL PARK 平和記念公園

From the A-Bomb Dome cross over into **Peace Memorial Park** (Heiwa-kōen), which is dotted with memorials, including the **cenotaph** that contains the names of all the known victims of the bomb. The cenotaph frames the **Flame of Peace**, which will only be extinguished once the last nuclear weapon on earth has been destroyed, and the A-Bomb Dome across the river.

Just north of the road crossing through the park is, for many, the most poignant memorial in the park – the **Children's Peace Monument**, inspired by leukaemia victim Sadako Sasaki. When Sadako developed leukaemia at 10 years of age she decided to fold 1000 paper cranes – an ancient Japanese custom through which it is believed that a person's wishes will come true. The crane is the symbol of longevity and happiness in Japan and she was convinced that if she could achieve that target she would recover. She died before reaching her goal, but her classmates folded the rest. The story inspired a nationwide bout of paper-crane folding, which continues to this day.

Nearby is the recently relocated **Korean A-Bomb Memorial**. Great numbers of Koreans were shipped from their homeland to work as slave labourers in Japanese factories during WWII, and more than one in 10 of those killed by the atomic bomb were Korean.

PEACE MEMORIAL MUSEUM

平和記念資料館

The **A-bomb museum** (☎ 241-4004; 1-2 Nakajima-chō, Naka-ku; admission ¥50; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Jul & Sep-Nov, 8.30am-7pm Aug, to 5pm Dec-Mar), as the Peace Memorial Museum is commonly known, narrates the events preceding, during and after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on 6 August 1945. For many it is an overwhelming experience and a potent symbol of the idiocy of war.

HIROSHIMA NATIONAL PEACE MEMORIAL HALL FOR THE ATOMIC BOMB VICTIMS

国立広島原爆死没者追悼平和祈念館

Opened in August 2002, **Peace Memorial Hall** (☎ 543-6271; 1-6 Nakajima-chō, Naka-ku; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mar-Jul, to 7pm Aug, to 6pm Sep-Nov, to 5pm Dec-Feb) is a contemplative hall of remembrance and a register where the names and photographs of atomic-bomb victims are kept, along with their testimonies. It was designed by architect Tange Kenzo, who also designed the park's museum, cenotaph and eternal flame. These testimonies, which can be viewed on video, vividly evoke the chaos that Japan was in at this time and the inhumane treatment of civilians by Japanese military personnel. It's worth taking time here to get first-hand accounts of the after-effects of the bomb.

HIROSHIMA-JŌ 広島城

Also known as **Carp Castle**, **Hiroshima-jō** (☎ 221-7512; 21-1 Moto-machi, Naka-ku; admission ¥320; ☎ 9am-6pm Mar-Nov, to 5pm Dec-Feb) was originally constructed in 1589, but much of it was dismantled following the Meiji Restoration, leaving only the donjon, main gates and turrets. The remainder was totally destroyed by the bomb and rebuilt in modern reinforced concrete in 1958.

SHUKKEI-EN 縮景園

Modelled after Xi Hu (West Lake) in Hangzhou, China, **Shukkei-en** (2-11 Kami-nobori-chō; admission ¥250; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar) dates from 1620 but it was severely damaged by the bomb. The garden's name literally means 'contracted view', and it attempts to re-create grand vistas in miniature. It may not be one of Japan's celebrated classic gardens, but it makes for a pleasant stroll.

Next to the garden is the splendid **Hiroshima Prefectural Art Museum** (2-22 Kami-nobori-chō; admission ¥500, combined ticket with garden ¥600; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Fri, Sun & to 7pm Sat), featuring Salvador Dali's *Dream of Venus* and the artwork of Hirayama Ikuo, who was in the city during the bombing. Enter the garden through the museum.

OTHER SIGHTS

Hijiyama-kōen, a park noted for its cherry blossoms in spring, lies directly south of JR Hiroshima station and is home to two worthy attractions. The **Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art** (☎ 264-1121; 1-1 Hijiyama-kōen,

HIROSHIMA

'Nothing will grow for 75 years' went the rumours after the *Enola Gay* unleashed the atomic bomb on Hiroshima on 6 August 1945. For many around the world, the bombing is still a potent symbol of people's inhumanity, and even more so for the remaining 125,000 Hiroshima *hibakusha* (atomic-bomb survivors).

The youngest *hibakusha* is 59, in the womb when the bomb was dropped. About 5000 have died every year over the past 10 years. Looking at modern Hiroshima more than 60 years after the bombing, it's easy to forget that it ever happened. Who will tell the *hibakusha* story when the last of their number dies? School children are visiting the Peace Museum in Hiroshima in declining numbers. The Children's Peace Memorial, where thousands of paper cranes are sent annually in memory of leukaemia victim Sadako, has been set alight by vandals. Even though they were protected by a glass enclosure and were under surveillance, the cranes were set alight by a university student from Kobe a few days before 6 August 2003. The student wished to express frustration over 'grim employment opportunities for university graduates'.

Economic realities and political ambitions are reshaping this most peaceful of nations. Until 2004 the Japanese prime minister would meet with *hibakusha* after the 6 August memorial service. This doesn't happen any longer, as many within the opposition and the dominant Liberal Democratic Party deepen and strengthen their arguments for the development of nuclear weapons in Japan.

As the voices of the *hibakusha* grow fewer, Dr Tanaka Yuki of the Hiroshima Peace Institute, a Hiroshima City Government think-tank, believes that the tragedy of Hiroshima is being discussed less and less, as it is thought of primarily as a nuclear tragedy. He says, 'All warfare is a crime against humanity. Hiroshima, apart from being nuclear, was also an air raid. Sixty-four cities, including Tokyo, were bombed during the Second World War in Japan, and bombing has been used in all modern warfare to some degree – from WWI to Iraq.' Dr Tanaka would like to see Hiroshima reinterpreted for future generations and put into a broader world context, so that it isn't relegated to the historical dustbin once all the *hibakusha* have died.

In a further effort to reinvigorate the antinuclear argument, there are plans for a People's Tribunal on the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (for details on that atomic explosion see p684), based on crimes-against-humanity trials in places such as Bosnia. As media saturation of modern warfare desensitises people to the realities of war, Dr Tanaka's concern and vision are timely – lest we forget.

Minami-ku; admission ¥360; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) has excellent displays by modern Japanese and international artists, while the **Hiroshima City Manga Library** (☎ 261-0330; 1-4 Hijiyama-kōen, Minami-ku; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is a small comic-book museum.

The **Hiroshima Museum of Art** (☎ 223-2530; 3-2 Moto-machi, Naka-ku; admission ¥1000; ☎ 9am-5pm) is in an interesting 1970s building built by the Hiroshima Bank and focusing on French masters, and the **Hiroshima Children's Museum** (☎ 222-5346; 5-83 Moto-machi, Naka-ku; admission museum/planetarium free/¥500; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) is good fun for adults and kids. Both are in Hanover Park, just southwest of the castle. The **Mazda Museum** (マツダミュージアム; www.mazda.com/mazdaspirit/museum; ☎ 252-5050; ☎ 8.30-11am & 12.30-3.30pm Mon-Fri) is quite popular, as you get to see the 7km assembly line – the world's longest. If you feel auto-inclined, check out

the details on the English-language website. Reservations are required; there is one tour in English daily at 1pm. It's two stops from JR Hiroshima station.

Activities

A love of **baseball** is not a prerequisite for having a great time at a Hiroshima Carp game. It's just as much fun watching the rowdy, organised enthusiasm of the crowd, especially when the Tokyo Giants come to town. The stadium is just north of the Peace Memorial Park, and outfield tickets start at ¥1500.

Miyajima (p460), 25km west of the city, can easily be visited as a **day trip** from Hiroshima. The tram company has a special one-day passport that includes a return tram trip to Miyajima-guchi, a return ferry to Miyajima and unlimited daily tram transport for just ¥840. You can buy the ticket at various big

hotels, tram stops and at the Hiroshima Rest House information office (p455).

A variety of lunch and dinner **cruises** run from Hiroshima to Miyajima and back. On weekdays from March to September day cruises operate through the Inland Sea.

Festivals & Events

On 6 August, the anniversary of the atomic bombing, a **memorial service** is held in Peace Memorial Park and thousands of paper lanterns for the souls of the dead are floated down the Ōta-gawa from in front of the A-Bomb Dome.

Sleeping

BUDGET

J-Hoppers Hiroshima (☎ 233-1360; www.hiroshimahostel.jp; 5-16 Dobashi-chō, Naka-ku; dm/s with shared bathroom ¥2500/3000; (P) (X) (S) (L)) This newly opened hostel has small co-ed and female-only dorm rooms but they are clean and staff here are very friendly. Bikes can be rented (¥500 per day) and extended-stay discounts are available.

World Friendship Center (ワールド・フレンドシップ・センター; ☎ 503-3191; fax 503-3179; www.wfchiroshima.net; 8-10 Higashi Kannon-machi Nishi-ku; s/tw with shared bathroom incl breakfast ¥3500/7000; (S) (X) (W) (F)) Run by an antinuclear nonprofit organisation, the homey World Friendship Center B&B has three bright Japanese-style rooms and hospitable expatriate staff. The city's tourist information offices can supply directions. No credit cards.

Aster Plaza International Youth House (☎ 247-8700; fax 246-5808; www1.ocn.ne.jp/~kokusei1 in Japanese; 4-17 Kako-machi Naka-ku; s/tw ¥3620/6260; (P) (S) (L)) This municipal cultural centre, a block south of the Peace Memorial Park, is the best value in Hiroshima. There's a midnight curfew.

Ikawa Ryokan (☎ 231-5058; fax 231-5995; www.itcj.jp/hdb/634026.html; 5-11 Dobashi-chō, Naka-ku; s/tw from ¥4200/7350; (P) (S) (L)) This is a friendly, family-run complex consisting of several wings with recently renovated rooms. There are Japanese and Western-style rooms, all very clean, and meals are available in the cafeteria.

Hotel Active! (☎ 212-0001; fax 211-3121; www.hotel-active.com in Japanese; 15-3 Nobori-chō Naka-ku; s/tw ¥5980/8800; (P) (X) (S) (L)) This newly opened business hotel is one of the most stylish in Japan. The lobby has designer couches, the beds have satiny coverlets, there's a free buffet breakfast and a communal bath (men only). You'll walk out feeling like a star.

Hotel Dormy Inn Hiroshima (☎ 240-1177; fax 240-1755; www.hotespa.net/hotels/hiroshima in Japanese; 3-28 Komachi Naka-ku; s/tw from ¥6000/9000; (P) (X) (S) (L)) Conveniently located on Heiwa Ōdōri, the Dormy Inn has standard business-hotel singles and a range of amenities, including a large communal bath (men only). There's a good buffet breakfast for ¥950.

MIDRANGE

Comfort Hotel Hiroshima Ōtemachi (☎ 545-7811; fax 545-7812; www.choicehotels.com; 3-7-9 Ōtemachi Naka-ku; s/tw ¥6500/8500; (P) (X) (S) (L)) Attractively designed, new and friendly, this is a great business hotel, not to be confused with the older Comfort Hotel Hiroshima a block away. It offers free buffet breakfast and internet access via the computers in the bright lobby.

Sera Bekkan (☎ 248-2251; fax 248-2768; www.yado.to in Japanese; 4-20 Mikawa-chō Naka-ku; s/tw ¥7350/14,700; incl 2 meals ¥12,600/25,200; (P) (S) (L)) A popular and friendly traditional ryokan near Fukurō-machi-kōen. Three of the rooms have a garden view.

ANA Hotel Hiroshima (☎ 241-1111; fax 241-9123; www.anahotels.com; 7-20 Naka-machi Naka-ku; s/tw ¥12,705/23,100; (P) (S) (L)) Rooms are large but plain, and the café downstairs is a mellow place to start the day over a buffet breakfast. Luxury rooms on the 'premier floors' are also available.

Rihga Royal Hotel Hiroshima (☎ 502-1121; fax 228-5415; www.rihga-hiroshima.co.jp; 6-78 Moto-machi; s/tw ¥13,000/17,000; (P) (X) (S) (L)) With professional English-speaking staff, spacious rooms and great night-time views, this is Hiroshima's tallest hotel, southwest of Hiroshima-jo. Ask for a view of the castle.

Eating

Hiroshima is noted for its seafood (particularly oysters), but especially *hiroshima-yaki*, a local version of *okonomiyaki* (egg-based savoury pancakes) made with *soba* (thin buckwheat noodles) and fried egg.

Peace Pot (☎ 211-0084; 11-7 Hashimoto-chō Naka-ku; dishes ¥650-880; (X) 11am-10.30pm) This alfresco soup spot is one of four new eateries along the Kyōbashi river by the Inari-ōhashi bridge. The tasty pork curry soup (¥650) is like a meal; bread or rice sets are available. Oysters and beef are on the menu in the neighbouring restaurants.

Bakudanya (☎ 245-5885; 6-13 Fujimi-chō Naka-ku; dishes ¥650-1000; (X) 11.20am-9pm) A rising star of

Hiroshima cuisine is *tsukemen*, a ramen-like soup dish in which noodles and broth are separated. The fun is in the dipping, and this simple counter shop has branched out across Japan. Try the Bakudan set (¥850) and choose the spiciness and volume of noodles. If in doubt, just select *futsū* (regular). Look for the white signboard under the green awning on Jizō-dori.

Hassei (☎ 242-8123; 4-17 Fujimi-chō Naka-ku; dishes ¥450-1200; (X) lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) For a hole in the wall like this unpretentious little *okonomiyaki* joint run by friendly chef Gaku-san, Hassei gets its share of celeb patrons, like composer Ryūichi Sakamoto. It's a less touristy alternative to Okonomi-mura and even the half-size *soba*- or *udon-yaki* (*hiroshima-yaki* with udon or soba noodles; ¥500) is very filling. If you're famished, try the seafood special (*shifōdo sushiaru*; ¥1200). Hassei has a rising sun pattern on the sign over the door.

Okonomi-mura (☎ 241-2210; 5-13 Shintenchō Naka-ku; dishes ¥700-1200; (X) 11am-2am) This Hiroshima institution is an amazing grouping of 27 eating counters on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th floors of the Shintenchō Plaza building behind the Parco Department Store (look for the red neon sign on the far side of the small square). All specialise in *hiroshima-yaki*, which goes down remarkably well with a tall, cold *nama biru* (draught beer). Turn to the right as you leave the lift on the 2nd floor to find Sarashina, where Chef Nakamura-san is very welcoming. Sarashina's open Tuesday to Sunday, phone ☎ 241-0564.

Cha Cha Ni Moon (☎ 241-7444; 2-6-26 Ōtemachi Naka-ku; dishes ¥500-1500; (X) dinner) Japanese minimalism prevails in this softly lit old house. There's a broad bar downstairs and two other floors of intimate dining rooms that are semiprivate. A house speciality is *yuba* (tofu skin), but most of the beautifully presented dishes here are based on traditional Kyoto cuisine. The ¥3500 *omakase* (chef's discretion) course includes tempura and cow's tongue. Look for the tiny 'Moon' sign across from the small park.

Zuchimi (☎ 546-0777; 1-5-18 Ōtemachi Naka-ku; meals ¥400-2800; (X) dinner; E) Serves up tapas, paella and other Spanish goodies in very lively style. Waiters shout, the music grooves and everyone seems to have a good time. It's a great alternative if you're tiring of *okonomiyaki*.

Spicy Bar Lal's (☎ 504-6328; 5-12 Tatemachi Naka-ku; dishes ¥500-4200; (X) lunch & dinner; E) Although Lal himself is no longer here, the Nepalese

and Indian fare at this colourful, cosy eatery is still excellent. Filling lunch specials start at ¥880. Truly tasty curries and naan breads make this one of the best South Asian restaurants in town.

Ristorante Mario (☎ 248-4956; 4-11 Nakajima-chō Naka-ku; dishes from ¥1000; (X) lunch & dinner; E) Good, honest pastas and pizzas (lunch courses start at ¥1800), quick service, a long wine list and an English menu make Ristorante Mario a relaxing option after a visit to the Peace Memorial Museum. This is justifiably a popular spot, so try to reserve on weekends.

Tosho (☎ 506-1028; 6-24 Hijiyama-chō Minami-ku; meals ¥1260-6300; (X) lunch & dinner) In a quiet wooden building overlooking a carp pond, Tosho has set menus of traditional Japanese food with complimentary coffee. Choose from a photo menu. The walls near the cashier area are covered with signatures from Hiroshima Carp baseball players. Follow the green-and-white signs from Danbara 1 chōme tram stop. It's off an uphill alley right after Hijiyama Shrine.

Drinking

Shintenchō and Nagarekawa are the city's entertainment districts.

Bar Alcoholiday (☎ 090-4659-9072; 3rd fl, Casa Blanca Bldg, 5-19 Nagarekawa-chō Naka-ku; drinks ¥500; (X) 9pm-5am Tue-Sun) You can hear the karaoke wails as you approach this place, in a building crammed full of bars. Chie will be happy to serve you, particularly between 9pm and 10pm, when drinks are ¥100 off. Look for the bright red Casa Blanca sign outside.

Opium (☎ 504-0255; 3rd fl, Namiki Curl Bldg, 3-12 Mikawa-chō; dishes from ¥500; (X) noon-4am; E) Sip high-calibre drinks and people-watch in this cool bar. Snacks, pizza and pasta dishes are available. There's a sign on the wall outside. It's above the Kokoroshka shoe shop on the corner.

Lotus (☎ 246-0104; 5th fl, Namiki Curl Bldg, 3-12 Mikawa-chō; drinks from ¥500; (X) 6pm-3am) Two floors above Opium in the Namiki Curl building is Lotus, a stylish, Zen-like space where you can take off your shoes and relax on the raised floor amid cushions and low tables or sip ¥600 cocktails at the bar. There's a little DJ booth here too playing great tunes.

Koba (☎ 249-6556; 3rd fl, Rego Bldg, 1-4 Naka-machi; dishes ¥700-1200; (X) 6pm-2am Thu-Tue; E) Koba is a very chill place to enjoy a drink, pizza, pasta or curry and an eclectic range of music; friendly manager Bom is a musician and

hosts live acts now and again as well as works by local artists. It's in a concrete building with a pool of water by the entrance, just behind Stussy.

Kuro-sawa (☎ 247-7750; 5th fl, Tenmaya Ebisuclub, 3-20 Horikawa-chō Naka-ku; dishes ¥420-5500; ☎ 6pm-4am Mon-Sat, to 1am Sun; E) This chic *izakaya* (Japanese-style pub) is hewn from bare concrete and attractively low-lit, a fine setting to savour goodies like charcoal-grilled pork with ginger sauce (¥724). Look for the MOS Burger outlet on the ground floor.

J-Café (☎ 242-1234; 4-20 Fujimi-chō Naka-ku; dishes from ¥600; ☎ noon-2am Sun-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat; E) Homey and comfy are the watchwords at this breezy café-bar on Heiwa-Ōdōri. Big red couches lend a living-room feel, and graffiti art adorns the walls. Scrumptious waffles, crepes and panini are on offer. The sign outside has a stylised 'j' like an ampersand.

Getting There & Away

Hiroshima's main **airport** (☎ 848-86-8151; 64-31 Hiraiwa, Zennyuji, Hongo-chō, Mihara-shi) is 40km east of the city, with bus connections to/from Hiroshima station (¥1300, 48 minutes). There are flights to/from all of Japan's major cities and international flights to Seoul, Dalian, Beijing, Shanghai, Taipei, Bangkok and Guam. **Hiroshima Nishi airport** (☎ 822-95-2650; 4-10-2 Kannon Shin-machi, Nishi-ku) is 4km southwest of the city centre on the coast. It handles more regional services, and there are buses to/from Hiroshima station (¥240).

Hiroshima is an important stop on the Tokyo–Osaka–Hakata *shinkansen* route. The trip from Hiroshima to Hakata (Fukuoka) takes 1¼ hours and costs ¥8700; to Shin-Osaka (Osaka) it's 1½ hours (¥9950), and to Tokyo five hours (¥18,050).

The JR San-yō line passes through Hiroshima onwards to Shimonoseki, hugging the coastline much of the way. The ordinary local services move along fairly quickly and are the best way to visit the nearby attractions of Miyajima and Iwakuni. Long-distance buses connect Hiroshima with all the major cities. Buses depart from the Hiroshima Bus Center, located on the 3rd floor between the Sogo and AQ'A shopping centres by the Kamiya-cho Nishi streetcar stop.

Hiroshima is an important port with ferry connections to other cities. The Hiroshima to Matsuyama ferry (¥2500 to ¥2900, 2¾ hours, 10 daily) and hydrofoil (¥6300, 68 minutes,

15 daily) services are a popular way of getting to/from Shikoku.

Getting Around

Hiroshima has an extensive tram service that will get you almost anywhere you want to go for a flat fare of ¥150 (¥100 on the short route 9). There's even a tram that runs all the way to Miyajima port (¥270). If you have to change trams to get to your destination, you should ask for a *norikae-ken* (transfer) ticket. Pay when you get off.

Two bicycles are available for rent at **Nippon Rent-a-car** (☎ 264-0919; 3-14 Kojin-machi; ☎ 24hr), four blocks southeast of the station. Bike rental costs ¥263/735 per two hours/day.

MIYAJIMA 宮島

☎ 0829 / pop 1970

More correctly known as Itsuku-shima, Miyajima is easily reached from Hiroshima. The famous 'floating' torii (Shintō shrine gate) of Itsukushima-jinja is one of the most photographed tourist attractions in Japan – it's classified as one of Japan's three best views (the other two are the sand spit at Amanohashidate, p372, on the northern coast of Kyoto prefecture, and the islands of Matsushima, p513, near Sendai, in Northern Honshū). Apart from the shrine, the island has other temples, good walks and remarkably tame deer that wander the streets – watch for signs warning of the dangers of fraternising with horned species; some deer will even eat your JR Rail Pass if you're careless!

Information

There's a **tourist information counter** (☎ 44-2011; 1162-18 Miyajima-chō; ☎ 9am-5pm) in the ferry terminal. Turn right as you emerge from the building and follow the waterfront to get to the shrine (a 10-minute walk) and the centre of the island's small town. The shopping street, packed with souvenir outlets and restaurants as well as the world's largest rice scoop (*shakushi*), is a block back from the waterfront.

Sights

ITSUKUSHIMA-JINJA 厳島神社

The **shrine** (☎ 44-2020; 1-1 Miyajima-chō; admission ¥300; ☎ 6.30am-6pm Mar–mid-Oct, to 5.30pm mid-Oct–Nov, Jan & Feb, to 5pm Dec) that gives the island its real name dates from the 6th century (its present form dates from 1168). Its pier-like construction is

a result of the island's holy status: commoners were not allowed to set foot on the island and had to approach the shrine by boat, entering through the **floating torii** out in the bay. Much of the time, however, the shrine and torii are surrounded not by water but by mud. The view of the torii that is immortalised in thousands of travel brochures requires a high tide.

On one side of the floating shrine is a **floating nō stage** built by a Mōri lord. The orange torii, dating from 1875 in its present form, is often floodlit at night.

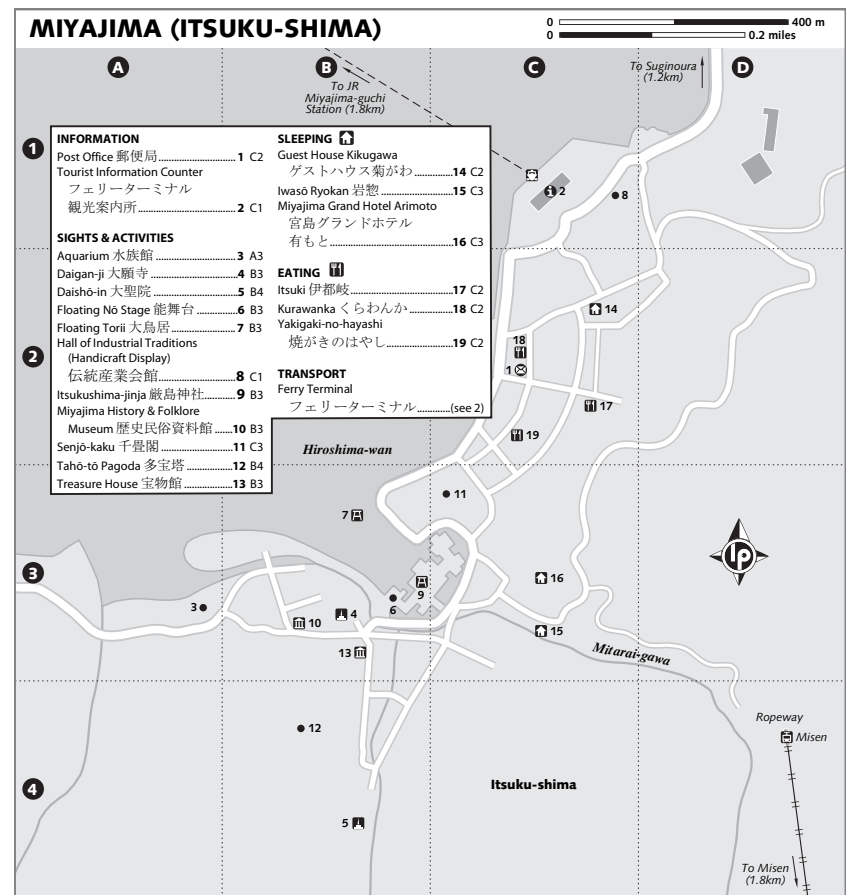
The **Treasure House** (admission ¥300; ☎ 8am-5pm) has a collection of painted sutra (Buddhist scriptures regarded as oral teachings of Gautama Buddha) scrolls, dating from the 12th century that is only rarely on display. The

exhibits are perhaps of greatest interest to the scholarly.

TEMPLES & HISTORICAL BUILDINGS

Topping the hill that is immediately north of Itsukushima-jinja is **Senjō-kaku** (Pavilion of 1000 Mats; ☎ 44-2020; 1-1 Miyajima-chō; admission ¥100; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm), built in 1587 by Toyotomi Hideyoshi. This huge and atmospheric hall is constructed with massive pillars and beams, and the ceiling is hung with paintings. It looks out to a colourful five-storey pagoda dating from 1407. Senjō-kaku should have been painted to match but was left unfinished when Toyotomi died (1598).

Miyajima has other temples, including the 1201 **Daigan-ji** (☎ 44-0179; 3 Miyajima-chō;



(☎ 9am-5pm), just south of the shrine, which is dedicated to the god of music. The colourful and glossy **Daishō-in** (☎ 44-0111; 210 Miyajima-chō; ☎ 8am-5pm), just south of town, can be visited on the way down to Misen (below). This is a Shingon sect temple with everything: statues, gates, pools, carp – you name it; there's even a very detailed English pamphlet. You can grope around in the dark beneath the Kannon hall here and view illuminated iconography. The rituals performed at the main Itsukushima-jinja are also administered by Daigan-ji. South of Itsukushima-jinja is the picturesque pagoda **Tahō-tō**.

MIYAJIMA HISTORY & FOLKLORE MUSEUM 歴史民俗資料館

Set in a fine garden, this **museum** (☎ 44-2019; 57 Miyajima-chō; admission ¥300; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Tue-Sun) combines a 19th-century merchant's home with exhibitions on trade in the Edo period, as well as displays connected with the island. There's an excellent brochure in English.

MISEN 弥山

The ascent of Misen (530m) is the island's finest walk, although the uphill part of the trip can be avoided by taking the two-stage **ropeway** (cable car; one way/return ¥1000/1800), which leaves you about a 20-minute walk from the top. There are monkeys and deer around the cable-car station. On the way up look for the **giant pot** said to have been used by Buddhist saint Kōbō Daishi (774-835) and kept simmering ever since! It's in the smaller building beside the main temple hall.

There are superb views from the summit and the descent takes a good hour. A four-hour hike of Misen is detailed in Lonely Planet's *Hiking in Japan*.

OTHER SIGHTS

Miyajima also has an **aquarium** (☎ 44-2010; 10-3 Miyajima-chō; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm) featuring 'panda dolphins', a popular beach, a seaside park and, across from the ferry landing, a display of local crafts in the **Hall of Industrial Traditions** (☎ 44-0008; 1165-9 Miyajima-chō; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Wed-Mon).

Festivals & Events

Festivals on the island include **fire-walking rites** by the island's monks on 15 April and 15 November, and the **Kangensai Boat Festival** in summer (held on different dates every year).

Sleeping & Eating

If you can afford to stay on the island, it's well worth it – you'll be able to enjoy the quiet in the evening after the day worshippers have left. Although there are many restaurants and cafés on Miyajima, most cater to day-trippers and close early.

Guest House Kikugawa (☎ 44-0039; fax 44-2773; www.kikugawa.ne.jp; 796 Miyajima-chō; s/tw from ¥6615/11,550; ☎ ☎) This charming inn is comfortable and tastefully decorated, with attractive wooden interiors. There are eight Japanese-style rooms and meals are available. The service is personal and the manager speaks English. Look for the white building with the red *noren*.

Miyajima Grand Hotel Arimoto (☎ 44-2411; www.miyajima-arimoto.co.jp; 364 Miyajima-chō; s/tw incl 2 meals from ¥15,750/31,500; ☎ ☎) A victim of the tour trade during peak seasons, the Grand Hotel Arimoto has helpful, professional staff and the cuisine features oysters prominently. Expect to pay over ¥20,000 per person from October to November.

ourpick Iwasō Ryokan (☎ 44-2233; fax 44-2230; www.iwaso.com; Momijidani Miyajima-chō; s/tw incl 2 meals ¥22,200/42,150; ☎ ☎) The Iwasō, one of Japan's better inns, offers a grand ryokan experience in exquisite gardens somewhat removed from the throng. It's worth the splurge, especially in autumn when Momijidani (Maple Valley) explodes with colour. Go for the old-fashioned *hanare* private cottages at the rear and receive the royal treatment. There's a relaxing *onsen* in the main, more modern building.

Yakigaki-no-hayashi (☎ 44-0335; 505-1 Miyajima-chō; dishes ¥700-1400; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm) The oysters in the tank and on the barbecue outside are what everyone is eating here. A plate of *nama-gaki* (raw oysters) is ¥1300.

Kurawanka (☎ 44-2077; 589-5 Miyajima-chō; dishes ¥730-1050; ☎ 11am-6pm) A popular *okonomiyaki* restaurant. Oyster, pork and egg are favourites. The *hiroshima-fū kaki-iri kurawanka-yaki* (Hiroshima-style *okonomiyaki* with oysters; ¥1050) is a real mouthful.

Itzuki (☎ 44-2376; 616 Miyajima-chō; drinks ¥500-1200; ☎ noon-midnight) Newly opened coffee shop Itzuki is a minimalist, peaceful haven away from the crowds. Finger foods like smoked oysters and *hors d'oeuvre moriawase* (hors d'oeuvre plate; ¥1200) are also available. It's just past the *kōmin-kan* (public hall) on the right, with a little carp pond at the front.

Getting There & Away

The mainland ferry terminal for Miyajima is near Miyajima-guchi station on the JR San'yō line, between Hiroshima and Iwakuni. Miyajima trams from Hiroshima terminate at the Hiroden-Miyajima-guchi stop by the ferry terminal. The tram (¥270, 70 minutes) takes longer than the *futsū* (¥400, 25 minutes), but it can be boarded in central Hiroshima.

From the terminal, ferries shuttle to Miyajima (¥170, 10 minutes). JR passholders should use the one operated by JR. High-speed ferries (¥1600, 20 to 30 minutes, eight daily) operate direct to Miyajima from Hiroshima's Ujina port. Another ferry (¥1900, 55 minutes, eight daily) links Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Park with Miyajima.

Miyajima can be easily visited as a day trip from Hiroshima. See p457 for details of the Hiroshima tram company's good-value one-day passport.

Getting Around

Bicycles can be hired from the JR office in the ferry building, but walking around is quite easy. A free bus goes from Iwasō Ryokan to the Misen cable-car station.

THE INLAND SEA

瀬戸内海

The Inland Sea (Seto-nai-kai) offers a firsthand experience of a part of Japan that, though rapidly changing, is still much slower-paced than the fast-moving metropolitan centres. It's bound by the major islands of Honshū, Kyūshū and Shikoku. Four narrow channels connect it with the ocean. To the west the Kanmon-kaikyō strait separates Honshū from Kyūshū and leads to the Sea of Japan; to the south, leading to the Pacific, the Hoya-kaikyō separates Kyūshū from Shikoku; at the other end of Shikoku, the Naruto-kaikyō and Kitan-kaikyō straits flow each side of Awaji-shima.

The most interesting area of the Inland Sea is the island-crowded stretch from Takamatsu (Shikoku) and Okayama west to Hiroshima. There are said to be more than 3000 islands and islets.

The Inland Sea can be explored by ferry or sometimes bus from the main islands. There

are now three bridge systems linking Honshū with Shikoku; the westernmost, known as Setonai Shimanami Kaidō, crosses 10 bridges and nine islands.

Information

Brochures, maps and general tourist information are readily available, but Donald Richie's *The Inland Sea*, originally published in 1971, makes an excellent introduction to the region. Although much of the Inland Sea's slow-moving and easy-going atmosphere has disappeared since this book was published, it still has fascinating insights.

The Inland Sea section of this guidebook starts with its largest island, Awaji-shima, in the east, and then works its way westwards. Islands that are close to and associated with particular places on Honshū or Shikoku are included in those sections. For instance, Miyajima is included in the Hiroshima section and Megi-jima in the Kagawa section of the Shikoku chapter.

Getting Around

Besides the regular ferry services between Honshū, Shikoku and the various islands, **SKK** (Seto Naikai-kisen; ☎ 082-253-1212; ☎ ticket office 7am-9pm) offers day cruises on the Inland Sea from Hiroshima. The trips are seasonal, and cruises with lunch/dinner cost from ¥5000/7500.

The Japan Travel Bureau (JTB) and other tour operators also run seasonal overnight cruises in the Inland Sea.

It's possible to take a ferry through the Inland Sea from Kansai to Kyūshū. Unless you check the times carefully, though, you may end up going through the Inland Sea at night, and if you just travel through you won't get a chance to taste the lifestyle on any of the islands. **Ferry Sunflower** (☎ 06-6572-5181; www.ferry-sunflower.com in Japanese; ☎ ticket office 9am-5pm) has two daily Osaka-Beppu ferries, and **Diamond Ferry** (☎ 078-857-9525; www.diamond-ferry.co.jp in Japanese; ☎ ticket office 9am-5pm) has two ferries a day between Kobe and Oita on Kyūshū.

AWAJI-SHIMA 淡路島

☎ 0799 / pop 153,000

Awaji-shima, the Inland Sea's largest island, forms the region's eastern boundary and connects with Honshū via **Akashi Kaikyō-Ōhashi** – at 3.91km, the longest suspension bridge in the world. Life on the island has changed considerably since the bridge opened, and

TAKING IT EASY IN THE INLAND SEA

If you want to experience the Inland Sea on smaller islands unconnected to the mainland by bridges, consider Shiraiishi-jima and Manabe-jima (administratively, the islands are part of Kasaoka city). The starting point is Kasaoka, about 40 minutes west of Okayama on the JR San-yō line. It's only a seven-minute stroll from Kasaoka station down to the rickety ferry terminal.

From there take a ferry to Shiraiishi-jima (¥500, 35 minutes or ¥900, 20 minutes, nine daily), where the Okayama International Villa Group has one of its villas (p446). The modern building is in an idyllic location with great views, and it has access to the beach, rocky coastline and hiking trails.

Next up is the ferry to Manabe-jima (¥450, 35 minutes), where the beachside **Santora Youth Hostel** (三虎ユースホステル; ☎ 0865-68-3515; www.jyh.or.jp/english/chugoku/manabe/index.html; 2224 Manabe-jima; dm members/nonmembers ¥3045/4045) is set to take care of your every need. Meals are available at the hostel. Manabe-jima residents call their island *hana-no-shima* (flower island) as a large variety of flowers are cultivated in its mild, frost-free climate.

When you've had enough of island life, head back to Kasaoka or carry on to Tadotsu in Kagawa-ken on Shikoku by ferry, which departs on Thursday and Saturday at 2.30pm (transfer at Sanagi-jima). The ferry company is **San-yō Kisen** (☎ 0865-69-7080).

Awaji-shima is now part of a road link from Kansai to Shikoku. At the southern end of the island, **Naruto-Ōhashi** spans the Naruto-kaikyō (Naruto Channel) across the well-known **Naruto Whirlpools** (see p632) to connect Shikoku with Awaji-shima.

The northern part of the island will be long remembered as the epicentre of the massive 1995 earthquake that claimed over 6000 lives, mostly in and around Kōbe. The island also provided most of the material used to build the island in Osaka Bay on which Kansai's international airport sits.

The island is relatively flat and has some good beaches. It was the original home of *ningyō jōruri puppet theatre*, which preceded the development of *bumraku* (classic puppet theatre using huge puppets). Short performances are given several times daily in the small **Awaji Jōruri Puppet Theatre** (淡路人形浄瑠璃館; ☎ 0799-52-0260) in Fukuda, at the southern end of the island. Near the Kōshien ferry terminal, at **Onokoro Awaji World Park** (淡路ワールドパークおのこのころ; ☎ 0799-62-1192; admission ¥1200, rides ¥300-500; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Thu-Tue), there's a bizarre grouping of international sightseeing attractions constructed at 4% their original size. They include the Taj Mahal, the Parthenon, Pisa's leaning tower and other international favourites.

Sandy Ōhama beach, about halfway down the east coast, attracts crowds in summer; Goshiki beach, about halfway down the west coast, is better for swimming and known for its spectacular sunsets.

SHŌDO-SHIMA 小豆島

☎ 0879 / pop 33,000

Famed for its vast olive groves and as the location for the Japanese film classic *Twenty-Four Eyes* (*Nijūshi-no hitomi*), Shōdo-shima translates literally as 'island of small beans'. A very mountainous island, it offers a number of interesting places to visit and makes an enjoyable escape from big-city Japan. The second-largest island in the Inland Sea, Shōdo-shima even has a miniature version of neighbouring Shikoku's 88 Temple Circuit. Administratively, Shōdo-shima is part of Shikoku's Kagawa-ken.

Orientation & Information

Tonoshō, at the western end of the island, is the usual arrival point from Takamatsu, Uno or Okayama and makes a good base from which to explore the island, although there are six ports with ferry connections to destinations here and there. At Tonoshō you'll find a **tourist information office** (☎ 62-5300; Tonoshō-chō; ☎ 8.30am-5.15pm) just inside the ferry building, with a very good English brochure on everything the island has to offer.

Sights & Activities

COASTAL AREA

Moving around the island anticlockwise, Shōdo-shima's olive-growing activities are commemorated at **Olive Park** (☎ 82-2200; Nishimura; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) on the south coast, where there are fake Grecian ruins and olive chocolate for sale. The brand-new **Sun**

Olive Onsen (admission ¥700; ☎ noon-9pm Thu-Tue) is there, featuring stunning views from a variety of baths, a restaurant and a training room. Shōdo-shima is serious about olives – it even has Milos in Greece as a sister island.

Cool off with a soy-sauce-flavoured ice cream at the **Marukin Soya Sauce Historical Museum** (☎ 82-0047; Nouma; admission ¥210; ☎ 9am-4pm), between Kusakabe and Sakate.

Just north of Sakate is the turn-off to the small village of **Tanoura**, the site of the village school in the novel *Twenty-Four Eyes* and the later film of the same name. The real school and its movie-set version are both open for **visits** (☎ 82-2455; Tanoura; combined ticket ¥750; ☎ 9am-5pm). A statue of the film's teacher and her pupils, known as the **Group Statue of Peace**, stands outside the Tonoshō ferry terminal.

CENTRAL MOUNTAINS

The **Kanka-kei cable car** (one way/return ¥700/1250; ☎ 8am-5pm) is the main attraction in the central mountains, making a spectacular trip up through Kanka-kei gorge. An alternative for keen walkers is a 3½-hour return trip climbing up the Omote 12 Views track and down the

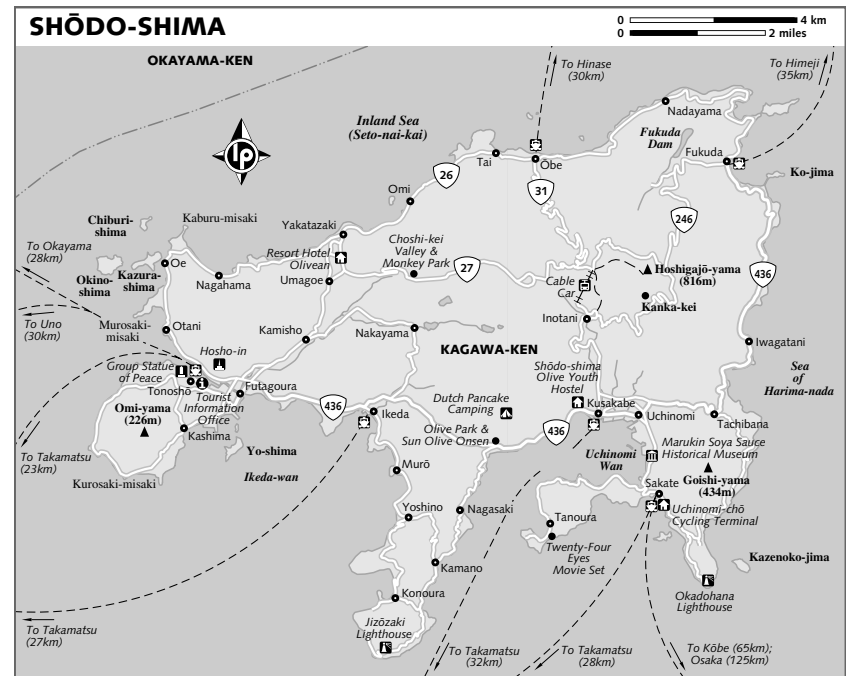
Ura Eight Views trail. From the cable car's arrival point at the top of the gorge, you can hike to the island's highest peak, Hoshigajō-yama (816m), in an hour.

As you descend on the road from the top towards Tonoshō, you pass **Choshi-kei Valley & Monkey Park** (☎ 62-0768; Nouma; admission ¥370; ☎ 8.10am-4.50pm), where monkeys from around the world are kept in cages. Wild monkeys come for a daily feed – they're used to people and will come right up to you.

Between Tonoshō and Otani is the temple **Hōshō-in** (☎ 62-0682; Kitayama), famed for its huge juniper tree, which is said to have been planted by Emperor Ojin 1500 years ago. The circumference of the trunk is 17m. The temple's opening hours are irregular.

Festivals & Events

The village of Shikoku-mura, in Yashima, just outside Takamatsu on Shikoku, has a village kabuki theatre that comes from Shōdo-shima. **Farmers' kabuki performances** are still held on the island on 3 May at Tonoshō and on Sports Day (around 10 October) in other centres.



Sleeping & Eating

The more interesting places to stay are along the southern coast of the island. Tonoshō, though, has a variety of hotels, ryokan and *minshuku* (family-run budget accommodation), particularly along the road running straight back from the waterfront.

Dutch Pancake Camping (ダッチパンケーキ キャンピング; ☎ 82-4616; www8.tiki.ne.jp/~dpc/Eng-frame.htm; 1869-1 Nishimura Otsu Uchinomi-chō; tents per person ¥1800; (P)) This friendly place is run by a Dutchman and his Japanese wife who are building a pancake café on site behind the Sun Olive Onsen. Prices are listed on the website. The campsite is on a small signposted road behind the *onsen*.

Shōdo-shima Olive Youth Hostel (小豆島オリーブユースホステル; ☎ 82-6161; www4.ocn.ne.jp/~olive-yh/index-e.html; Tonoshō-chō; dm members/nonmembers ¥3100/3700; (P) ☎ ☎) On the south coast, this hostel has meals available. It also rents bicycles (per four hours ¥500).

Uchinomi-chō Cycling Terminal (内海町サイクリング・ターミナル; ☎ 82-1099; 1834-15 Ko Sakate Uchinomi-chō; s with/without meals ¥5000/2700) At the Sakate ferry terminal, this place also rents bikes – ¥500 for four hours then ¥50 for each extra hour.

Maruse Minshuku (民宿マルセ; ☎ 62-2385; 5978 Ko Tonoshō-chō; s incl 2 meals from ¥6300; (P) ☎) This neat place next to the post office is easy to

find, and has a new wing a short distance away with Japanese- and Western-style rooms.

Resort Hotel Olivean (リゾートホテルオリビアン; ☎ 65-2311; www.artstreet.com/comps/hotel_olivean/Index.htm; Yū-higaoka; s/tw incl 2 meals from ¥21,000/39,000; (P) ☎ ☎) If you want something more upmarket, this place has it all and is a good spot to watch the sunrise and sunset. It's a grand complex located towards the northern coast of the island between Tonoshō and Obe.

Getting There & Away

There are ferry services from Honshū and Shikoku to various ports on the island. Popular jumping-off points include Uno on Honshū (trains go to Uno from Okayama) and Takamatsu on Shikoku. There are high-speed ferries (¥1140, 30 minutes, 17 daily) and regular ferries (¥570, around an hour, 15 daily) from Takamatsu to Tonoshō.

Getting Around

If you've got plenty of time, cycling is a very enjoyable way to see Shōdo-shima. **Ryobi Rent-a-cycle** (☎ 62-5001; ☎ 7am-10pm) is inside the Ōkido Hotel on the right as you leave the ferry terminal at Tonohsō; ask at the reception. Bike rental is ¥1050 per day.

There are also bus services around the island and two daily bus tours from Tonohsō

(¥3280/3980, departing 12.40pm/9.40am) and one from Sakate (departing 1.20pm, ¥2500). If having your own car appeals, **Nippon Car Rental** (☎ 62-0680; ☎ 8.30am-6pm) is on the left as you leave the ferry terminal Tonohsō. Rates are ¥5250 for six hours.

INNO-SHIMA 因島

☎ 084 / pop 27,000
Inno-shima and the islands Ikuchi-jima and Ōmi-shima are now linked with Honshū and Shikoku; they're three of the nine islands linked by the Setonai Shimanami Kaidō system. Famed for its flowers and abundance of fruit, Inno-shima is connected by bridge to Mukai-shima and on to Onomichi. The island has a mildly interesting **pirate castle** (因島水軍城; 3228-2 Nakanosho; admission ¥310; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Fri-Wed) and atop Shirataki-yama there are 500 statues of *rakan*, the disciples of Buddha, as well as excellent views of the Kaidō. On the first Saturday and Sunday in September the lively **Suigun Furusato Matsuri** has boat races and *jindaiko* drumming.

IKUCHI-JIMA 生口島

☎ 08452 / pop 10,900
Ikuchi-jima is known for its citrus groves and beaches, including the artificial Sunset Beach on its west coast. It may not rival Hawaii's Sunset Beach for waves, but it definitely tops it in terms of summer swimmers.

Sights

Sleepy Setoda, the main town on the island, attracts package tours with the temple **Kōsan-ji** (耕三寺; ☎ 7-0800; 553-2 Setoda; combined ticket ¥1200; ☎ 9am-5pm), a wonderful if bizarre exercise in kitsch. Starting in 1935, local steel-tube magnate Kanemoto Kōzō devoted a large slab of his considerable fortune to re-creating numerous important temples and shrines, all in this one spot and all in grateful homage to his mother and Buddha. The complex has some 2000 exhibits.

Admission to Kōsan-ji includes the **Art Museum, 1000 Buddhas Cave, Treasure House** and the exquisite **Choseikaku Villa**, where Kōzō's mother lived. The extraordinary 1000 Buddhas Cave includes an introductory 'hell', as well as winding tunnels and spiral stairs lined with statues. The effect is a bit like a Buddhist Disneyland.

To get to the temple, turn right as you leave the boat landing then left up the shop-lined

600m-long street. The **Onomichi City History & Folklore Museum** (尾道市歴史民俗資料館; admission free; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Sat, Sun & national holidays) is at the start of this street. Halfway up the same street you can turn left towards a temple on the hillside; around the back of this temple and much further up the hill is Kōjō-ji, dating from 1403, with a three-storey pagoda and fine views over the island. You can also get there by turning left from the pier and heading straight up the hill.

Sleeping

Setoda Shimanami Youth Hostel (瀬戸田しまなみユースホステル; ☎ 7-3137; homepage2/nifty.com/shimanami/nab.html in Japanese; 58-1 Tarumi Setoda-chō; dm ¥2700; (P) ☎ ☎) Right on Sunset Beach, this friendly hostel is popular with cyclists. It's also unique for having an archery dojo and genuine *onsen* baths. Most rooms are Japanese, and meals are available.

Ryokan Tsutsui (旅館つつ井; ☎ 7-2221; www.tsutsui.yad.jp in Japanese; 216 Setoda Setoda-chō; s incl 2 meals from ¥12,000; (P) ☎) The rooms at this ryokan are spacious and the gorgeous new wooden baths offer great views. Located in front of the ferry terminal, it's one of the few options left in town since the closure of other businesses.

Getting There & Away

On Honshū, ferries from Onomichi leave every 1½ hours (¥760, 35 minutes) and from Mihara every hour (¥750, 25 minutes). Other services are available. It seems a bit of a shame to do so, but yes, you can get to Setoda by bus from Onomichi.

ŌMI-SHIMA 大三島

☎ 0897 / pop 3900
This hilly island boasts the mountain god's treasure house, **Ōyamatsumi-jinja** (大山祇神社; ☎ 82-0032; 3327 Miyaura; admission incl Kaiji Museum ¥1000; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm), which commanded much respect from the Inland Sea's pirates between the 12th and 16th centuries. In fact, the pirates were more like a local navy than real pirates but, until Toyotomi Hideyoshi brought them to heel, they wielded real power in these parts. Along the way, what is reputedly Japan's largest collection of armour was built up in the shrine's treasure house. Around 80% of the armour and helmets designated as National Treasures are held there.

NAO-SHIMA 直島

Nao-shima is a unique island. It's home to the **Benesse Art Site Nao-shima** (www.naoshima-is.com.jp), which features stunning art in gorgeous settings. The project was started by the Fukutake Shoten publishing company to display its collection of contemporary art. Fukutake Shoten became the Benesse Corporation, and award-winning architect Andō Tadao designed its **Benesse House** (☎ 087-892-2030; Gotanji Nao-shima-chō; admission ¥1000; ☎ 8am-9pm). There are works here by Andy Warhol, David Hockney and Jasper Johns among others.

The opportunity to stay in an encampment of Mongolian *pao* tents by the sea at the **Nao-shima Furusato Umi no Ie Tsutsuji-sō** (☎ 087-892-2838; s/tw from ¥3675/7350; (P) ☎) makes Nao-shima a rare experience. Meals are available at the camping ground. There's also the Benesse House lodgings for upmarket accommodation – check out rates on the website and preview each room. The museum also restores and preserves old sites on the island; contemporary artists turn them into artworks for exhibition. Five sites have been completed. The astounding underground **Chichū Art Museum** (☎ 087-892-3755; 3449-1 Nao-shima-chō; admission ¥2000; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Mar-Sep, to 5pm Tue-Sun Oct-Feb) is another highlight of the project. It houses some Monet waterlilies and amazing sculptures by Walter de Maria. Minibuses connect the sights, or you can rent bicycles and enjoy the scenery around the island.

Although it's much closer to Honshū, Nao-shima is officially part of Shikoku's Kagawa-ken. It can be reached from Takamatsu in Kagawa by ferry (¥510, one hour), or from Uno in Okayama-ken (¥220, 20 minutes). Uno is at the end of the JR Uno line from Okayama. Travelling via Nao-shima is a good way to get from Honshū to Shikoku, or vice versa.

In an adjacent building known as the **Kaiji Museum** (海事博物館; admission ¥1000; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm) there's a boat that was used by Emperor Hirohito in his marine-science investigations, together with a natural-history exhibit. The shrine is one of the most ancient in Japan.

Miyaura port is a 15-minute walk from the shrine. There's a **tourist information counter** in the roadside **Shimanami no eki mishima** (しまなみの駅御島; ☎ 82-0002; 3260 Miyaura; ☎ 8.30am-5pm), which can help with local *minshuku* reservations. It's just past the shrine on the right. Showers and bicycle rental are available.

Getting There & Away

You can get to Ōmi-shima by high-speed ferry service from Mihara (¥1250, 40 minutes) or from Tadanoumi in Hiroshima-ken (¥290, 20 minutes). A highway bus links Ōmi-shima with JR Shin-Onomichi station (¥1800, 50 minutes). The bus station is on the eastern side of the island below Tatara Ōhashi, the bridge that links Ōmi-shima with Ikuchi-jima.

YAMAGUCHI-KEN 山口県

Yamaguchi, at the western end of Honshū, straddles both the southern San-yō coast and the northern San-in coast. The great Kintai-kyō bridge at Iwakuni is a southern highlight, while Shimonoseki acts as the gateway to Kyūshū and Korea. The northern stretch includes the historically important town of Hagi and, in the central mountains, the vast cave at Akiyoshi-dai. The section of the coast from Tottori eastwards to Wakasa-wan is included in the Kansai chapter (see p370).

IWAKUNI 岩国

☎ 0827 / pop 148,000

The five-arched Kintai-kyō bridge is Iwakuni's major attraction, but this relaxed city has a number of points of interest in the nearby Kikko-kōen area. The main sights can be seen in a couple of hours.

Orientation & Information

Iwakuni has three widely separated areas. To the far west of the town centre is the Shin-Iwakuni *shinkansen* station, which is totally separate from the rest of town. Its **tourist information office** (☎ 46-0655; 1055-1 Mishō; ☎ 10.30am-3.30pm Thu-Tue) is very helpful. In the central area is the old part of town with the bridge,

the samurai quarter and the castle. There's a **tourist information office** (☎ 41-2300; 1-1-42 Iwakuni; ☎ 9.35am-5pm) near the bridge. To the east, in the modern part of town, the JR Iwakuni station has a helpful **tourist information office** (☎ 21-6050; 1-1-1 Marifu-machi; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun), as well as hotels, restaurants, bars and other conveniences.

At the bridge, the cable car can be seen climbing the mountains on the far side. The castle overlooks the town from the right of the cable car.

Sights

KINTAI-KYŌ 錦帯橋

Kintai-kyō, or the **Brocade Sash Bridge**, was built in 1673 and washed away by a flood in 1950. It was authentically rebuilt in 1953, with some cunningly concealed steel reinforcements, and rebuilt again in 2003-04. The bridge is immediately recognisable by its five steep arches. In the feudal era only samurai could use the bridge, which connected their side of the river with the rest of the town; commoners had to cross by boat. Today visitors pay ¥300 to walk across and back. The ticket office at the entrance to the bridge also sells an all-inclusive *setto-ken* (set ticket; ¥930) covering the bridge (normally ¥300 on its own), the return cable-car trip (normally ¥540) and entry to Iwakuni-jō (normally ¥260) – a saving of ¥170 for all three. The bridge and castle are floodlit nightly. After 4pm or 5pm, there are no attendants at the bridge ticket booth.

SAMURAI QUARTER

Some traces remain of the old samurai quarter on the far side of the bridge. Beside the cable-car station is the **Iwakuni Art Museum** (岩国美術館; ☎ 41-0506; 2-10-27 Yokoyama; admission ¥800; ☎ 9am-5pm Fri-Wed Mar-Nov, to 4pm Fri-Wed Dec-Feb), a delight for military buffs with its extensive collection of samurai armour and equipment. It's said to be one of the best collections in Japan.

The old samurai quarter is now part of **Kikko-kōen** and includes picturesque moats and remnants of feudal buildings.

IWAKUNI-JŌ 岩国城

The original **castle** (☎ 41-0633; admission ¥260; ☎ 9am-4.45pm, closed 29 Jan-5 Mar) was built on the mountain between 1603 and 1608, but seven years later the *daimyō* was forced to dismantle it and move down to the riverside. The castle

was rebuilt in 1960 as part of Japan's great castle-reconstruction movement, but modern Japanese castles were built for tourism, not warfare, so it now stands photogenically high on the hill.

You can get to the castle by **cable car** (one way/return ¥320/540; ☎ 9am-5pm) or on foot along the road (for walking only) beside the youth hostel. See opposite for details of all-inclusive tickets.

OTHER SIGHTS

Iwakuni is famous for its albino snakes, said to embody the spirit of Benzaiten, the goddess of good fortune. They are unique to the area. On the far side of the bridge, the **Yokoyama White Snake Viewing Facility** (白蛇横山観覧所; ☎ 43-4888; 2-6 Yokoyama; admission ¥100; ☎ 9am-5pm) has four of these strange-looking creatures; other white snake facilities are around Iwakuni station.

Ukai (fishing using trained cormorants) usually takes place at Kintai-kyō every night from June to August, except when rain makes the water muddy or on nights with a full-moon. For ¥3500 you can watch this colourful and exciting method of fishing.

On the mountain side of the bridge, to the right, is a small shop selling *ishiningyō*, curious little rock agglutinations formed by river insects.

Sleeping & Eating

Iwakuni has places to stay on both sides of the river. There's only one restaurant on the west side of the river (by the cable-car station), though you can have tea and snacks. On the east side there are a few places selling take-away and Japanese food close to the bridge.

Iwakuni Youth Hostel (岩国ユースホステル; ☎ 43-1092; fax 43-0123; www.jyh.or.jp/english/chugoku/iwakuni/index.html; 1-10-46 Yokoyama; dm members/non-members ¥2835/3835) This is a large, basic hostel, somewhat institutional but run by a very cheerful young couple. It's close to most of the attractions on the west side of the Kintai-kyō bridge and in a beautiful wooded area. Meals are available. There's a path outside that makes for a nice walk up to the castle area.

Hangetsu-an (半月庵; ☎ 41-0021; fax 43-0121; 1-17-27 Iwakuni; s/tw incl 2 meals from ¥8900/17,800; (P) ☎) This clean, friendly place stresses its traditional service, but the building is modern and there are more-expensive rooms with private bathrooms (single/twin ¥11,000/22,000). It's on the east bank down the street continuing

from the bridge; you'll see the old-fashioned entrance a few blocks along on the left.

Shiratame Ryokan (白為旅館; ☎ 41-0074; fax 41-1174; www.gambo-ad.com/iwakuni/hotel/shiratame/info.htm in Japanese; 1-5-16 Iwakuni; s/tw incl 2 meals from ¥18,110/36,220; (P) ☎) Just in front of the east side of the bridge, this fair-sized, traditional ryokan has well-presented local seafood. All the rooms here have views of the river.

Midori-no-sato (緑の里; ☎ 41-1370; 1-4-10 Iwakuni; meals ¥730-980; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Mon) Away from the crowds, a couple of blocks down the street continuing on from the bridge on the right-hand side, Midori-no-sato has set menus including cake-like *iwakuni-zushi* (Iwakuni-style sushi; ¥980), which includes *renkon* (lotus root) salad and *sōmen* noodles.

Cafe de Campagne (カフェ・ド・カンパーニュ; ☎ 43-4477; 2-7-25 Kawanishi; meals ¥1000-3800; ☎ 11am-11pm Mon-Fri, 9am-11pm Sat & Sun) One of the few eatery options open late, this standard trattoria is about 1km from the Kintai-kyō bridge. It has basic pasta dishes, like *peperoncino* pasta (¥880), garlic bread and salads. From the bridge, go south and cross the Garyō-bashi bridge, turn left and continue to the intersection before Kawanishi station; it's by a car dealership.

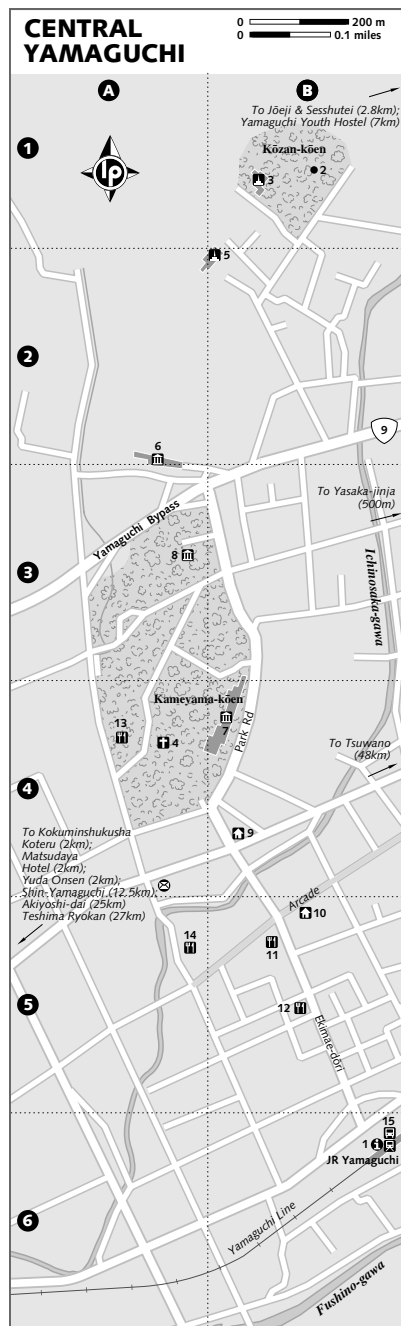
Getting There & Away

Iwakuni is only 40km from Hiroshima. Shin-Iwakuni station is on the *shinkansen* line, while JR Iwakuni station is on the JR San-yō line. Kintai-kyō is about 5km from either. Buses shuttle back and forth between JR Iwakuni station and the bridge (¥240), and between Shin-Iwakuni station and the bridge (¥280).

YAMAGUCHI 山口

☎ 083 / pop 192,000

During the Sengoku-jidai (Warring States) period (1467-1573), Yamaguchi prospered as an alternative capital to chaotic Kyoto. In 1550 the Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier paused for two months in Yamaguchi on his way to the imperial capital, but quickly returned to the safety of this provincial centre when he was unable even to find the emperor in Kyoto! In the following centuries Yamaguchi took turns with Hagi as the provincial capital and, like Hagi, Yamaguchi played an important part in the Meiji Restoration. Today this 'Kyoto of the West' is a peaceful town with interesting attractions.

**INFORMATION**

Tourist Information Office
観光案内所.....1 B6

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Five-Storey Pagoda 五重塔.....2 B1
Ruriko-ji Shiryōkan
瑠璃光寺資料館.....(see 3)
Ruriko-ji 瑠璃光寺.....3 B1
St. Francis Xavier Memorial Church
ザビエル記念聖堂.....4 A4
Tōshun-ji 洞春寺.....5 B2
Yamaguchi History Museum 山口市歴史民俗資料館.....6 A2
Yamaguchi Prefectural Art Museum
山口県立美術館.....7 B4
Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum
山口県立博物館.....8 A3

SLEEPING

Sunroute Kokusai Hotel Yamaguchi
サンルート国際ホテル山口.....9 B4
Taiyō-dō Ryokan 太陽堂旅館.....10 B5

EATING

Café Galle カフェガレ.....11 B5
Frank フランク.....12 B5
La Francesca ラフランチェスカ.....13 A4
Sabō Kō 茶房 幸.....14 A5

TRANSPORT

Nishi Nihon Bus Net Service.....15 B6

Orientation & Information

Ekimae-dōri is the main shopping street, running straight up from the station and crossing the main shopping arcade before reaching Rte 9. A very helpful **tourist information office** (☎ 933-0090; 2-1 Sodayu-chō; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Nov, 8.30am-5.30pm Dec-Mar) is on the 2nd floor of the train station, with English-language brochures and free internet access.

North of Rte 204, the **Ichinosaka-gawa** river has a particularly pretty stretch lined with cherry trees. Naturally, they're at their best during the spring blossoming time, but they're also lovely on summer evenings, when large fireflies flit through the branches.

Sights**ST FRANCIS XAVIER MEMORIAL CHURCH**

ザビエル記念聖堂

The **church** (☎ 923-0532; 4-1 Kameyama-chō; suggested donation ¥100; ☎ 9am-5.30pm) overlooks the town centre from a hilltop in Kameyama-kōen. Built in 1952 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Francis Xavier's visit to the city, it burned down under mysterious circumstances in 1991 and was rebuilt in 1998. It now has a very modern design and colourful interior.

ART GALLERY & MUSEUMS

At the foot of the hill stands the **Yamaguchi Prefectural Art Museum** (☎ 925-7788; 3-1 Kameya-chō; admission ¥190; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), where frequent special exhibitions are held. Just north of it is the **Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum** (☎ 922-0294; 8-2 Kasuga-chō; admission ¥130; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Tue-Sun), which has exhibitions on wildlife and technology. The **Yamaguchi History Museum** (☎ 924-7001; 5-1 Kasuga-chō; admission ¥100; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) is just off Rte 9.

KŌZAN-KŌEN & RURIKŌ-JI

香山公園 瑠璃光寺

Further north again from the town centre is **Kōzan-kōen**, where the **five-storey pagoda** of Rurikō-ji, dating from 1404, is picturesquely sited beside a small lake. A small museum, **Rurikō-ji Shiryōkan** (☎ 924-9139; 7-1 Kōzan-chō; admission ¥300; ☎ 9am-5pm), has photos and details of all 40 Japanese five-storey pagodas, and a map indicating where they're located. It's illuminated at night. The temple **Rurikō-ji**, with which the pagoda is associated, is also in the park and was moved here from a small village.

The park's teahouse was also moved here; the Yamaguchi *daimyō* held secret talks in the house under the pretext of a tea ceremony. The park is also the site of the **Tōshun-ji** temple and the graves of the Mōri lords.

JŌEI-JI 常栄寺

About 3km northeast of the JR station, **Jōei-ji** was originally built as a house and is notable for its Zen garden, **Sesshutei** (☎ 922-2272; 2001 Miyano-shimo; admission ¥300; ☎ 8am-5pm), designed by the painter Sesshū. Visitors bring *bentō* (boxed lunches) and sit on the veranda to eat, admiring the garden.

YUDA ONSEN

Just west of the city is the 800-year-old **Yuda Onsen** hot springs, said to have been discovered when a white fox healed its injured legs in the waters here. It's an eclectic mix of the traditional and the modern, geared to the older tour-group set. There's a **tourist information office** (☎ 901-0150; 2-1-23 Yuda Onsen; ☎ 9am-7pm) about 600m northwest of Yuda Onsen station on Rte 204; internet access is available here. In front of the office is one of the neighbourhood's five *ashi no yu* (foot baths), where you can bathe your feet for free and get friendly with locals. You can also use the baths at the large **Hotel Kamefuku** (ホテルかめ福; ☎ 922-

7000; 4-5 Yuda Onsen; admission ¥800; ☎ 11.30am-10pm), the less-crowded **Kokuminshukusha Koteru** (国民宿舎こてる; ☎ 922-3240; 4-3-15 Yuda Onsen; admission ¥350; ☎ 7am-midnight, 3-10pm) and, for a taste of luxury, the traditional ryokan **Umenoya** (梅乃屋; ☎ 922-0051; 4-3-19 Yuda Onsen; admission ¥800; ☎ 1pm-midnight). Buses run regularly to Yuda Onsen bus stop, near the tourist information office, from Yamaguchi station (¥190, 10 minutes).

Festivals & Events

During **Gion Matsuri**, which takes place on 20, 24 and 27 July, the Sagi no mai (Egret Dance) is held at Yasaka-jinja. From 6 to 7 August, during **Tanabata Chōchin Matsuri**, 10,000 decorated lanterns illuminate the city.

Sleeping

There are more accommodation options in nearby Yuda Onsen than in the Yamaguchi station area, but the youth hostel offers a relaxing getaway in a rural neighbourhood.

Yamaguchi Youth Hostel (山口ユースホステル; ☎ 928-0057; www.jyh.or.jp/english/chugoku/yamaguti/index.html; 801 Miyanoue; dm members/nonmembers ¥2730/3730; ☎ ☎) This charming home is about 4km from Miyano station (two stops east of Yamaguchi) in a lovely farming area, and features a small crafts gallery. Meals are available, and manager Sugita-san can sometimes pick up guests at Miyano station; otherwise there is a bus.

Kokuminshukusha Koteru (国民宿舎こてる; ☎ 922-3240; fax 928-6177; 4-3-15 Yuda Onsen; s/tw ¥5400/10,800; ☎ ☎) Two blocks north of the main street in Yuda Onsen, this is a good-value family-run place with Japanese-style rooms and cheery staff. The entrance to the baths is on the side of the building.

Taiyō-dō Ryokan (☎ 922-0897; fax 922-1152; 2-3 Komeya-chō; s/tw incl 2 meals ¥5500/11,000) On the shopping arcade just off Ekimae-dōri and beside a bakery with a green peaked roof, the Taiyō-dō has comfortably large rooms, and original '60s and '70s woodwork and furniture. The place is quite old, but has some character; the elderly manager is welcoming and helpful. It's seven minutes' walk from Yamaguchi station.

Sunroute Kokusai Hotel Yamaguchi (☎ 923-3610; fax 923-2379; www.sunroute.jp; 1-1 Nakagawara-chō; s/tw ¥6825/12,180; ☎ ☎ ☎) This is the best value in town. Central to the sights in the middle of town and a 10-minute walk from the sta-

tion, this recently renovated hotel has cheerful staff and stylish rooms. Free bicycles are also available. Indian restaurant Shiva on the 1st floor has great curry and naan lunch sets, as well as English menus.

our pick **Teshima Ryokan** (てしま旅館; ☎ 665-2248; www.teshimaryokan.com in Japanese; 7418-8 Ajisu-chō; s/tw incl 2 meals for ¥19,950/33,600; (P) ♻) A 20-minute drive southwest of Shin-yamaguchi station, this inn is a miracle of contemporary design by Kyoto architect Tsujimura Hisanobu. It ain't much from the outside, but the interior is a delicious symphony of blonde woods, cosy couches and diaphanous screens. There are baths here and superb cuisine; every detail is seen to by the *bantō-san* (conierge), who can pick up guests at the station.

Matsudaya Hotel (ホテル松田屋; ☎ 922-0125; fax 925-6111; www.matsudayahotel.co.jp in Japanese; 3-6-7 Yuda Onsen; s/tw incl 2 meals for ¥22,000/44,000; (P) ♻) Ichirō, the famed baseball player, stayed at this very traditional inn when he was in town. The rooms, baths and gardens are gorgeous, with service to match – expect about five staff standing at attention when you enter the lobby – and there's a great selection of dolls and ceramics for sale. The Matsudaya is about 800m north of Yuda Onsen station along the main drag in Yuda Onsen.

Eating

Sabō Kō (☎ 928-5522; 1-2-39 Dōjōmonzen; dishes ¥300-900; ☎ 11.30am-7pm Wed-Mon) 'Kō' means happiness, a very apt name for this delightful local coffee shop. It's a very laid-back atmosphere with humble décor and staff who are at turns boisterous or Zen-clam. The speciality here is *wafū omuraisu* (Japanese-style rice omelette; ¥800), a delish blend of mushrooms, *daikon* (raddish), garlic and onions. Look for the wooden door with a diamond-shaped window.

Café Galle (☎ 928-2880; 2-4-12 Dōjōmonzen; meals ¥350-800; ☎ 11am-6pm Thu-Tue) This is a stylish little basement café, very attractively designed and popular with local ladies. The *higawari ranchi* (daily lunch set; ¥800) typically consists of a fish and veggies plate. The entrance is easy to miss; it's right by some tall plants along the pavement.

Frank (☎ 932-4836; Dōjōmonzen; meals ¥700-900; ☎ noon-11pm Wed-Mon) Come to Frank if you want a funky place to chill out after sightseeing and try the *tai-fū yaki bifun* (Thai food stall-style rice noodles; ¥700). This spacious

café, two blocks southwest of the arcade, has sofas, drinks and good daily lunch sets, also ¥700. Look for the red F by the door, which is around the corner from the main street.

La Francesca (☎ 934-1888; 7-1 Kameyama; meals ¥1500-4200; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☒) An Italian villa with a terrace that's a great spot for a beer in summer, La Francesca has good food and professional service. The lunch set (¥1575) offers a main course choice of *honjitsu no sakana* (fish of the day), *buta-bara niku* (pork back ribs) and *hoho niku* (beef cheek).

Getting There & Away

The Yamaguchi *futsū* service connects the city with Shin-Yamaguchi (¥230, 25 minutes). Shin-Yamaguchi is 10km southwest of Yamaguchi in Ogōri, at the junction of the San-yō Osaka-Hakata *shinkansen* line and the JR Yamaguchi line, which passes through Yamaguchi and continues on to Tsuruano and Masuda on the San-in coast.

JR and Bōchō Kōtsū buses run to/from Yamaguchi to Hagi (¥1680, 70 minutes) and Akiyoshi-dai (¥1130, 55 minutes).

The fun *SL Yamaguchi-gō* steam locomotive stops at Yamaguchi and Yuda Onsen stations from March to November (see p486).

Getting Around

Bicycles can be hired from the train station at **Nishi Nihon Bus Net Service** (☎ 922-0774) – a good idea, since the town's attractions are somewhat scattered (it's 8km just to Jōei-ji and back) and the pavements are wide. The first two hours cost ¥310, or it's ¥820 daily.

AKIYOSHI-DAI 秋吉台

☎ 0837

The rolling Akiyoshi-dai tablelands are about halfway between Yamaguchi and Hagi on the northern San-in coast. In this unusual landscape, the green fields are dotted with curious rock spires. Every February locals carry out the centuries-old tradition of *yama-yaki* (grass burning) on the plain to revitalise the vegetation. Beneath this picturesque plateau are hundreds of limestone caverns, the largest of which, **Akiyoshi-dō** (秋芳洞; ☎ 62-0304; admission ¥1200; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mar-Nov, to 4.30pm Dec-Feb), is open to the public.

Akiyoshi-dō is of interest principally for its size; it is the largest limestone cave in Japan. The stalagmites and stalactites are not particularly noteworthy, but the *hyakumai-zara*

layered limestone pools are remarkable. In all, the cave extends about 10km, at some points 100m wide, with a river flowing through it and a pathway that runs for about 1km. At the midpoint of the cave trail you can take a lift up to the surface, where there is a lookout over the surrounding country. There are entrances to the cave at both ends of the pathway as well as at the lift. Buses run between the two ends if you don't want to retrace your steps. If you're feeling claustrophobic in the cave, go for a wander along the plentiful hiking trails on Japan's largest karst plateau.

Sleeping

There is scant accommodation around the cave area, and you'd be better off staying in Hagi or Yamaguchi and visiting Akiyoshi-dai as a day trip.

Akiyoshi-dai Youth Hostel (秋吉台ユースホステル; ☎ 62-0341; fax 62-1546; www.jyh.or.jp/english/chugoku/akiyoshi/index.html; 4236-1 Akiyoshi Shūho-chō; dm members/nonmembers ¥2730/3730; (P) ♻) This is a large and somewhat institutional hostel, but foreign guests are usually given rooms in the more modern part of the building. Meals are available, and the elderly managers are quite friendly. It's close to one of the entrances to the cave.

Akiyoshi Royal Hotel (秋芳ロイヤルホテル; ☎ 62-0311; fax 62-0231; www.shuhokan.co.jp; Akiyoshi-dai; s/tw incl 2 meals ¥12,600/25,200; (P) ♻) This large hotel that caters to Japanese group tours visiting the plateau. Japanese- and Western-style rooms are available, rather spartan but large, and there are *onsen* baths on the premises with views of the plain, also open to nonguests (¥500, open 5pm to 9pm). It's located about 1.5km north of the main entrance to the cave along the road.

Getting There & Away

It takes just under an hour by bus to reach the cave from Yamaguchi (¥1130, 55 minutes) or Higashi-Hagi (¥1710, two daily). If you've got a JR pass, take the JR bus from Yamaguchi. Buses also run to the cave from Shin-Yamaguchi (¥1140, 45 minutes) and Shimonoseki (¥1730, two hours).

SHIMONOSEKI 下関

☎ 0832 / pop 288,000

Shimonoseki is an important crossroads for travellers and Japanese history. At the extreme western tip of Honshū, it's separated from

the island of Kyūshū by only a narrow strait, famous in Japanese history for a decisive 12th-century clash between rival samurai clans. The expressway crosses the Kanmon-kaikyō strait on the Kanmon-bashi bridge; while another road, the *shinkansen* railway line and the JR railway line all tunnel underneath. You can even walk to Kyūshū through a tunnel under the strait! Shimonoseki is also an important connecting point to South Korea, with a daily ferry service to/from Busan. The town has a number of points of interest and some excellent, if potentially deadly, cuisine.

Orientation

Beside JR Shimonoseki station is the large Sea Mall Shimonoseki shopping centre, and just east is the 153m Kaikyō Yume Tower, which looks like a midget skyscraper topped by a futuristic billiard ball. A ¥600 ticket to the tower gets you to the **observatory** (☎ 31-5600; 30th fl, 3-3-1 Buzenda-chō; ☎ 9.30am-9.30pm) for a very impressive 360-degree view of the surrounding scenery.

Information

There's a **tourist information office** (☎ 32-8383; 4-3-1 Takezaki-chō; ☎ 9am-7pm) in JR Shimonoseki station and another **tourist office** (☎ 56-3422; 1-11-1 Akine Minami-machi; ☎ 9am-7pm) in the Shin-Shimonoseki *shinkansen* station, two stops north of the JR station on the JR San-yō line.

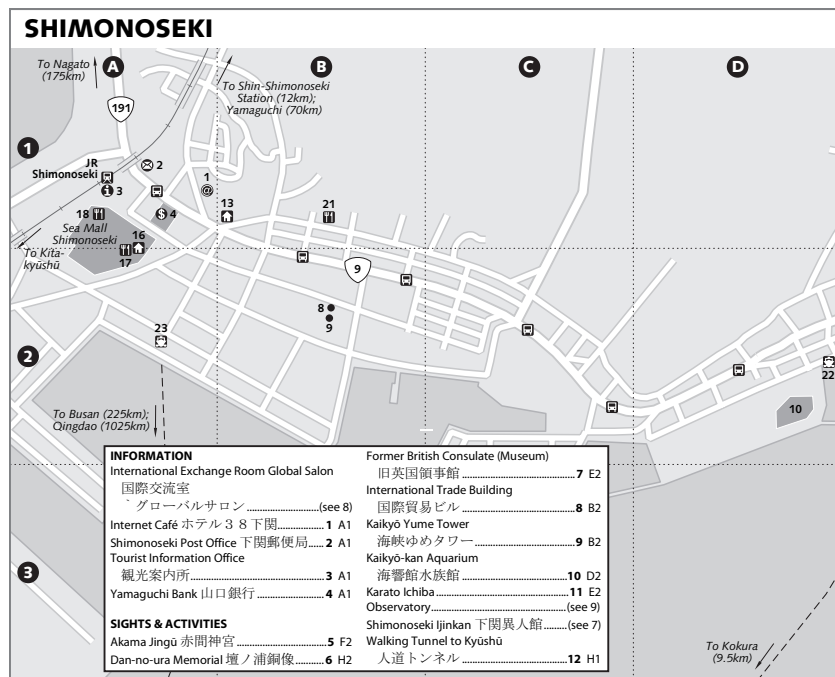
Internet access and a small library are available at the **International Exchange Room 'Global Salon'** (☎ 31-5770; 3-3-1 Buzenda-chō; per 30min ¥100; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Sun), on the 4th floor of the International Trade Building, which is by the Kaikyō Yume Tower. There's an **internet café** (☎ 28-1638; 1-15-33 Takezaki-chō; per 30min ¥400, wi-fi ¥200; ☎ 10am-10pm) on the 1st floor of Hotel 38 Shimonoseki, which is about a two-minute walk from the station.

If you're arriving from Korea, note that there are no currency-exchange counters in the ferry terminal. The information office in the station can give you a list of international ATMs and places where you can change money; one is the **Shimonoseki Post Office** (☎ 22-0957; 2-12-12 Takezaki-chō; ☎ 9am-4pm), which takes cash and travellers cheques.

Sights & Activities

KARATO ICHIBA 唐戸市場

A highlight of any trip to Shimonoseki is an early rise and a visit to the **Karato Ichiba fish**



markets (☎ 31-0001; 5-50 Karato; ☎ 4am-3pm Mon-Sat, 7am-3pm Sun; (P)). The interesting stuff is on show from 4am to 8am, so if you like to sleep in, forget it. The markets kick off at 2am for those in the industry, but the public is welcome from 4am – the earlier you get there the better. It's a great opportunity to try sashimi for breakfast or lunch, and the fish doesn't get any fresher – a fair bit will still be moving. People-watching is almost as much fun as goggling at the many different sea creatures.

The market is in Karato, halfway between central Shimonoseki and Hino-yama. The first bus leaves from outside the station at 5.55am (6.14am on weekends) – it costs ¥190 and takes seven minutes. Organise a taxi if you want to go earlier. The markets are closed two Wednesdays a month.

Also in Karato, the **Kaikyō-kan aquarium** (☎ 28-1100; 6-1 Arukapōto; admission ¥1800; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm; (P)) has stacks of impressive fish, shows, displays, a huge blue-whale skeleton and a special tank of *fugu* (see p476).

The Meiji-era former **British Consulate building** (☎ 31-1238; 4-11 Karato; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm

of 1906 is close at hand. It has an interesting façade, and there's a small museum inside with the consul's desk still in place. There's a unique coffee house at the rear (see p476).

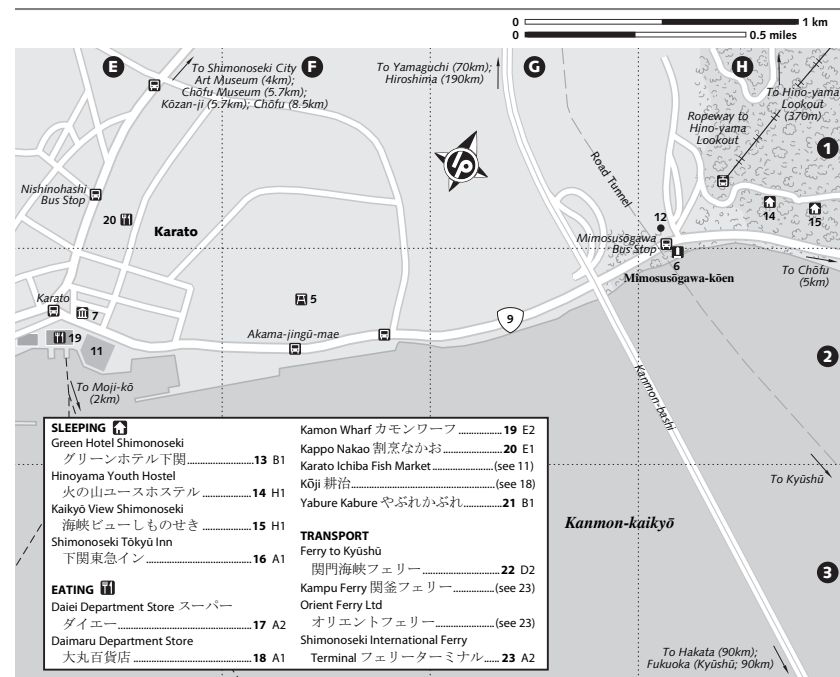
AKAMA-JINGŪ 赤間神社

Bright vermilion, this postwar **shrine** (☎ 31-4138; 4-1 Amidajji-chō; ☎ 24hr) is dedicated to the eight-year-old emperor Antoku, who died in 1185 in the naval battle of Dan-no-ura. In the Hōichi Hall stands a statue of the splendidly monk-erred Earless Hōichi, the hero of a traditional ghost story retold by Japanophile Lafcadio Hearn (see p489). The shrine is between Karato and Hino-yama. Get off the bus (¥230, 10 minutes) at the Akama-jingū-mae bus stop.

The **Sentei Festival** (2 to 4 May) is held here to remember the Heike women who worked as prostitutes to pay for rites for their fallen kin. On 3 May women dressed as Heian-era courtesans form a colourful procession at the shrine.

HINO-YAMA 火の山

About 5km northeast of JR Shimonoseki station there are superb views over the Kanmon-



kaikyō from the top of 268m-high **Hino-yama**. Walk or drive to the top, as the ropeway is closed. Take a Ropeway-mae bus (¥360) to the Mimosusōgawa bus stop and walk up to the ropeway station, or take a Kokuminshukusha-mae bus straight to the bottom of the ropeway. By the Mimosusōgawa-kōen bus stop are lifts that take you down to a free **cross-strait walker's tunnel**, popular with local joggers, for a 780m submarine walk to Kyūshū. It's a nice stroll around the seaside promenade on the Kyūshū side, but there are no restaurants.

Across the road from the same bus stop is the **Dan-no-ura Memorial**, marking the spot where the decisive clash between the Minamoto and Taira clans took place in 1185. This is where one of the ladies of the House of Taira plunged into the sea with the infant emperor Antoku in her arms instead of surrendering to the enemy.

CHŌFU 長府

Chōfu is the old castle town/area and, while little remains of the coastal castle itself, there are earth walls and samurai gates, along with a museum and some important temples and shrines.

National treasure **Kōzan-ji** (功山寺; ☎ 45-0258; 1 Kawabuchi; ☎ 9am-5pm) has a Zen-style hall dating from 1327, and the **Chōfu Museum** (長府博物館; ☎ 45-0555; 1-2-5 Kawabuchi; admission ¥200; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun) is also in the temple grounds.

Shimonoseki City Art Museum (下関市立美術館; ☎ 45-4131; 1-1 Kuromon Higashi-machi admission ¥200; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun) features contemporary Japanese artists.

Sleeping

Hinoyama Youth Hostel (☎ 22-3753; www.e-yh.net/shimonoseki; 3-47 Mimosusogawa-chō; dm ¥2900; (P) ☎ ☎) Amazing views of the straits and relaxed service make this one of the best youth hostels in Chūgoku. You can take a Hino-yama bus from the station (¥230, 26 minutes). Breakfast is available, but there are few restaurants in the area.

Green Hotel Shimonoseki (☎ 31-1007; fax 31-3603; www.greenhotelshimonoseki.jp in Japanese; 1-16-13 Takezaki-chō; s/tw ¥4800/8800; (P) ☎ ☎ wi-fi) Singles in this bright, friendly little chain hotel are small, but it's well kept and only three minutes from the station. A free lobby computer and ¥500 buffet breakfast are available.

Shimonoseki Tōkyū Inn (☎ 33-0109; fax 23-0285; www.tokyu-hotels.co.jp; 4-4-1 Takezaki-chō; s/tw ¥6825/12,600; (P) ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) Not far from the station, this well-managed hotel has decent-sized rooms with extras such as trouser presses for business travellers. There are also recliners in the 'comfort room' singles (¥9975) and a buffet breakfast (¥1000).

Kaikyō View Shimonoseki (☎ 23-0117; fax 29-0114; www.kv-shimonoseki.com in Japanese; 3-58 Mimosu-sogawa-chō; s/tw incl 2 meals ¥10,500/19,950; (P) ☒ ☑) On Hino-yama, Kaikyō View has great views and professional service. There are Japanese- and Western-style rooms, each of which looks out over the Kanmon strait. There's also an *onsen* on site with views, a sauna and outdoor bath. It's open to nonguests for ¥1050, with entry from 11am to 3pm.

Eating & Drinking

Head down to the combined Daimaru and Daiei department-store basements at the station and check out the goodies and eateries.

The best spot for a raw-fish lunch or breakfast is the Karato Ichiba market. There are stalls in the markets serving sushi and delicious deep-fried *fugu* for ¥500 a plate. The vendors will hand you a tray and tongs to pick your sushi, and you can eat it on the boardwalk while watching the ships sail by. Next door is the Kamon Wharf complex, which has more than 40 shops, the majority of them eateries.

Shimonoseki Ijinkan (☎ 22-2262; 4-11 Karato; drinks ¥500-1500; ☒ 9.30am-8pm Tue-Sun) Tucked away in the old British consulate courtyard, the Ijinkan coffee house has bygone European elegance and the theatrical ministrations of bow-tied 'coffee meister' Kunio Kanegae, who puts on

a delightful little show if you order the *café au lait* (¥1050).

Kōji (☎ 29-5000; 4-4-10 Takezaki-chō; meals ¥683-8400; ☒ 11am-9pm; ☒ 11am-3pm) This busy, elegant Chinese eatery on the 7th floor of the Daimaru shopping complex claims a lineage with one of the oldest *soba* shops in Tokyo's Asakusa. There's a variety of tasty noodle dishes and stir-fries here like *gyūniku to gurin asupara no atamemono* (beef and asparagus stir-fry; ¥2100). Large daily lunch specials are ¥1365.

Yabure-Kabure (☎ 34-3711; 2-2-5 Buzenda-chō; meals ¥800-12,000; ☒ lunch & dinner) *Yabure kabure* means 'desperation' and this is certainly a boisterous, fun place to try *fugu* with emphasis on set menus, such as the *fugu* sashimi Ebisu course (¥5000). There are some English-speaking staff here. Look for the blue-and-white blowfish on the outside wall by the door.

Kappo Nakao (☎ 31-4129; 4-6 Akama-chō; meals ¥3800-26,250; ☒ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) This is a sophisticated *fugu* restaurant in Karato, with graceful service and splendidly prepared dishes. The presentation and relaxed atmosphere are worth it even if you don't try the *fugu*. The set lunches, such as the *fuku kaiseki* (*fugu* course; ¥2625), are decent value. Look for the stone lantern and wooden gate at the front.

Getting There & Away

Shinkansen trains stop at Shin-Shimonoseki station, two stops from JR Shimonoseki station. From Shimonoseki the bridge and tunnels connect roads and rail lines in Honshū with Kyūshū. Eastbound road users can take Rte 191 along the northern San-in coast, Rte 2 along the southern San-yō coast or the Chūgoku Expressway through central Honshū.

DARE TO FUGU?

Fugu are known in English as globefish or blowfish, and you won't have to go to Karato Ichiba (p473) to see your first in Shimonoseki. The city revels in its reputation as the *fugu* capital of Japan, and paintings and sculptures of the fish are everywhere.

Eating raw *fugu* is considered somewhat adventurous, since the fish's liver and other organs contain tetrodotoxin, a poison that makes cyanide look like chicken feed. During the Tokugawa shōgunate and the Meiji Restoration eating *fugu* was banned in certain districts, and since 1958 only specialist chefs have been allowed to prepare and sell the potentially deadly fare. Only 30% of apprentice chefs who train for three years pass the test to get a licence. Despite the precautions, every now and then people die – Kabuki actor Bandō Mitsugoro VIII, considered a national treasure, keeled over after a *fugu* party in 1975, but he had eaten four servings of *fugu* liver.

Fugu used to be a winter dish, eaten mainly between October and March, but it's now available year-round, thanks to *fugu* farms off Kyūshū.

Kanmon Kisen ferries run two or three times hourly from the Karato area of Shimonoseki to Moji-ko in Kyūshū (¥390, five minutes). Kanmon Kaikyō ferries ply the route between Karato and Kokura in Kyūshū (¥200, 13 minutes). From Shin-moji in Kita-Kyūshū there are ferries to Kōbe, Osaka and Tokyo in Honshū and to Matsuyama in Shikoku.

FERRIES TO KOREA & CHINA

Kampu Ferry (☎ in Shimonoseki 24-3000, operating under Pukwan Ferry in Busan 051-464-2700) operates the Shimonoseki-Busan ferry from the Shimonoseki International Ferry Terminal (Shimonoseki-kō Kokusai Taminaru), a short walk from the station. Head up to the **2nd floor** (☒ 10am-noon & 1-6.30pm) for bookings. There are daily departures at 7pm from Shimonoseki, arriving in Busan at 8.30am the following morning. Boarding time is between 6pm and 6.20pm, and one-way fares start at ¥7200 for students (¥9000 for an open tatami area), continuing upwards for cabins; there's a 10% discount on return fares. Shimonoseki City imposes a ¥600 levy on departing passengers.

Ferries from Busan depart from the Busan Port International Passenger Terminal, five-to 10-minutes' walk from Jungang-dong subway station on subway line 1. They follow the same time schedule, leaving Busan at 8pm and arriving in Shimonoseki at 8am. One-way/return fares start at 85,000/161,500 won.

If you need a visa for South Korea, arrange it before coming to Shimonoseki. There's a Korean consulate in Hiroshima. This route is used by many long-term Western residents in Japan, so expect to have your passport rigorously inspected when you return to Japan.

Orient Ferry Ltd (www.orientferry.co.jp in Japanese; ☎ in Shimonoseki 32-9677, in Qingdao 0532-8387-1160) runs between Shimonoseki and Qingdao, China (27 hours). The cheapest one-way/return tickets are ¥15,000/27,200 from Shimonoseki (departures 1pm Wednesday, Friday and Saturday) and 1100/1980 yuan from Qingdao, departing from the port ferry terminal north of Qingdao station at 8pm on Monday, Thursday and Saturday.

SHIMONOSEKI TO HAGI

There are three routes between Shimonoseki and Hagi. One goes around the western extremity of Honshū, served by the JR San-in line, and features some great coastal scenery, small fishing villages and interesting country-

side. **Ōmi-shima**, with its scenic, rocky coast, is immediately north of Nagato and connected to the mainland by a bridge. The island is part of the Kita Nagato Coastal Park, which extends eastwards beyond Hagi. **Ōmi-shima Kanko-kisen** (☎ 0837-26-0834) runs 1½-hour cruises (¥2200) around the island, taking passengers through natural rock archways.

An alternative is to travel via the Akiyoshi cave and tablelands area (see p472).

The third option is to take the JR Mine line from Asa, east of Shimonoseki, to Nagato, and then take the JR San-in line to Hagi.

Tawarayama Onsen 俵山温泉

☎ 0837

Nestled in the mountains, Tawarayama Onsen has escaped developers and maintained its reputation as a favoured hidden spa for *tōji* (curative bathing). It's quite deep in the mountains and serious about its purpose: there are no karaoke bars, no neon and almost no restaurants. Bathers come here for their health, usually staying from four days to a week at a time in the 40-odd ryokan. This *onsen* is so old-style that none of the ryokan has its own bath; water is not all that plentiful. Guests go out to bathe in the three public baths: **Machino-yu** (町の湯; ☎ 29-0001; admission ¥360; ☒ 6am-10.30pm); **Kawa-no-yu** (川の湯; ☎ 29-0001; admission ¥360; ☒ 2-10pm), which overlooks the river; and the newer **Hakuen-no-yu** (白猿の湯; ☎ 29-0036; admission ¥700; ☒ 7am-9pm). The latter has one of the only eateries in town, **Ryōfutei** (風亭; dishes ¥900-5000; ☒ lunch & dinner), serving pastas and meals like *karē raisu* (curry and rice, ¥850). There's a photo menu. An endless stream of lifelong *onsen* devotees wander down the narrow main street in their *yukata* (summer kimonos). If you're looking for a place to stay while in town, the popular **Izumiyu** (泉屋; ☎ 29-0231; s/tw incl 2 meals ¥10,500/17,850; (P) ☒ ☑) has Edo- and Meiji-era buildings and a huge garden. The friendly managers can pick up guests at Nagato-Yumoto station.

About 2km west of the *onsen* village is the **Mara Kannon** temple. Kannon is the Buddhist deity of compassion, while *mara* is the most graphic word imaginable for the male procreative organ, somewhere off the vulgar scale beyond 'knob end'. Put the two together, and you've this astonishing little temple asking for compassion for knob ends that aren't working properly. It looks more like a garden shed than a place of worship, and it's festooned with

phallic staturary. On 1 May it's the scene of a highly photographic fertility rite, the **Mara Kannon Matsuri**. Call the ryokan and check the date – sometimes it's on the 3rd.

Take the JR Mine line from Asa to the south, or Nagato to the north, to Nagato-Yumoto. Buses run from there up to Tawarayama Onsen (¥510, 25 minutes). There's also a direct bus from Shimonoseki (¥1610, 1½ hours).

HAGI 萩

☎ 0838 / pop 56,000

Hagi is a sleepy but attractive city closely linked with ceramics and the Meiji Restoration. It has an interesting combination of temples and shrines, a fascinating old samurai quarter, some picturesque castle ruins and fine coastal views. It's ironic that Hagi's claim to fame is its role in propelling Japan directly from the feudal to the modern era, while its attractions are principally its feudal past.

Orientation & Information

Western and central Hagi are effectively an island created by the two rivers Hashimoto-gawa and Matsumoto-gawa; eastern Hagi (with the major JR station Higashi-Hagi) lies on the eastern bank of the Matsumoto-gawa. Get off at JR Higashi-Hagi for the main sights of the city.

The main road through central Hagi starts from JR Hagi station in the south and runs north, past the bus centre (*basu senta* in Japanese) in the centre of town. West of this central area is the old samurai quarter of Jōkamachi, with its picturesque streets and old buildings. More such buildings can be found in Horiuchi to the northwest and Teramachi to the northeast of Jōkamachi.

Hagi's **tourist information office** (☎ 25-3145; 2997-3 Chintō; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-5pm) is just beside the Higashi-Hagi station. There's another south of town near Hagi station.

Free internet access is available at the **Hagi City Library** (☎ 25-6355; 552-26 Emukai; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Tue-Sun) on the 2nd floor; you'll have to fill out a form in Japanese first. There's also **Dagashi-ten** (☎ 080-3622-6961; 90-3 Higashi-tamachi; per 30min ¥100; ☎ 11am-6pm), a sweet shop in the arcade with a single terminal down the back.

Sights

HAGI POTTERY & KILNS

Connoisseurs of Japanese pottery rank *hagi-yaki*, the pottery of Hagi, second only to Kyoto's *raku-yaki*. As in other Japanese pottery centres, the craft came from Korea when Korean potters were abducted during Toyotomi Hideyoshi's unsuccessful invasion in the late 1500s. At a number of shops and kilns you can see the pottery being made and browse through the finished products. *Hagi-yaki* is noted for its fine glazes and delicate pastel colours.

The **Hagi-jō Kiln** (☎ 22-5226; Horiuchi; ☎ 8am-5pm) in Horiuchi has particularly fine pieces. It's closed irregular hours for firing. The western end of Hagi has several interesting pottery kilns near the park, Shizuki-kōen. You can also try your hand at making *hagi-yaki* at the crafts centre **Jōzan** (☎ 25-1666; Horiuchi; lessons ¥1680-5250; ☎ 8am-4pm). Call for a reservation.

Swede **Bertil Persson** (☎ 25-2693), who has lived in Hagi for over 30 years, has his own kiln and is happy to meet anyone seriously interested in ceramics.

During the first week of May the **Hagi-yaki Matsuri** takes place at the city gymnasium, with works from 51 local kilns on sale.

HAGI-JŌ RUINS & SHIZUKI-KŌEN

萩城跡指月公園

There's not much of the old Hagi-jō to see, apart from the typically imposing outer walls and the surrounding moat. The **castle** (☎ 25-1826; Horiuchi Shizuki-kōen-nai; admission with Mōri House ¥210; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mar-Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Feb) was built in 1604. It was dismantled in 1874 during the Meiji Restoration – since Hagi played a leading part in the end of the feudal era and the downfall of the shōgunate, it was appropriate that the town also led the way in the removal of feudal symbols.

Now the grounds are a pleasant park, with the **Shizukiyama-jinja**, the **Hanano-e Tea House** (Hanano-e Satei; tea ¥500) and other buildings. From the castle ruins you can climb the hillside to the 143m peak of Shizuki-yama.

MŌRI HOUSE 旧毛利家萩屋敷長屋

South of the park is **Mōri House** (☎ 25-2304; Horiuchi Shizuki-Kōen; admission with Hagi-jō ¥210; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Apr-Aug, 8.30am-4.30pm Nov-Feb, to 6pm Mar), a terrace house where samurai soldiers were once barracked. There's an interesting **Christian cemetery** to the south of the samurai house.

JŌKAMACHI, HORIUCHI & TERAMACHI

AREAS 城下町・堀内・寺町

Between the modern town centre and the moat that separates western Hagi from central

Hagi is the old samurai residential area, with many streets lined by whitewashed walls. This area is fascinating to wander around and has a number of interesting houses, particularly in the area known as Jōkamachi. Teramachi is noted particularly for its many fine old temples.

The Kikuya family were merchants rather than samurai, but their wealth and special connections allowed them to build a house well above their station. **Kikuya House** (☎ 25-8282; 1-1 Gofuku-machi; admission ¥500; ☎ 9am-5pm) dates from 1604 and has a fine gate, attractive gardens, and numerous examples of construction details and materials that would normally have been forbidden to the merchant class. Across the street is **Kubota House** (☎ 25-3139; 1-3 Gofuku-machi; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm), another renovated residence. At the southern perimeter of the Jōkamachi district, before you reach the little canal, is the green tea-coloured **Ishii Chawan Museum** (☎ 22-1211; 33-3 Minamifuruhagi-machi; admission ¥500; ☎ 9am-4.45pm Tue-Sun, closed Jan, Jun & Dec), which has an extensive collection of tea-ceremony bowls and utensils. From the museum, go east, cross the canal and turn south to reach the **Hagi Uragami Museum** (☎ 24-2400; 586-1 Hiyako; admission from ¥800; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun). This superb private collection, housed in a building

designed by Tange Kenzo, consists of oriental ceramics and about 5000 woodblock prints. There are fine works by Katsushika Hokusai and Utamaro Kitagawa. At the main entrance to the Horiuchi district is the **Hagi Museum** (☎ 25-6447; 355 Horiuchi; admission ¥500; ☎ 9am-5pm), which has exhibitions about Hagi history, as well as astronomy and biology.

Kumaya Art Museum (☎ 22-7547; 47 Imauono Tamachi; admission ¥700; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), in Jōkamachi, has a limited collection including tea bowls, screens and other items, displayed in a series of small warehouses dating from 1768. The Kumaya family handled the trading and commercial operations of Hagi's ruling Mōri family.

The Horiuchi and Teramachi areas are dotted with temples and shrines. **Fukuhara-ke Yashiki-mon** is one of the finest of the samurai gates in Horiuchi. Nearby is the **Tomb of Tenjuin**, dedicated to Mōri Terumoto, the founder of the Mōri dynasty. There are numerous old temples in the Teramachi area, including the two-storey **Kaichō-ji** (☎ 22-0053; 50 Kitafuruhagi-machi Ikkū; ☎ 5am-6pm).

TŌKŌ-JI 東光寺

East of the river stands this pretty temple (☎ 26-1052; admission ¥300; 1647 Chintō; ☎ 8.30am-

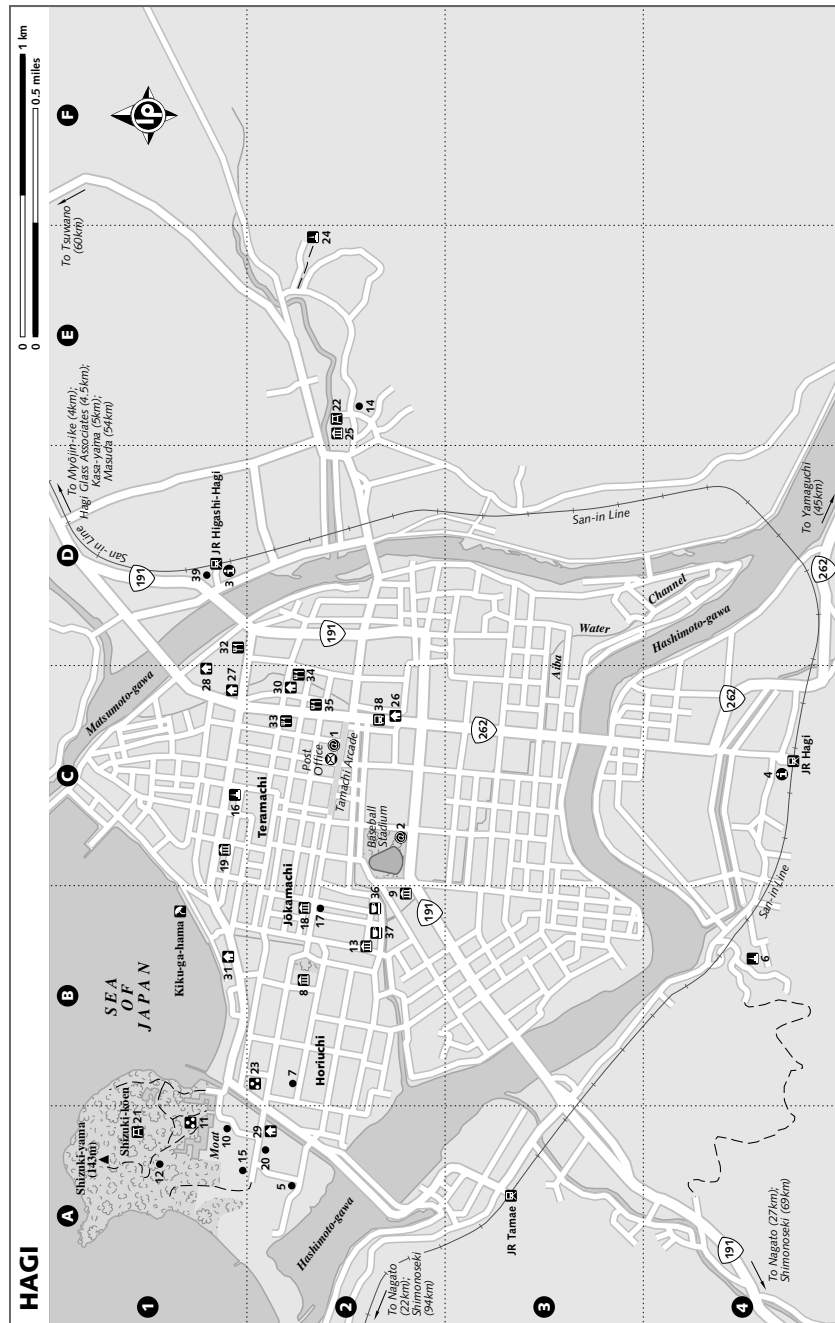
THE REVOLUTIONARY WHO WASN'T

Hagi in Honshū and Kagoshima in Kyūshū played major parts in the events leading up to the Meiji Restoration. Japan's long period of isolation from the outside world under the Tokugawa rule had, by about the mid-19th century, created tensions approaching breaking point. The arrival of US Commodore Perry brought matters to a humiliating head, as the 'barbarians' simply dictated their terms to the helpless Japanese and forced the country open.

Japan's modernisation couldn't happen under the calcified feudal shōgunate. Restoring the emperor to power, even if only as a figurehead, was the route the progressive samurai chose, and Yoshida Shōin of Hagi was one of their leaders. On the surface he was also a complete failure. In 1854, in order to study first-hand the ways of the West, he attempted to leave Japan on Perry's ship, only to be handed over to the authorities and imprisoned in Edo (Tokyo).

When he returned to Hagi he hatched a plot to kill a shōgunate official, but he talked about it so much that word leaked out to his enemies. He was arrested again and, in 1859 at the age of 29, he was executed.

Fortunately, where Yoshida failed in acting he succeeded in inspiring. In the years before his death he taught followers at a school he founded called Shoka Sonjuku. In 1865 they led a militia of peasants and samurai that overturned Hagi's Chōshū government. The Western powers supported the new blood in Hagi and Kagoshima and, when the shōgunate army moved against Hagi's young Turks, it was defeated. That the downfall of the shōgunate came at the hands of an army of not just samurai but also peasants was further proof of the changes taking place. In 1867 the emperor was restored to nominal power and Japan was on the road to becoming a modern nation-state thanks to the Sonjuku group; pupil Itō Hirobumi became the first prime minister. Today, the spirit of Yoshida Shōin lives on at Hagi's Shōin-jinja.

**INFORMATION**

Dagashi-ten 駄菓子店	1 C2
Hagi City Library 萩市立図書館	2 C2
Tourist Information Office	
観光案内所	3 D1
Tourist Information Office	
観光案内所	4 C4

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Christian Cemetery	
萩キリシタン殉教者 記念公園	5 A2
Daishō-in 大照院	6 B4
Fukuhara-ke Yashiki-mon 福原門	7 B2
Hagi Museum 萩博物館	8 B2
Hagi Uragami Museum	
萩浦上美術館	9 B2
Hagi-jō Kiln 萩城窯	10 A1
Hagi-jō Ruins 萩城跡	11 A1
Hanano-e Tea House 花江茶亭	12 A1
Ishii Chawan Museum	
石井茶碗美術館	13 B2

Itō Hirobumi House

伊藤博文旧宅	14 E2
Jōzan 城山	15 A1
Kaichō-ji 海潮寺	16 C1
Kikuya House 菊屋家住宅	17 B2
Kubota House 久保田家	18 B2
Kumaya Art Museum 熊谷美術館	19 C1
Mōri House 旧毛利家萩屋敷長屋	20 A2
Shizukiyama-jinja 指月山神社	21 A1
Shōin-jinja 松陰神社	22 E2
Tomb of Tenjin 天樹院墓所	23 B2
Tōkō-ji 東光寺	24 E2
Yoshida Shō in Rekishikan	25 E2
Business Hotel Hasegawa	
ビジネスホテル長谷川	26 C2
Hagi Grand Hotel Tenkū	
萩グランドホテル天空	27 C1
Hagi no yado Tomoe	
萩の宿常茂庵	28 C1

Hagi Youth Hostel

萩ユースホステル	29 A2
Nakamura Ryokan 中村旅館	30 C2
Well Heart Pia Hagi	
ウェルハートピア萩	31 B1
EATING	
Don Don Udonya	
どんどんうどん屋	32 D1
Maru マル	33 C2
Nakamura 中村	34 C2
San Marco サンマルコ	35 C2
DRINKING	
Cafeteria Ijinkan	
カフェテリア異人館	36 B2
Kurumayado Tenjuppei	
傳宿天十平	37 B2
TRANSPORT	
Hagi Bus Centre 萩バスセンター	38 C2
Smile Bicycle Rental	39 D1

5pm), home to the tombs of five Mōri lords. The odd-numbered lords (apart from No 1) were buried here; the even-numbered ones were buried at the **Daishō-in** temple. The stone walkways on the hillside behind the temple are flanked by almost 500 stone lanterns, erected by the lords' servants.

SHŌIN-JINJA 松陰神社

This Meiji-era shrine is dedicated to Meiji Restoration movement leader Yoshida Shōin. His life is illustrated in the nearby **Yoshida Shōin Rekishikan** (Yoshida Shōin Historical Museum; ☎ 26-9116; Chintō Matsumoto; admission ¥650; ☎ 9am-5pm). South of the shrine, **Itō Hirobumi House** (伊藤博文旧宅; admission to grounds free; ☎ 9am-5pm) is the early home of the four-term prime minister who was a follower of Yoshida Shōin, and who later drafted the Meiji Constitution. Yoshida Shōin's tomb is near Tōkō-ji.

DAISHŌ-IN 大照院

South of the centre, near JR Hagi station, this **funerary temple** (☎ 22-2124; 4132 0mi; admission ¥200; ☎ 8am-5pm Apr-Nov, to 4.30pm Dec-Mar) was the resting place for the first two Mōri generations and then, after that, all even-numbered generations of the Mōri lords.

MYŌJIN-IKE & KASA-YAMA 明神池・笠山

About 5km east of the town is the 112m dormant volcano **Kasa-yama**. It's hardly a whopper, but there are some great things to do here. The pond at the mountain's base, **Myōjin-ike**, is connected to the sea and shelters a variety of saltwater fish.

Further up the mountain is **Hagi Glass Associates** (萩ガラス工房; ☎ 26-2555; Myōjin-ike Koshigahama; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm, demonstrations 4.30pm), where quartz basalt from the volcano is used to make extremely tough Hagi glassware. There is a showroom and a shop, and visitors can make their own piece of glassware (courses ¥1050 to ¥3150). Next door is Hagi's own beer factory **Yuzuya Honten** (柚子屋本店; ☎ 25-7511; Myōjin-ike Koshigahama; ☎ 9am-5pm), where you can check out how the beer is made and taste the brew; it also bottles citrus juice.

The road continues to the top of Kasa-yama, from where there are fine views along the coast and an intriguingly tiny 30m-deep crater. Kasa-yama is close enough to make a good bicycle ride from Hagi.

Sleeping

Hagi Youth Hostel (☎ 22-0733; fax 22-3558; www.jyh.or.jp/yhguide/chugoku/hagi/index.html in Japanese; 109-22 Horuchi; dm members/nonmembers ¥2940/3940; ☎ closed mid-Jan-mid-Feb; P ☎) Close to the castle at the western end of the town, the hostel is a 15-minute walk from JR Tamae station. Most of the kilns and *hagi-yaki* shops are in this quiet area. The hostel is cold and bare, but the manager is very attentive. Bicycles can be rented for ¥500 a day and meals are available.

Nakamura Ryokan (☎ 22-0303; fax 26-0303; nakamura-r.ftw.jp in Japanese; 56 Furuhashi-machi; s/tw ¥5250/8400; P ☎) The Nakamura (no connection to restaurant Nakamura next door) is a friendly place divided into modern and older buildings. It has large tatami rooms and there's a large pine by the tile-roof *genkan* (entrance).

Business Hotel Hasegawa (☎ 22-0450; fax 22-4884; www.hagi.ne.jp/004_hasegawa in Japanese; 17 Karahi-machi; s/tw ¥5775/10,500; (P) ☎ ☎ ☎) Between the station and the sights near Hagi castle, the cheerful Hasegawa has sunny Western- and Japanese-style rooms with bathrooms, but they're quite small. It's right by the bus centre.

Well Heart Pia Hagi (☎ 22-7580; fax 25-7931; www.kip.or.jp/hp_109 in Japanese; 485-2 Horiuchi; s/tw Western ¥8500/12,000, Japanese ¥11,400/15,400; (P) ☎ ☎ ☎) Five minutes' walk east of Hagi castle, this modern public lodging facility has huge rooms with great views facing Kiku-gu-hama beach. The Japanese- and Western-style rooms have their own bathroom, and meals are available. The baths are also open to nonguests (11am to 9pm Thur-Tues, 11am-3pm Wed, ¥400).

Hagi Grand Hotel Tenkū (☎ 25-1211; fax 25-4422; www.hagi-gh.com in Japanese; 25 Furuhaagi-machi; s/tw ¥8550/13,950; (P) ☎ ☎ ☎) Here there are large rooms and a huge *onsen* complex at the back. The foyer is a good place to sample local sweets.

Hagi no Yado Tomoe (☎ 22-0150; fax 25-0152; www.tomeohagi.jp in Japanese; 608-53 Kōbō-ji Hijiwara; per person incl 2 meals from ¥26,250; (P) ☎ ☎) The finest inn in Hagi, the historic Tomoe has gorgeous, refurbished Japanese rooms with garden views, exquisite, artfully prepared cuisine and luxurious baths. There's also a small gallery off the lobby showcasing Hagi ceramics, open to nonguests.

Eating & Drinking

Kurumayado Tenjūpei (☎ 26-6474; 33-5 Minami-furuhaagi-machi; dishes ¥350-600; ☎ 9am-6pm) This charming gallery and tea room is in a late-Edo period house with a large garden. Enjoy the *sukon setto* (tea with scone; ¥600) in the European-style drawing room.

Don Don Udonya (☎ 22-7537; 377 San-ku Hijiwara; dishes ¥390-700; ☎ 9am-9pm) Popular with locals, this place has excellent udon noodles and set meals, with plastic food models in the window. Try the *nikuten udon* (beef and tempura over noodles; ¥490). This chain outlet is in a large white building with a check pattern on the lower part.

Cafeteria Ijinkan (☎ 25-6334; 2-61 Gofuku-machi; dishes ¥350-880; ☎ 9.30am-10pm) The Ijinkan is an old-fashioned, brick-walled café with many varieties of coffee available, as well as pizzas, cakes and *sansai pirafu* (pilaf with edible wild plants; ¥850). Close to the museum, it's popular with elderly tourists.

Maru (☎ 26-5050; 78 Yoshida-chō; dishes ¥430-1000; ☎ dinner Tue-Sun) Maru is a fashionable *izakaya* with an inventive menu, mostly side dishes. Sushi, tofu and other Japanese food with a modern twist are on offer. If you really love meat, the *kenrangyū nigirizushi* (raw beef sushi; ¥1000) is something to write home about. Look for the tall white building across the street; Maru has a large wooden door.

San Marco (☎ 25-4677; 18 Higashita-machi; meals ¥730-1950; ☎ 11am-9pm) Hagi pizza and very simple Italian lunch and dinner set menus are on offer at this family restaurant. There's a photo menu and plastic meal displays. It's located above the sports shop on the corner.

Nakamura (☎ 22-6619; 394 Hijiwara; meals ¥1500-5000; ☎ lunch & dinner) *Unidon* (sea urchin on rice; ¥3150) is the house speciality in the traditional surroundings here. Fronted by bushes, this old-fashioned-looking restaurant is behind a carpark by a small canal.

Getting There & Away

The JR San-in line runs along the north coast through Tottori, Matsue, Masuda and Hagi to Shimonoseki. Local services between Shimonoseki and Higashi-Hagi (¥1890) take about three hours, including transfers). They travel around the end of Honshū, giving some great coastal views.

JR buses connect Hagi with Shin-Yamaguchi (¥1970, 1½ hours), which is south of Hagi on the Tokyo-Osaka-Hakata *shinkansen* line. There's a service to Tsuwano (¥2080, two hours) to the east in Shimane-ken, and also to Tokyo (¥14,250, 12 hours), Osaka (¥9480, 12 hours) and Hiroshima (¥3300, four hours). Buses run from Yamaguchi to Hagi (¥1760, one hour).

Hagi is served by Iwami airport, an hour to the northeast near Masuda in Shimane-ken. There are daily flights to/from Tokyo and Osaka. A bus (¥1560, 70 minutes) from in front of Higashi-Hagi station or the Hagi bus centre connects Hagi with all flights.

Getting Around

Hagi is a good place to explore by bicycle and there are plenty of hire places, including one at the youth hostel and several around the castle and JR Higashi-Hagi station. The best is **Smile** (☎ 22-2914; 3000 Shinkawa Minami; bike rental 1hr/day ¥100/800; ☎ 8am-sunset), to the right as you leave the station.

A handy bus system takes in Hagi's main attractions. There are east- and west-bound

loops, with two services per hour at each stop. One trip costs ¥100, and one-/two-day passes cost ¥500/700. Pick up a schedule at the tourist information office.

From Hagi, the JR San-in line and Rte 191, the main road, pretty much hug each other and the coastline up to the prefectural border with Shimane-ken. If you're going to Tsuwano, there's a direct bus from Hagi, but if you've got a JR pass you'll want to go by train up the coast to Masuda, then change to the JR Yamaguchi line for Tsuwano.

SHIMANE-KEN 島根県

Along the northern San-in coastline on the Sea of Japan, Shimane-ken is off the beaten track but well worth the effort of visiting. Cities are few and far between, the pace of life is decidedly slower than on the San-yō coast and locals seem particularly friendly towards visitors. Highlights include Tsuwano, a quiet, unspoilt mountain town; the great shrine at Izumo; and Matsue, where the writer and Japanophile Lafcadio Hearn lived.

TSUWANO 津和野

☎ 0856 / pop 9,500

Tsuwano is a relaxing, 700-year-old mountain town with a bit of something for everyone – a fine shrine and castle ruins, buildings reminiscent of the Edo era and literary sites. It's in the far western reaches of Shimane-ken, about 42km east of Hagi, and has a wonderful collection of carp swimming in the roadside water channels – in fact, there are far more carp here than people!

Orientation & Information

Tsuwano is a long, narrow town wedged into a deep north-south valley. Tsuwano-kawa, the JR Yamaguchi line and main road all run down the middle of the valley. A bilingual booklet, *Yū ni shin sai Tsuwano*, is available at the **tourist information office** (☎ 72-1771; Ekimae; ☎ 9am-5pm), just south of the train station. The title means 'make yourself at home in Tsuwano' in the local dialect.

Sights & Activities

TSUWANO-JŌ 津和野城

The ruins of Tsuwano-jō seem to brood over the valley, with the broken stone walls draping along the ridge. The **castle** was originally

constructed in 1295 and remained in use until the Meiji Restoration. An old single-seater chairlift takes you up (and down) the hillside for ¥450, and there's a further 15-minute walk to the castle ruins.

TAIKODANI-INARI-JINJA 太鼓谷稲成神社

Just above the castle chairlift station, this splendid, thriving **shrine** (☎ 72-0219; Tsuwano; ☎ 8am-4.30pm) is one of the largest Inari shrines in Japan. You can walk up to it from the main road through a tunnel created by about 1000 red torii; their lantern light is beautiful at night. Festivals are held here on 15 May and 15 November. The **Sagi Mai Matsuri** (Heron Dance Festival), which includes a procession of dancers dressed as herons, is performed on 20 and 27 July at Yasaka-jinja, near the start of the torii steps.

TONOMACHI DISTRICT 殿町

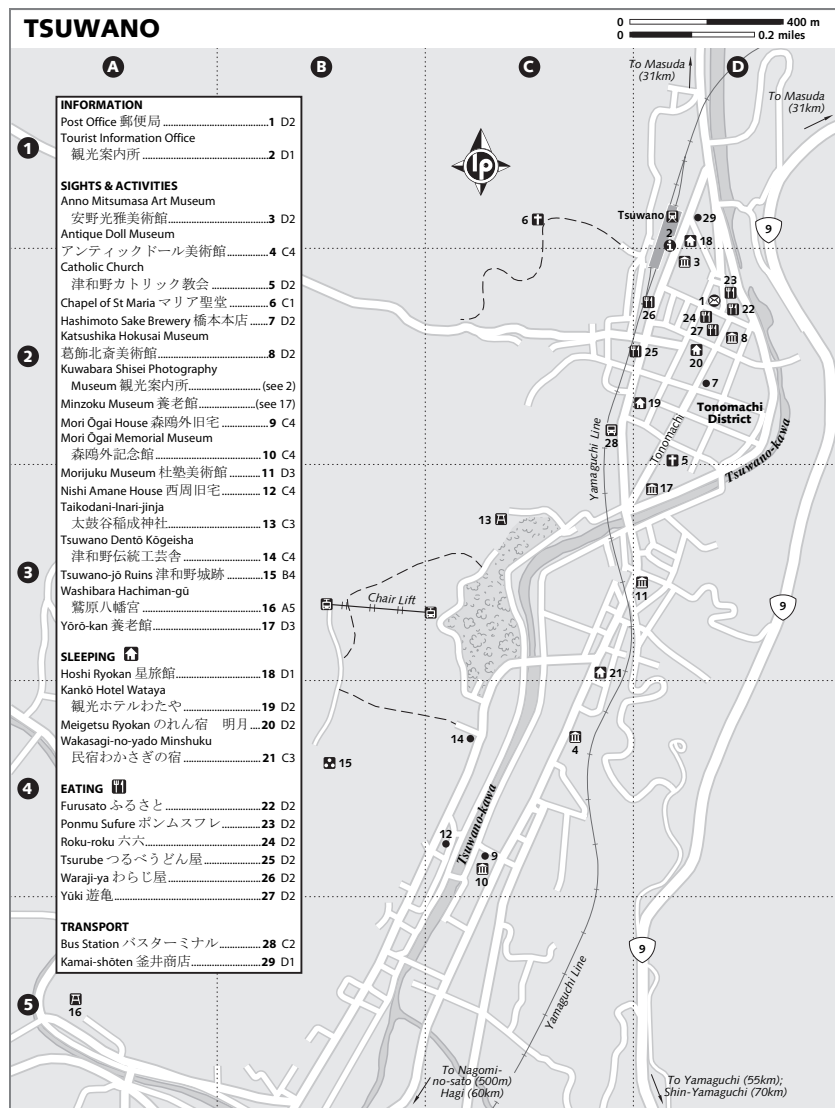
Only the walls and some fine old gates from the former **samurai quarter** of Tonomachi remain. The water channels that run alongside the picturesque Tonomachi road are home to numerous large, colourful carp, though disease has diminished their numbers. It's said that these fish were bred to provide a potential source of food should the town ever be besieged. (The feared attack never came.)

The Tsuwano **Catholic Church** (☎ 72-0251; Tonomachi; ☎ 8am-5.30pm April-Nov, to 5pm Dec-Mar) is a reminder that Nagasaki Christians were once exiled here. Instead of pews, the church has tatami mats! Just north of the river is the **Yōrō-kan**, a school for young samurai in the late Edo period. The building houses the **Minzoku Museum** (☎ 72-1000; Tonomachi; admission ¥250; ☎ 8.30am-5pm March-November), an interesting little folk-art museum with all sorts of farming and cooking equipment.

Near the post office, the **Katsushika Hokusai Museum** (☎ 72-1850; Ushiroda; admission ¥500; ☎ 9.30am-5pm) features a small collection by the master Edo-period painter Hokusai and his disciples, and interestingly shows the woodblock process plate by plate.

CHAPEL OF ST MARIA マリア聖堂

The tiny **Chapel of St Maria** dates from 1951, when a German priest built it as a memorial to the exiled Catholics who died in the final period of Christian persecution before the anti-Christian laws were repealed in 1872. Today it's a well-kept, peaceful sanctuary.



OTHER SIGHTS

The beautiful **former residences** of Nishi Amane, who played an important part in the Meiji Restoration government, and Mori Ōgai, a highly regarded novelist who served as a physician in the Imperial Japanese Army, are in the south of the town. At the rear of the latter is the **Mori Ōgai Memorial Museum** (☎ 72-3210;

Machida; museum ¥500, residence grounds ¥100; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), a modern building housing many of the writer's personal effects. The residence grounds are even more interesting than the museum.

The **Antique Doll Museum** (☎ 72-3110; Mori; admission ¥800; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Fri-Wed) houses an astounding collection of fine European an-

tique dolls. Perhaps more interesting (and still with a bit of European flavour) is the **Morijuku Museum** (☎ 72-3200; Mori; admission ¥500; ☎ 9am-5pm), an old farmhouse with a room of etchings by Goya and paintings by local artists. Make sure you see the pinhole camera feature on the 2nd floor (the proprietor will gladly show you). Crafts shop **Tsuwano Dentō Kōgeisha** (☎ 72-1518; Shiroyama-shita; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Wed-Mon) has a neat paper-making demonstration and a good range of traditional paper products for sale.

Kuwabara Shisei Photography Museum (☎ 72-3171; Ekimae; admission ¥300; ☎ 9am-4.45pm) has a small but excellent collection dedicated to contemporary photojournalism. It's in the same building as the information office, next to the station. Across the street is the **Anno Mitsumasa Art Museum** (☎ 72-4155; Ekimae; admission ¥800; ☎ 9am-5pm), showing works by local artist Anno Mitsumasa. It has a good gift shop.

There are a number of sake breweries in town, some of which have tastings. Try **Hashimoto**, where Toba-san, one of the resident staff, can answer your questions in English while you sample the local brew.

South of the town is the shrine **Washibara Hachiman-gū**, about 4km from the station, where **archery contests** on horseback are held on 2 April.

If you feel like a long soak in a bath, head down to **Nagomi-no-sato** (なごみの里; ☎ 72-4122; Washibara; admission ¥500; ☎ 10am-10pm, closed 2nd & 4th Tue of month), the Tsuwano *onsen* complex south of town. It has a restaurant, local produce for sale, and mask painting and bamboo weaving on weekends.

Sleeping

Hoshi Ryokan (☎ 72-0136; fax 72-0241; Ekimae; s/tw incl 2 meals ¥6500/13,000; (P) (S)) This is an older, faded ryokan opposite the bicycle shop and steps away from the station. The Japanese rooms, though, are quite large and some have mountain views. Toilets are shared.

Wakasagi-no-yado Minshuku (☎ /fax 72-1146; Mori; s/tw incl 2 meals ¥7500/15,000; (P) (S)) This family-run operation is pleasant, friendly and frequently recommended; staff can even pick you up at the station in summer. If you're walking from the station, look for the white building on the left with a checked tile design.

Meigetsu Ryokan (☎ 72-0685; fax 72-0637; Uocho; s/tw incl 2 meals from ¥10,500/21,000; (P) (S)) A tradi-

tional ryokan with old-style, very warm service and a pretty little garden. The wooden interiors and baths are older but well kept. There's an old-fashioned gate with a tiled roof outside the white building.

Kankō Hotel Wataya (☎ 72-0333; fax 72-1543; www.tsuwano.jp in Japanese; Takaokadōri; s/tw incl 2 meals ¥12,600/25,200; (P) (S)) The Wataya is a modern, sophisticated *onsen* complex with Western- and Japanese-style rooms and some very stylish bathing facilities. You can have your own outdoor bath with mountain views if you want to splash out. Meals here are exquisitely prepared, with emphasis on tofu and *sansai* (edible wild plants).

Eating

Most visitors to Tsuwano usually dine in their *minshuku* or ryokan, so many restaurants are open only during the day.

Roku-roku (☎ 72-0443; Shin-chō; dishes ¥300-780; ☎ 6pm-12.30am Tue-Sun) A short walk southwest of the post office, this small but lively *izakaya* is the best bet in the evening, as it's inexpensive, friendly and a good place for meeting locals. The *kabuto-ebi shio-yaki* (grilled and salted minilobster; ¥500) is highly recommended. The lower half of the building is covered with logs.

Tsurube (☎ 72-2098; Takaokadōri; dishes ¥520-840; ☎ 11am-6.30pm) Here the house speciality is *udon* noodles handmade on the premises, like the *sansai udon* (udon wild edible plants; ¥785). It's the brown-and-white building by the graveyard.

Waraji-ya (☎ 72-3221; Takaokadōri; dishes ¥400-1600; ☎ 11am-5pm) Rustic and traditional, Waraji-ya serves noodles and is well known for *tendon* (tempura-and-rice dishes; ¥1100). It has an *irori* (open fireplace). There are plastic food models in the window. Closes irregularly for holidays.

Furusato (☎ 72-0403; Gion-chō; meals ¥1200-1300; ☎ lunch) Across from the post office, Furusato serves the local speciality, *uzume-meshi* (rice served in a soup with tofu, mushrooms and mountain vegetables; ¥1200). It's a mostly brown building with a white *noren* over the door.

Yūki (☎ 72-0162; 271-4 Ushiroda; meals ¥1300-3000; ☎ 10.30am-7pm) Yūki's *Tsuwano teishoku* (a sampler of local dishes; ¥2300) is recommended. There are carp swimming in a pool in the floor here, and you can also try the *koi teishoku* (carp course; ¥2300). Look for

the old-fashioned building with a small pine tree outside.

Ponmu Sufure (☎ 72-2778; 284 Ushiroda; meals ¥1500-3000; ☎ 10am-9pm Fri-Wed, to midnight Fri & Sat) There's good pizza and bread at the only Western restaurant in town. It's hard to go wrong with the ¥1500 lunch specials; choose from the *honjitsu* (daily) pasta, pizza or risotto. Look for the white building with a green awning.

Getting There & Away

The JR Yamaguchi line runs from Shin-Yamaguchi on the south coast through Yamaguchi to Tsuwano and on to Masuda on the north coast. There are connections from Tsuwano to Shin-Yamaguchi (¥1110, 1½ hours) and Masuda (¥570, 40 minutes). Seven buses a day (¥2080, two hours) and two expresses buses (¥2080, 1½ hours) run between Tsuwano and Hagi.

From mid-March to late November there's a popular steam-locomotive service from Shin-Yamaguchi to Tsuwano. It mainly runs on weekends, the Golden Week holiday (late April to early May) and from late July to late August. The SL *Yamaguchi-gō* service is operated with two restored 1930s locomotives pulling antique carriages that travel between Shin-Yamaguchi and Tsuwano. The trip costs ¥1620 and takes two hours. Ask for up-to-date details and book well ahead at JR and tourist information offices. Details in Japanese at www.c571.jp.

Getting Around

Tsuwano has several bicycle-rental places; rates are ¥500/800 per two hours/day. **Kamaishōten** (☎ 8am-7pm) is in front of the station.

ŌDA 大田

☎ 0854 / pop 41,000

Ōda itself is an unremarkable coastal city but its outskirts contain worthwhile attractions seldom visited by foreigners. The old silver mine here is slated to become a Unesco World Heritage site in 2007.

If you're coming from the west, try the old-style baths at **Yunotsu Onsen** (温泉津温泉), a charming little seaside hamlet on the San'in train line from which silver was once shipped. Don't be shy if the local oldsters are crowding the two *sentō* here, which have mineral deposits lining the tubs. **Motoyu Onsen** (元湯温泉; ☎ 0855-65-2052; admission ¥300; ☎ 5.30am-9pm) is the older of the two and faces a statue of local

Buddhist poet Asahara Saichi, who insisted he be depicted with horns on his head to reflect his sins. A few doors down is **Yakushinoyu Onsen** (薬師湯温泉; ☎ 0855-65-4894; admission ¥300; ☎ 5am-9pm), which has a pleasant lounge and bay windows on the 2nd floor.

Three stops up the train line is the curious, underground **Nima Sand Museum** (礫サンドミュージアム; ☎ 0854-88-3776; 975 Amagōchi Nima-chō; admission ¥700, youth hostel members ¥560; ☎ 9am-5pm, closed 1st Wed of each month), which houses the world's biggest hourglass – this monster is turned over at midnight on 31 December each year, and has exactly the right number of grains of sand to last through to the same time the next year. The 5m-long timer is suspended high in one of the museum's glass pyramids. There are also displays on the local 'singing sand'. The museum is about 10 minutes' walk from Nima station.

our pick If you haven't had the chance to stay at a Buddhist temple, **Jōfuku-ji Youth Hostel** (おースホステル城福寺; ☎ 0854-88-2233; www.shimane-yh.jp/jofukuji/jofukuji_e.html; 1114 Nima-machi Nima-chō; members/nonmembers ¥2730/3780) is a lovely spot to try it out. The busy priest and his wife are very friendly, and there's a splendid view out over the coast. Sometimes they can pick visitors up at Nima station. This homey wooden temple is a bit isolated but meals are available.

Iwami Ginzan 石見銀山

About 6km inland from Nima station is the old **Iwami Ginzan Silver Mine**, which in the early 17th century produced an impressive 38 tonnes of silver annually, about one-third of global output. The Tokugawa shōgunate had direct control over the 500 or so mines in the area. Today visitors can explore the small **Ryūgenji Mabu Mine** (龍源寺間歩; ☎ 0854-89-0347; Ōmori-chō Ōda-shi; admission ¥400; ☎ 9am-5pm 21 March-23 Nov, to 4pm 24 Nov-20 March) but, as Iwami will become a Unesco World Heritage site, the much larger Ōkubo mine shaft is to open to the public in 2007. Shuttle buses are expected to run there from Ōmori.

Ōmori is a charming little town near the mines with carefully restored wooden houses lining the main street. There's an interesting temple, **Rakan-ji** (羅漢寺; ☎ 0854-89-0005; Ōmori-chō Ōda-shi; admission ¥500; ☎ 8am-5pm), which boasts 500 stone arhat statues in two chambers beside graceful stone bridges. Their facial expressions are particularly striking.

A good place for a coffee break is **Gungendō** (群言堂; ☎ 0854-89-0077; 183 Ōmori-chō Ōda-shi; cake

sets ¥1000; ☎ 10am-6pm Thu-Tue), a large, stylish clothing-shop-cum-café. It's just down the road and over a little bridge from Rakan-ji temple, past the Wilds Gallery. It's a large building on the corner; look for the orange post box outside.

Buses run from Nima station to the Ryūgenji Mabu Mine (23 minutes, ¥510) via the Ōmori Daikansho Ato (Former Intendant's Office) at the centre of town and the nearby **tourist information office** (☎ 0854-89-0333; ☎ 9am-5pm May-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Apr), also a stop for buses to and from Ōda bus centre (28 minutes, ¥560).

Sanbe-san 三瓶山

About 20km inland from Ōda is Sanbe-san, an old volcano with grassy slopes that reaches 1126m. It has four separate peaks known as the Father, the Mother, the Child and the Grandchild. It takes about an hour to climb from **Sanbe Onsen** and five hours to climb around the caldera. There's a dip in the *onsen* awaiting you on your return. Day-trippers can try **Kokuminshukusha Sanbesō** (民宿舎さんべ荘; ☎ 0854-83-2011; Shigaku Sanbe-chō Ōda-shi; admission ¥500; ☎ 10.30am-9pm; ☐), a large lodging facility that has outdoor circular tubs. The area is also a popular ski centre in winter. Buses run between Ōda and Sanbe Onsen (¥830, 40 minutes).

IZUMO 出雲

☎ 0853 / pop 148,000

Only 34km west of Matsue, Izumo has one major attraction – the great **Izumo Taisha shrine** (出雲大社; ☎ 53-3100; 195 Kizuki Higashi Taisha-chō; ☎ 6am-8pm), one of Japan's two top Shintō sites along with Ise-jingū. It's hard to see behind its fence but definitely worth a visit if you're in the area.

Orientation & Information

Izumo Taisha is 8km northwest of central Izumo, where accommodation is more plentiful. The shrine area, basically one main, sleepy street, runs straight up to the shrine. It has the Ichibata Line Taisha Ekimae train station and a few accommodation places and restaurants. The friendly **tourist information office** (☎ 53-2298; 1346-9 Kizuki Minami Shinmondōri Taisha-chō; ☎ 9am-5.30pm) in the heritage train station building has information in English. There's also a new **tourist information office** (☎ 53-2100; 3286-1 Kizuki Higashi Seidamari Taisha-chō; ☎ 10am-3pm) right by the

front gate to the shrine. Izumo Taisha can easily be visited as a day trip from Matsue.

Sights

IZUMO TAISHA 出雲大社

This is the oldest Shintō shrine in Japan and is second in importance only to the shrines of Ise. Although it's only a shadow of its former self – the buildings purportedly once towered to a colossal 48m with a 109m-long staircase, but today they're a modest 24m – this is still an enormously significant structure, both architecturally and spiritually. It's also known as Izumo Oyashiro.

A shrine has existed on the site for the last 1500 years. The current main shrine was last rebuilt in 1744, its 25th incarnation, whereas the surrounding buildings date back to 1874. All are constructed in the Taisha-zukuri style, considered Japan's oldest form of shrine architecture. The wooded grounds are pleasant to wander through, and the shrine itself enjoys the borrowed scenery of Yakumo Hill as a backdrop.

The shrine is dedicated to Okuninushi, the *kami* (Shintō deity) of marriage, among other things. Hence visitors to the shrine summon the deity by clapping four times rather than the normal two – twice for themselves and twice for their partner or partners to be.

The **Haiden** (拜殿; Hall of Worship) is the first building inside the entrance torii; huge *shimenawa* (twisted straw ropes) hang over the entry. Those who can toss and lodge a coin in them are said to be blessed by good luck. The main building is the largest shrine in Japan, but the **Honden** (本殿; Main Hall) cannot be entered. The shrine compound is flanked by *jūku-sha*, long shelters where Japan's eight million Shintō deities stay when they turn up for their annual shindig.

On the southeastern side of the compound is the **Shinko-den** (神祇殿; Treasure House; admission ¥150; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm), with a collection of shrine paraphernalia. Behind the main shrine building, in the northwestern corner, is the former **Shōkokan** (彰古館; Treasure Hall; admission ¥50; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm), which boasts a large collection of images of Okuninushi in the form of Daikoku, a cheerful chubby character standing on two or three rice bales with a sack over his shoulder and a mallet in his hand. Usually you will see his equally happy son Ebisu standing beside him with a fish tucked under his arm.

Just to the right of the front gate of the shrine is the **Shimane Museum of Ancient Izumo** (島根県立古代出雲歴史博物館; ☎ 53-8600; 99-4 Kizuki Higashi Taisha-chō; admission ¥600; 🕒 9am-6pm, closed 3rd Tue of month; 📍), opened in March 2007 with a collection featuring numerous national treasures and important cultural properties ranging from arms and armour to masks and fans.

If you want to get an idea of the original size of Izumo Taisha, check out the **Kodai Izumo Ōyashiro Mokei Tenjikan** (古代出雲大社模型展示館; Ancient Izumo Shrine Model Hall; ☎ 53-3100; admission free; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm), which has a one-tenth-scale model of the shrine as it was about 800 years ago. There are also photos of wooden pillars unearthed in 2000 with a diameter of 1.2m, evidence supporting the high-rise shrine theory.

HINOMISAKI 日御碕

It's less than 10km from Izumo Taisha to **Hinomisaki** cape, where you'll find a beautiful lighthouse, some fine views and another ancient shrine. On the way you'll pass the pleasant **Inasa-no-hama**, a good swimming beach just 2km from Taisha Ekimae station. Buses run regularly from the station to the cape via the beach (¥840, 35 minutes). **Hinomisaki-jinja** is near the cape's bus terminus. Coastal paths head north and south from the car park, offering fine views, particularly from the top of the **lighthouse** (日御碕灯台; admission ¥150; 🕒 9am-4.30pm).

Festivals & Events

The lunar calendar month corresponding to October is known throughout Japan as **Kanazuki** (Month without Gods). In Izumo, however, it is known as **Kan-arizuki** (Month with Gods), for this is the month when all the Shintō gods congregate for an annual get-together at Izumo Taisha.

In accordance with the ancient calendar, the **Kamiari-sai Matsuri** (*kamiari-sai* means 'the gods are here!') takes place from 11 to 17 October.

Sleeping & Eating

It's easy to take a day trip to Izumo from Matsue or simply pause there while travelling along the coast. If you do want to stop, you'll find a few places along the main street of Izumo Taisha, which runs down from the shrine to the train station.

Ebisuya Youth Hostel (☎ 53-2157; fax 53-5805; www.shimane-yh.jp/ebisuya/ebisuya_e.html; Shimondōri Taisha-chō; dm members/nonmembers ¥3050/4100; 📍) Just off the main street, near the station, this hostel is a large, older concrete structure with clean Western- and Japanese-style rooms. Look for the tall hedge around a white building.

Fujiwara Ryokan (☎ 53-2009; fax 53-2524; Seimonmae Taisha-chō; s/tw incl 2 meals ¥10,500/21,000; 📍) Full-sized baths and a small internal garden lend charm to this family-run business. It's a little faded but the staff here are very friendly. The cuisine features seasonal dishes. Look for the large pine tree outside.

Yashiroya (☎ 53-2596; 72-5 Kizuki-higashi Taisha-chō; meals ¥700-800; 🕒 10am-7pm Wed-Mon) A local favourite, Yashiroya is down the hill and off to the right from the shrine entrance and has tasty *warigo* (buckwheat) *soba* (¥700), as well as *yamakake soba* (soba topped with grated yam; ¥800). It's the white building with a tiled roof.

Getting There & Away

The private Ichibata line starts from Matsue Shinjiko-onsen station in Matsue and runs on the northern side of Shinji-ko lake to Taisha Ekimae station (¥790, one hour, with a transfer at Kawato). The JR line runs from JR Matsue station to JR Izumo-shi station (¥570, 42 minutes), where you can transfer to an Ichibata-line train to Izumo Taisha. The first option is more frequent, with more than 20 services a day. If you're coming from the west, change at JR Izumo-shi station.

The one-day L&R Free Kippu ticket (¥1000) allows unlimited travel on Ichibata trains going from Izumo Taisha towards Matsue, and on Shinji-ko Lakeline buses, which stop at the Ichibata bus terminal. The one-day Ichinichi Free Jōshaken (¥1500) allows unlimited travel on Ichibata trains.

Izumo has an airport with flights to/from most of Japan's major cities.

MATSUE 松江

☎ 0852 / pop 194,000

Home to spectacular sunsets over neighbouring Lake Shinji, Matsue is a pleasant, laid-back city with great food and some fine historical attractions. It straddles the Ōhashi-gawa, the river that connects Shinjiko with Nakanoumi, a saline lake. There's a compact area in the north with almost all of Matsue's interesting sites: an original castle,

a fine samurai residence, the former home of writer Lafcadio Hearn and garden. It's worth spending a night or two here to enjoy the leisurely pace.

Information

The **tourist information office** (☎ 21-4034; 665 Asahi-machi; 🕒 9am-6pm) in front of JR Matsue station can arrange a free English-language tour – the Matsue Goodwill Guide – if you call a few days in advance. There are guides at the castle on weekends.

You'll also find information, a small library and free internet access at the **Shimane International Centre** (☎ 31-5056; 2nd fl, Kunibiki Messe Bldg, 1-2-1 Gakuen Minami; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat), about a 12-minute walk from the station.

Sights

MATSUE-JŌ 松江城

Matsue's **castle** (☎ 21-4030; 1-5 Tono-machi; admission ¥550, foreigners with ID ¥280; 🕒 8.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar) is hardly imposing but it is picturesque and original, dating from 1611, with a rich wooden interior showcasing treasures from the Matsudaira clan. Known as Plover Castle for the graceful shape of its gable ornaments, Matsue-jō is the only surviving fortress in the San'in region. You can save 20% with a Universal Pass (¥920), which includes entry to the castle, Buke Yashiki Samurai Residence and the Koizumi Yakumo (Lafcadio Hearn) Memorial Museum.

Fun **Horikawa Pleasure Boat tours** (☎ 27-0417; admission ¥1200, foreigners with ID ¥800; 🕒 9am-5pm Mar-Jun & Sep-20 Oct, to 6pm Jul-Aug, to 4pm 21 Oct-Nov, 10am-3pm Dec-Feb) circumnavigate the castle moat and then zip you around some of the city's canals.

KOIZUMI YAKUMO (LAFCADIO HEARN) RESIDENCE 小泉八雲旧宅

Hearn was a Greco-Irish writer born on the Greek island of Lefkada in 1850 and educated in France and the UK. He lived in the USA from 1869, went to Japan in 1890 and remained there for the rest of his life. His adopted Japanese name was Koizumi Yakumo, and his first book on Japan, *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, is a classic, providing an insight into the country at that time. The Japanese have a great interest in the outsider's view of their country, so Hearn's pretty little house is an important attraction, despite the fact that he only lived in Matsue for just over

a year. Hearn's former **residence** (☎ admission ¥300; 🕒 9am-4.30pm) is at the northern end of Shiomi Nawate.

KOIZUMI YAKUMO (LAFCADIO HEARN) MEMORIAL MUSEUM 小泉八雲記念館

Next door to Hearn's home is this **memorial museum** (☎ 21-2147; 322 Okudani-chō; admission ¥300, foreigners with ID ¥150; 🕒 8.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar) with displays about Hearn's life, writing and Matsue residence. There's a stack of Japanese newspapers on which Hearn wrote simple words and phrases to teach English to his son. A brochure and map in English are available, showing points of interest around Matsue that are mentioned in Hearn's writings.

TANABE ART MUSEUM 田部美術館

Family items from generations of the region's Tanabe clan are displayed at the **Tanabe Art Museum** (☎ 26-2211; 310-5 Kitahori-chō; admission ¥600; 🕒 9am-4.30pm Tue-Sun), including tea bowls and other tea-ceremony utensils.

BUKE YASHIKI SAMURAI RESIDENCE

武家屋敷

The well-preserved **Buke Yashiki** (☎ 22-2243; 305 Kitahori-chō; admission ¥300, foreigners with ID ¥150; 🕒 8.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar) is a middle Edo-period samurai residence from 1730. A useful leaflet in English describes the various rooms and their uses. The large, spartan residence was clearly not the home of a wealthy samurai.

SHIMANE PREFECTURAL ART MUSEUM

島根県立博物館

This impressive, futuristic-looking **museum** (☎ 55-4700; 1-5 Sodeshi-chō; admission ¥300; 🕒 10am-6.30pm Wed-Mon; 📍) displays work by Monet, Rodin and current Japanese artists. It's in a fabulous location overlooking the lake, and on a sunny day it's fun to wander round the outdoor sculptures. You can also watch the sunset from the 2nd-floor viewing platform or outside by the water. The museum is a 15-minute walk west of the station.

OTHER SIGHTS

The **Matsue-onsen** area is just north of the lake near Matsue-onsen station on the Ichibata line. Here there are several hotels and ryokan, as well as O-yu-kake Jizō, a *jigoku* (hell) – very hot springs that are definitely not for bathing.

EXOTIC DISHES FROM THE LAKE

Matsue's *kyodo ryōri* (regional cuisine) includes 'seven exotic dishes from Shinji-ko'.

- *suzuki* or *hōsho yaki* – steam-baked and paper-wrapped bass
- *shirauo* – whitebait tempura or sashimi
- *amasagi* – sweet tempura or teriyaki
- *shijimi* – tiny shellfish in miso soup
- *moroge ebi* – steamed shrimp
- *koi* – baked carp
- *unagi* – grilled freshwater eel

The seven exotic dishes are seasonal, but you can sample up to six of the wonders at any time of year. For a little indulgence, make a lunchtime reservation at Minamikan (p491), an old ryokan. Have a tatami room to yourself overlooking a garden and Shinji-ko. If you order the *omakase* (chef's suggestion), the dishes just keep on coming. The *suzuki-yaki* is particularly good here. For a more laid-back experience, get yourself a counter seat at Kawa-kyō (p491) in the evening. At this very popular local drinking spot the company is as agreeable as the food, and someone will be on hand to translate, suggest sake and make the whole experience a night to remember. Try the trademark dish, tenderised eel with garlic and *tomburi* (plant caviar).

Naniwa Hotori (☎ 21-2835; 21 Suetsugu Honmachi; meals ¥1890-10,000; ☎ lunch & dinner) Right on the river and next to Matsue-Ōhashi bridge, this is a very bright and airy modern Japanese restaurant. You can try the lunchtime *unameshi* (eel and rice; ¥1890) and, with a reservation, 'exotic dishes from the lake' (*kyōdofu*; from ¥4200) at the attached Naniwa Honten traditional eatery.

Drinking

Filaments (☎ 24-8984; 5 Hakkenya-chō; drinks ¥500-700; ☎ 7.30pm-late) This is a hip bar in a quiet area near the river. Owner Sam has thousands of CDs and likes to chat into the early hours.

Cafe Bar E.A.D. (☎ 28-3130; 36 Suetsugu Honmachi; meals ¥315-1050, drinks ¥525-840; ☎ 5pm-midnight Thu-Mon) This stylish little delight has comfy couches, a terrace and some of the best river views in the city. The menu is mostly snacks, but *jikasei* (homemade) pizza (¥735) is on offer, along with cigars. Take the stairs beside EAD used-clothing shop by the bridge and climb to the 3rd floor.

Getting There & Away

Matsue is on the JR San-in line, which runs along the San-in coast. You can head down to Okayama (on the south coast) via Yonago on the JR Hakubi line. It's ¥480 to Yonago (35 minutes), then ¥5360 to Okayama (2½ hours).

Matsue is serviced by both Izumo and Yonago airports, and between them they have flights to all the major cities. Highway buses also operate to/from all of Japan's major cities.

Getting Around

Matsue has an efficient Lake Line bus, which runs a set route around the city's attractions every 20 minutes from 8.40am to 5.40pm. One ride costs ¥200, but a day pass is only ¥500 and includes discounts on many attractions. The Walker loop bus follows smaller loops around the downtown area, taking in the sights, and leaving Matsue station about every 30 minutes. One trip is ¥150 and day passes are ¥400. Lake Line buses are red and look like streetcars. Walker buses are smaller, like minibuses.

If you're planning to visit Izumo Taisha, make sure you invest in the one-day L&R Free Kippu ticket (¥1500), which allows unlimited travel on Ichibata trains and Shinji-ko lakeside buses.

Matsue is a good place to explore by bicycle; these can be rented opposite Matsue station at **Nippon Rent-a-car** (☎ 21-7518; 589-1 Asahimachi; ☎ 8am-8pm). Rates are ¥525 for two hours or ¥1155 per day.

AROUND MATSUE & IZUMO Shinji-ko 宍道湖

Sunset over the Yomega-shima islet in Shinji-ko is a photographer's favourite. The lake also

provides the region's seven local delicacies. At the western end of the lake, the garden at Gakuen-ji temple in Hirata is noted for its autumn colours.

At the southwestern corner of the lake, the town of Shinji had one of the finest ryokan in Japan, **Yakumo Honjin** (八雲本陣; ☎ 0852-66-0136; 1335 Shinji-chō, Shinji Yatsuka-gun, Matsue-shi; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Fri-Wed), until its closure in 2006. Parts of the inn are 250 years old, and visitors can still have a look around for ¥300. It's a short walk from Shinji station on the JR San'in Line.

Shimane-hantō 島根半島

North of Matsue, the coastline of the Shimane-hantō peninsula has some spectacular scenery, particularly around Kaga. From April to October you can enter the **Kaga-no-Kukedo cave** boat with 50-minute tours leaving from **Marine Plaza Shimane** (☎ 0852-85-9111; tour ¥1000, min 3 people).

Adachi Art Museum 足立美術館

East of Matsue in Yasugi is this excellent museum (☎ 0854-28-7111; 320 Furukawa-chō, Yasugi-shi; admission ¥2200, foreigners with ID ¥1200; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar; ☎). Founded by businessman and aesthete Adachi Zenko, this renowned collection is set in large, meticulous gardens ranked as the best in Japan, and features wonderful modern works by the likes of painter Yokoyama Taikan, *mingei* (folk craft) potter Kawai Kanjiro and ceramicist and epicure Kitaoji Rosanjin. A beautifully illustrated English pamphlet is available. Take the JR line to Yasugi, where there's a free connecting shuttle bus to the museum (about once an hour).

OKI-SHOTŌ 隠岐諸島

☎ 08512 / pop 24,000

Directly north of Matsue are the islands of the Oki-shotō, with spectacular scenery and steep cliffs. They are strictly for those who want to get away from it all and were once used to exile political prisoners and *daimyō* (as well as two emperors) who came out on the losing side of political squabbles. The group consists of several islands, including the three Dōzen islands and the larger Dōgo. The 7km-long cliffs of the Oki Kuniga coast of **Nishi-no-shima**, at times falling 250 sheer metres into the sea, are particularly noteworthy. **Kokobun-ji** on Dōgo dates from the 8th century. **Bullfights** are an attraction on Dōgo during the sum-

mer months – not man versus bull, but bull versus bull.

If you're keen to go, allow at least a couple of days and pop into the information office at Matsue station to sort out a few things before you head off. Pick up the simple English-language brochure and map of the islands called **Oki National Park**. There's also the Japanese-only website www.e-oki.net.

The islands have some *minshuku* and other forms of accommodation, as well as places to camp.

Ferry services to the Oki islands from Shichirui and Sakai-minato, which are northeast of Matsue, are operated by **Oki Kisen** (☎ 08512-2-1122). For Dōgo-shima, from Matsue bus terminal take the 7.55am bus to Shichirui (¥1000, 40 minutes), then the 9am ferry (¥2840, 2½ hours). Flights operate to Dōgo from Izumo and Osaka.

TOTTORI-KEN 鳥取県

Although Tottori is the least populous of Japan's 47 prefectures, it has a wealth of spectacular coastal scenery, sand dunes, *onsen* and volcanoes. It's best to visit in summer.

YONAGO 米子

☎ 0859 / pop 150,000

Yonago is a sizable city and an important railway junction – here the JR San-in line, which runs along the Sea of Japan coast, is met by the JR Hakubi line coming up from Okayama on the San-yō side of the mountains.

There's a **tourist information office** (☎ 22-6317; 2 Yayoi-chō; ☎ 9am-6pm) in JR Yonago station. Attractions include a visit to the **Yonago Waterbirds Sanctuary** (子水鳥公園; ☎ 24-6139; 665 Hikona Shinden; admission ¥300; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Wed-Mon; ☎), which boasts over 50 kinds of birds, including migratory whistling swans from northern Russia. To get there, board a Sakaiminato-bound bus on the Uchihama Line at the station and get off 20 minutes later at Norikoshi.

Kaike Onsen is on the coast, north of the station, and is the largest *onsen* area in the San-in region. It's given over to large group-oriented ryokan and hotels, and the beach is marred by concrete tetrapods. Near the bus station is the reasonably priced *sendō*, hotel and restaurant complex **OU Land** (おうゆランド; ☎ 31-2666; 1-18-1 Kaike Onsen; bathing ¥350; ☎ 10am-11pm; ☎); local accommodation places also allow bathers, generally for ¥500 or ¥1000.

Yonago **airport** (☎ 45-6121; 1634 Sainokami-chō Sakaiminato-shi) has daily flights to/from Tokyo, Nagoya and Seoul.

If travelling by bus in Tottori-ken, a three-day, ¥1500 pass (in the form of an old-time *tegata* wooden plaque) is available at tourist information offices and allows discounts at some attractions.

DAISEN 大山

☎ 0859

Although it's not one of Japan's highest mountains, at 1729m Daisen looks very impressive because it rises straight from sea level – its summit is only about 10km from the coast.

The popular climb up the volcano is a five- to six-hour return trip from the ancient **Daisen-ji** (大山寺) temple. Up a stone path is **Ogamiyama-jinja** (大神山神社) shrine, the oldest building in western Tottori-ken. From the summit, there are fine views over the coast and, in perfect conditions, all the way to the Oki-shotō. Pick up a copy of Lonely Planet's *Hiking in Japan* for detailed information on hiking Daisen.

Buses run to the temple from Yonago (¥800, 50 minutes), where you will also find the **Daisen-ji Tourist Information Centre** (☎ 52-2502; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 6.30pm Sat & Sun). It has brochures, maps and hiking information in English, as well as updated warnings and conditions on the mountain, and can arrange bookings at the many local ryokan.

The mountain catches the northwest monsoon winds in the winter, bringing deep snow and tonnes of enjoyment for skiers at what is western Japan's top ski area. **Daisen Kokusai Ski Resort** (大山国際スキー場; ☎ 52-2321; www.daisen.net) is one of four linked ski hills on the lower slopes.

ALONG THE COAST TO TOTTORI

Just north of Kurayoshi is **Lake Tōgo**, which has **Hawai Onsen** on its western side and **Tōgo Onsen** on its eastern side. There's lots of accommodation around, including **Kōhō-ji Youth Hostel** (香宝寺ユースホステル; ☎ 0858-35-2054; fax 0858-35-2052; www.jyh.or.jp/english/chugoku/kohoji/index.html; Yurihama-chō Shimoosozu; dm ¥2900, onsen ¥100; P ☎), which is attached to a Buddhist temple and serves meals. Nearby is a friendly local *sentō* with a glass ceiling called **Hawai Yūtown** (ハワイゆ〜たうん; ☎ 0858-35-4919; admission ¥350; ☎ 9am-9pm Wed-Mon). The likeness

of the town's name to the popular Pacific islands is not lost on the people of Hawaii, but although there's a nice beach, it's not Waimea Bay. It does have a sister city in Hawaii, though.

Travelling eastwards there's a succession of impressive **swimming beaches** split by rocky headlands all the way to Tottori city, notably Ishiwaki, Ide-ga-hama, Aoya and the extremely popular Hakuto. These are packed with surfers on weekends in summer. If you're on the train you'll miss a lot of the coast, as the line runs a fair way inland, so it's worth considering using a car to explore this area. You can also take a dip at **Hamamura Onsen Kan** (浜村温泉館; ☎ 0857-82-4567; admission ¥420; ☎ 10am-10pm, closed 1st Wed of month). It's a seven-minute walk from Hamamura station, and has delightful indoor and panoramic outdoor baths – but you'll have to climb more than 70 steps to reach them!

TOTTORI 鳥取

☎ 0857 / pop 201,000

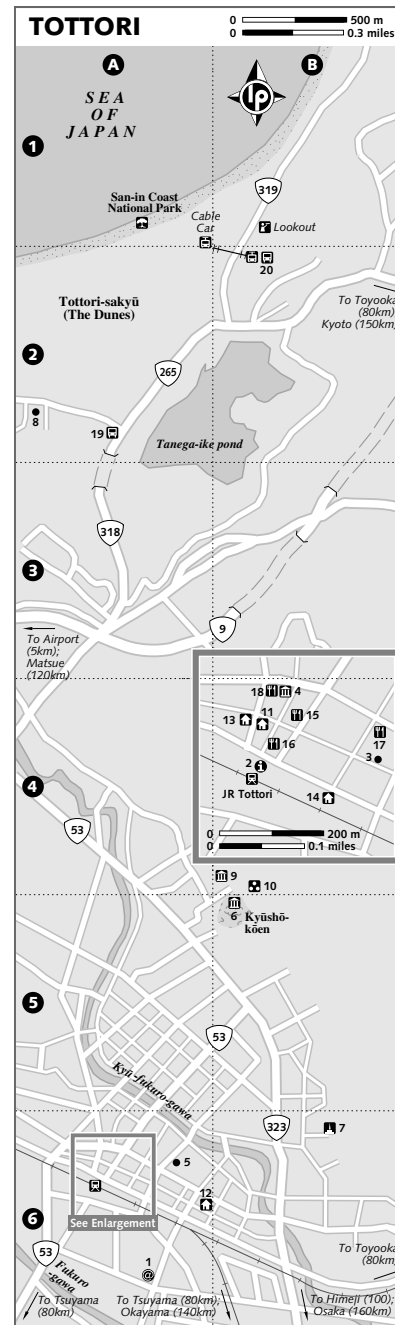
Tottori is a large, busy city a few kilometres inland but it's a good jumping-off point to explore the area's seaside wonders like Tottori's sand dunes, the main draw here. The principal coast road passes through the city's northern fringe in a blizzard of car dealers, *pachinko* parlours and fast-food outlets. There is a helpful **tourist information booth** (☎ 22-3318; 117 Higashi Honji-chō; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm) inside the station, with English-language pamphlets and maps. For internet access, try **Comic Buster Dorothy** (☎ 27-7775; 2-27 Tomiyasu; per 30min/3hr ¥280/980; ☎ 24hr) southeast of the station.

Sights

Most of Tottori's attractions are concentrated in a compact little group about 1.5km north-east of the station at the foot of Mt Kyūshō.

Tottori-jō once overlooked the town from the hillside but now only the castle's foundations remain. Below is the elegant, European-style **Jinpū-kaku Villa** (☎ 26-3595; 2-121 Higashi-machi; admission ¥150; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), dating from 1907 and now used as a museum. Across from this building is the modern **Tottori Prefectural Museum** (☎ 26-8042; 2-124 Higashi-machi; admission ¥180; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun).

Tottori also has an interesting little **Folkcraft Museum** (☎ 26-2367; 651 Sakae-machi; admission ¥500; ☎ 10am-5pm Thu-Tue) near the JR station, with



gorgeous items from Japan, Korea, China and Europe. East of the station is the 17th-century temple and garden **Kannon-in** (☎ 24-5641; 162 Uemachi; admission incl matcha tea ¥600; ☎ 9am-5pm; P).

Ekimae Ichiba (☎ 24-0645; 272 Eiraku Onsen-chō; ☎ 4am-7pm Thu-Tue) is a fun little fish market near the station with a resident cat who loves to be stroked.

The station area also has a number of *onsen* in hotels and ryokan available for public bathing. If you can brave the 47°C waters, try soaking with the local oldsters at the *sentō* **Hinomaru Onsen** (☎ 22-2648; 401 Suehiro Onsen-chō; admission ¥350; ☎ 6am-midnight, closed 2nd Mon of month).

TOTTORI-SAKYŪ (THE DUNES)

鳥取砂丘

Used as the location for Teshigahara Hiroshi's classic 1964 film *Woman in the Dunes* about an entomologist who gets trapped in the sand, the Tottori sand dunes are on the coast about 5km from the city. There's a viewing point on a hillside overlooking the dunes, along with a huge car park and the usual assortment of tourist amenities. The dunes stretch for over

INFORMATION

Comic Buster Dorothy コミックバスタードロシー 1 A6
Tourist Information Booth
観光案内所 2 B4

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Ekimae Ichiba 駅前市場 3 B4
Folkcraft Museum 民芸美術館 4 B4
Hinomaru Onsen 日乃丸温泉 5 A6
Jinpū-kaku Villa & Museum
仁風閣 6 B5
Kannon-in 観音院 7 B6
Tottori Cycling Terminal サイクリングターミナル 8 A2
Tottori Prefectural Museum 鳥取県立博物館 9 B4
Tottori-jō Ruins 鳥取城跡 10 B4

SLEEPING

Hotel Taihei ホテル太平 11 B4
Matsuya-sō 松屋荘 12 A6
Tottori Green Hotel Morris
鳥取グリーンホテルモリス 13 B4
Tottori Washington Hotel Plaza
鳥取ワシントンホテル 14 B4

EATING

Chocolate チョコレート 15 B4
Daizen 大善 16 B4
Jujun ジュジュアン 17 B4
Takumi Kappōten
たくみ割烹店 18 B4

TRANSPORT

Kodomo-no-kuni Iriguchi Bus Stop
子どもの国入り口 19 A2
Sakyu-Senta Bus Stop (Dunes
Centre) 砂丘センター 20 B2

10km along the coast and, at some points, can be about 2km wide. The section where the dunes are highest is popular with paragliders, who fly off on the incoming sea breezes. You can even get a Lawrence of Arabia photo of yourself wearing Arabian headgear and accompanied by a camel. It's quite easy to get away from it all out on the sand, which has footprints going to and fro.

You can stay at the **Tottori Cycling Terminal** (☎ 29-0800; 1157-115 Hamasaka; r per person incl 2 meals ¥4920), but it's a bit isolated; there's a camping area next door. The Cycling Terminal also rents bicycles; rates are ¥310 for four hours.

Use the Loop Bus (right) to get out to Tottori-sakyū. The bus stop for the dunes is Sakyū-Sentā (Dunes Centre); get off at the Kodomo-no-kuni iriguchi (Children's World entrance) for the Cycling Terminal.

Sleeping

Matsuya-sō (☎ 22-4891; 3-814 Yoshikata Onsen; s/tw ¥3500/6000; P ♻️) About a 10-minute walk from the station and behind a high-rise apartment building, this *minshuku*-style lodging is very friendly and comfortable. It has simple Japanese rooms and shared toilets. It's also very close to several of the city's scalding public baths.

Tottori Green Hotel Morris (☎ 22-2331; fax 26-5574; www.hotel-morris.co.jp/tottori in Japanese; 2-107 Ima-machi; s/tw ¥5250/9240; P ♻️ ♻️ ♻️) You can choose from nine different kinds of healing pillows to sleep on at this business hotel. A buffet breakfast and large bath (men only) are available. The sign in English outside says 'Hotel Morris'.

Hotel Taihei (☎ 29-1111; fax 29-1125; www.hotel.taihei.jp in Japanese; 752 Sakae-machi; s/tw ¥5565/9450; P ♻️ ♻️ ♻️) This is a dark, older business hotel that still has rotary-dial phones in the rooms, some of which have retro couches. The red-brick façade makes it easy to find. Restaurant Taiheiraku in the basement serves reasonably priced Matsuba crab dishes in winter.

Tottori Washington Hotel Plaza (☎ 27-8111; fax 27-8125; wh-at.com in Japanese; 102 Higashi Honji-chō; s/tw ¥7900/16,000; P ♻️ ♻️ ♻️) Standard business hotel-type rooms are on offer from this national chain, conveniently located by the station. In an effort to reduce waste, it no longer provides disposable razors or toothbrushes.

Eating

Daizen (☎ 27-6574; 715 Sakae-machi; meals ¥500-1050; ♻️ 11am-midnight) For quantity and quality at a decent price, try the *teishoku* sets like *sanna shioyaki teishoku* (grilled Pacific saury set meal; ¥840) at this simple but busy *izakaya*. It's on the right as you enter the covered shopping arcade; look for the lanterns and loud signage out the front.

Chocolate (☎ 37-2227; 611 Sakae-machi; meals ¥600-950, drinks from ¥550; ♻️ 10am-midnight Wed-Mon) The couches under the chandelier in this snazzy café-bar are a great spot to unwind. Staff is young and hip, and the photo menu features curry lunches, pastas and pizzas for dinner and some excellent desserts.

Takumi Kappōten (☎ 26-6355; 653 Sakae-machi; meals ¥800-9000; ♻️ lunch & dinner) The *takumi teishoku* (a lunchtime fish set meal; ¥1260; with *sashimi* ¥2100) are decent value at this old-fashioned Japanese eatery, which focuses on local seafood, vegetables and home-style cooking. It's part of the Folkcraft Museum next door; look for the bamboo railings beside the door.

Jujuan (☎ 21-1919; 751 Suehiro Onsen-chō; set meals ¥800-9800; ♻️ lunch & dinner; E). This *sumibiyaki* (charcoal grilled cuisine) restaurant has lots of meat on skewers sizzling away, and some very friendly staff.

Getting There & Away

The coastal JR San-in line runs through Tottori from Matsue (¥2210, 2¼ hours) and on to Toyooka (*futsū* ¥1450, 2½ hours) and Kyoto. Super Inaba express services connect Tottori and Okayama (¥4270, two hours) on the San-yō coast.

Tottori **airport** (☎ 28-1150; 4-110-5 Koyama-chō Nishi) is just northwest of town, with flights to/from Tokyo.

Getting Around

Tottori's efficient Loop Bus (¥300/600 per ride/day pass) operates on weekends, holidays and from 20 July to 31 August. It connects the station with the dunes and Tottori port. Red- and blue-roofed minibuses (¥100/300 per ride/day pass) ply smaller, inner-city loops from the station every 20 minutes. Regular city buses depart from the station and leave for the dunes area (¥360, 20 minutes). Maps and timetables are available at the information office.

Bicycles can be rented near the station.

SAN-IN COAST NATIONAL PARK

山陰海岸国立公園

The spectacular coastline east from the Tottori dunes all the way to the Tango-hantō peninsula in Kyoto-fu is known as the San-in Kaigan Kokuritsu Kōen – the San-in Coast National Park. There are sandy beaches, rugged headlands and pines jutting into the blue sky.

Train lines run the length of the area, but they spend a fair bit of time inland and in tunnels. The best way to see the coastline is on wheels, whether it be by rental car, motorbike or bicycle.

Uradome Kaigan 浦富海岸

The first place of interest is Uradome Kaigan, amid the park's bluffs and craggy outcrops. Forty-minute **cruises** (☎ 0857-73-1212; cruise ¥1200; ♻️ Mar-Nov) leave from Ōtani-sanbashi, which is about 35 minutes east of Tottori by bus from JR Tottori station. The bus goes via the dunes, so it's possible to visit the dunes and do the cruise as a day trip from Tottori. Boat is the only way to see the islets and craggy cliffs, with pines clinging precariously to their sides.

Uradome and **Makidani**, two very popular beaches, are a few kilometres east. The closest station is Iwami on the JR San-in line, 2km from the coast, where there's a **tourist**

information office (☎ 0857-72-3481; ♻️ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun). You can rent bicycles at the office and arrange accommodation. **Seaside Uradome** (シーサイド浦富; ☎ 0857-73-1555; fax 0857-73-1557; www.seasideuradome.com in Japanese; 2475-18 Uradome Iwamichō Iwami-gun; s/tw ¥4200/84000; P ♻️) is a small hotel with Japanese-style rooms on a 3.5km-long esplanade in Iwami. Camping is possible on Makidani beach.

Said to be the oldest *onsen* in the San'in region and known for having curative waters, **Iwai Onsen** is a small, quiet collection of ryokan about eight minutes by bus from Iwami station along Rte 9. Casual bathers can relax at the modern *sentō* **Iwai Yukamuri Onsen** (岩井ゆかむり温泉; ☎ 0857-73-1670; admission ¥300; ♻️ 6am-10pm). It's right by the bus stop and has an old-fashioned, white and blue exterior.

Higashi-hama 東浜

The next train station heading eastwards is Higashi-hama; if you're coming by train, this is the one to hop off at. It's all of 100m from the station to a long sandy beach where you can take a stroll or a dip and contemplate the fact that Japan is not all urban sprawl after all. A minibus makes runs here from Iwami.

The Tottori-ken-Hyōgo-ken border is on the next headland.

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