

Kumamoto's

# Big Book of Rural Fun

Packed with 190  
delicious, exciting  
and relaxing things  
to see, eat and do

For inquiries relating to this booklet:

Department of Agriculture, Forestry,  
and Fisheries, Rural Development  
Bureau, Agricultural Division Tel.096-333-2415

Published by Kumamoto Prefecture  
Compiled by the Agricultural Division  
Published in 2023

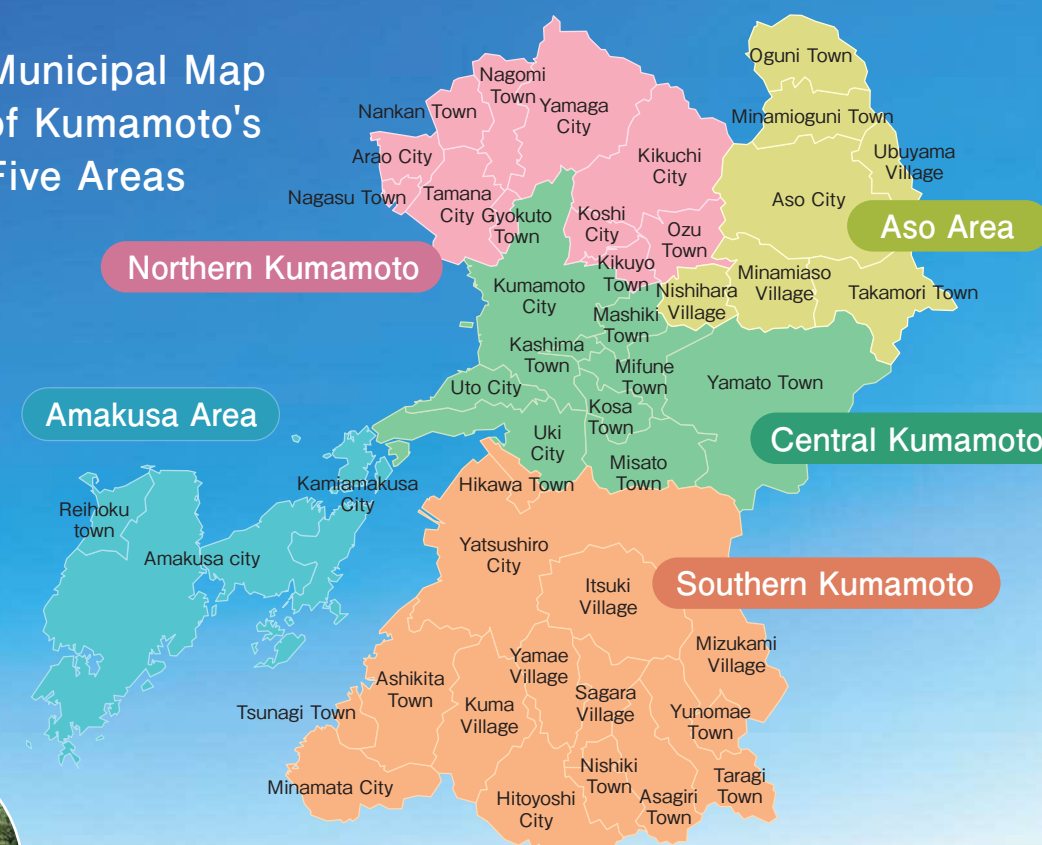


# Step into Kumamoto's Rural Areas

In Kumamoto's rural areas, nature takes center stage.

Kumamoto Prefecture is covered in mountains, with more than 70% of its land in mountainous regions, outside of cities and plains. The prefecture is also home to coastal regions and islands, with farming, mountain and fishing villages covering most of the land. Many of Japan's leading tourist attractions can be found here: Aso (home to Kurokawa Onsen) and Amakusa can both be considered rural areas. Kumamoto's rural areas are brimming with fun things to do and locals who will welcome you with omotenashi—Japan's famous style of hospitality. This book brings together various itineraries and must-visit spots where you can enjoy these areas for yourself. As you flick through the pages, let your imagination run wild with all the adventures you could have. Perhaps you'll find something you'll want to experience on your next holiday or an area you'd like to visit. You might even decide that you'd like to stay over a couple of nights to try out various things. May this book be a source of inspiration for your next trip to Kumamoto Prefecture.

Municipal Map of Kumamoto's Five Areas



## Contents

Page 3 to 4:

10 must-try experiences in Kumamoto's rural areas, including harvesting, arts and crafts, experiences in nature, local cuisine and minshuku (family-operated guest houses).

### Areas

Recommended day- and overnight trips  
What are Kumamoto's rural areas?

Page 5 to 6: Northern Kumamoto

Page 7 to 8: Aso Area

Page 9 to 10: Central Kumamoto

Page 11 to 12: Southern Kumamoto

Page 13 to 14: Amakusa Area

Page 15 to 16:

Fun things to do near the hot springs

### Rural areas

Page 17 to 18:

Have even more fun by staying overnight and exploring the area!

Must-try itineraries for an overnight trip in the rural areas by the sea or in the mountains

\*The information in this booklet is correct as of March 1, 2023. Depending on the time of year, prices may change or advance reservations may be necessary. Be sure to check the latest information before visiting.





# 1 Footpaths

Enjoy untouched countryside scenery on a walking experience that has its roots in the UK.

The footpath originated in the UK as a path that people could use to enjoy walking. There are many footpaths in Kumamoto's rural villages where you'll pass forests, rice paddies, and old townscapes. You can also take a guided tour to get a more in-depth understanding of these routes.



Do! Watch!  
Eat! Stay!

# 10 Must-try Experiences in Kumamoto's Rural Areas

Kumamoto Prefecture is blessed with loads of delicious food! This is all thanks to the rich nature in the rural areas and the hard work of those in the agriculture, forestry and fishing industries. There are many exciting and memorable encounters and experiences to be had in this natural wonderland.

Make friends with the animals-feed them and try milking a cow!



# 7 Animal meet and greet

Along with vegetable and fruit farming and fishing, Kumamoto is also known for animal husbandry. This farming experience gives you the chance to meet Japanese Brown cows as they graze on the pasture amid the vast wilderness, and try your hand at milking and feeding the cows.

# 4 Cooking experience & processed food

Local cooking experts will cook and teach you about delicious food.

Kumamoto's rural areas abound in delicious cuisine brimming with fresh produce, such as vegetables and fish. In this cooking workshop, a local cooking expert will teach you how to make local cuisine, including vegetable-packed dago jiru (traditional soup with dumplings) and konjac.



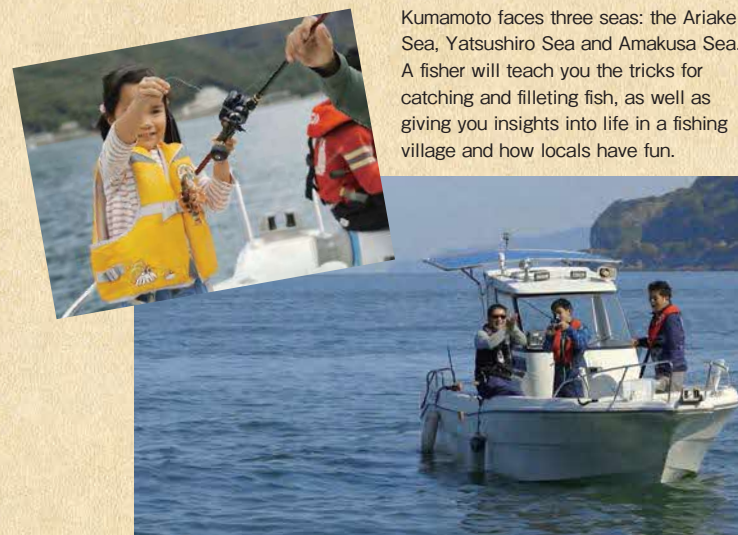
# 8 Scenery Grab your camera and head out to enjoy stunning landscapes.

Thanks to its many mountainous areas, Kumamoto is home to classic Japanese scenery, such as terraced rice paddies and rural landscapes. The rural villages also boast various captivating vistas, including powerful waterfalls and gorges, a mystical sea of clouds floating in the valleys and morning dew.



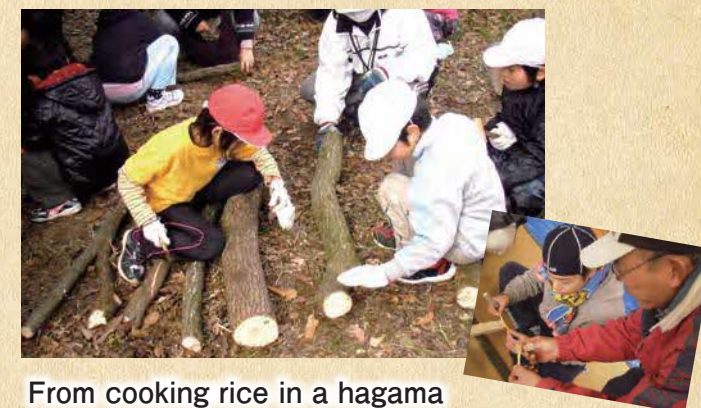
# 2 Fishing experience

Join a fisher on the high seas! Will you bring in something yummy?



Kumamoto faces three seas: the Ariake Sea, Yatsushiro Sea and Amakusa Sea. A fisher will teach you the tricks for catching and filleting fish, as well as giving you insights into life in a fishing village and how locals have fun.

# 3 Forestry experience



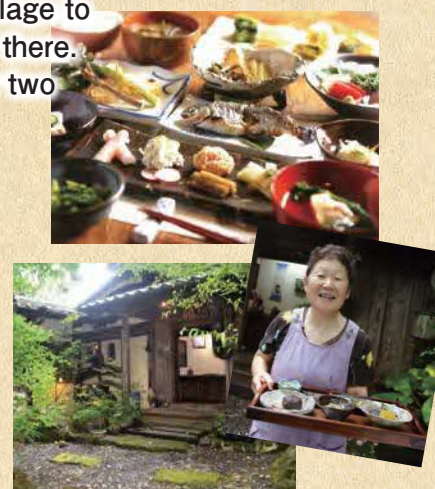
From cooking rice in a hagama (traditional rice cooking pot) to practicing bamboo craft, you can experience life and leisure in the mountains.

This experience will teach you about the culture and lifestyles of the mountains in a fun way! You'll get to build a fire with firewood for the kamado (traditional stove), on which you'll cook rice in a large hagama, and try your hand at making a toy bamboo-copter with bamboo harvested from the mountains.

# 5 Rural family minshuku

Stay in a rural village to get a feel for life there. Limited to one or two groups per day.

You can find various minshuku (family-operated guest houses) run by farming and fishing families, and even whole houses that can be rented out. They're great places to experience various aspects of life in a rural village—chat with the owners, enjoy meals packed with seasonal vegetables and try your hand at creating bamboo craft with bamboo harvested from the mountains. Unwind and enjoy the warm hospitality.



# 6 Farming experience

Learn about how delicious vegetables are grown and harvested!

Put your hands in the dirt and dig up a big sweet potato! Vegetable harvesting is just one of the great farm activities you can enjoy with local farmers...and it'll get kids excited about vegetables too! You'll even find winter vegetables like Chinese cabbage, which is a key ingredient in hot pot enjoyed in the colder months.



# 10 Fruit picking

In Kumamoto Prefecture, you can enjoy various fruits year-round. There are also many sightseeing farms where you can try your hand at seasonal fruit picking. December to April is strawberry and mandarin season. Biting into freshly picked fruit is a special experience you can only enjoy in farming areas like these!

Enjoy seasonal flavors! Nothing beats freshly picked fruit.



# 9 Farmers' market

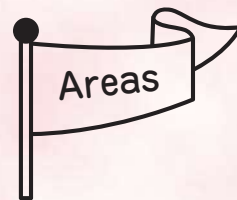
Here you can pick up some of the rural villages' delicious food and expertly crafted products as a souvenir.

Scattered throughout the rural villages are farmers' markets, where you'll be spoiled by the freshness and affordability that only local produce can offer. As well as delicious foods, they also sell a wide variety of handmade goods such as dishes, woodwork, bamboo crafts, additive-free soap and accessories.





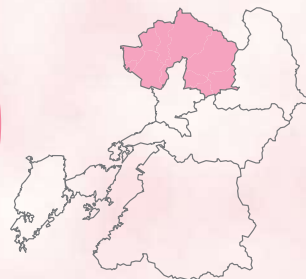
What are  
Kumamoto's  
rural areas?



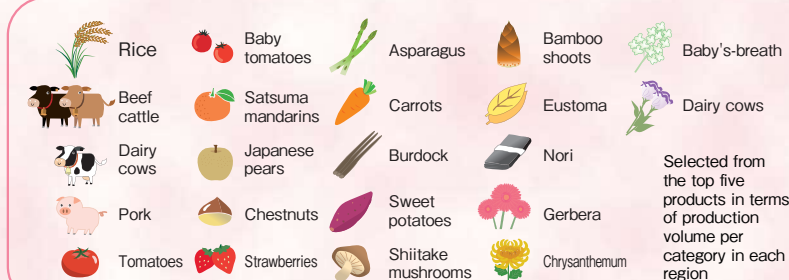
## Northern Kumamoto

Where is  
Northern  
Kumamoto?

Arao City, Tamana City,  
Yamaga City, Kikuchi City,  
Koshi City, Gyokuto Town,  
Nankan Town, Nagasu Town,  
Nagomi Town, Ozu Town,  
Kikuyo Town



Agricultural, forestry and  
marine products of Northern Kumamoto



Northern Kumamoto faces  
the Ariake Sea in the west,  
and has a range of gently  
sloping mountains in the east.

Abounding with delicious produce from seafood  
to fruit, rice to meat, this area is a foodie's paradise.

Northern Kumamoto is a production center for various agricultural, forestry and marine products, all of which benefit from the rich water from the Kikuchi River and Ariake Sea. Clear, mineral-rich streams and water-filled rice fields with sandy soil extend out from the Kikuchi River basin, the water source for this area. The region is also known for its wide temperature variance between day and night, resulting in rice of exceptional quality.

Northern Kumamoto boasts a flourishing livestock industry with various brands of beef including Kumamoto Kurogewagyu beef—a local brand—and rice-fed Ekome beef. There are also many sightseeing farms where you can enjoy fruit picking. Along the Ariake Sea stretches one of Japan's largest tidal flats, Arao-higata, a fertile ground for nori cultivation and Japanese hard clam fishing. Various high-quality hot spring sources can be found in Northern Kumamoto, including the moisturizing waters of Yamaga Onsen, Hirayama Onsen and Tamana Onsen.



## Local Cuisine

### ● Ohimesan Dago-jiru

Dago-jiru (dumpling soup) is one of Kumamoto's classic local dishes. In parts of Northern Kumamoto, like Kikuchi City, dago (dumplings in Kumamoto dialect) are made by kneading sweet potatoes with the wheat flour and water. They have a soft texture and the sweet potatoes add a rich sweetness.

Ohimesan dago-jiru means "princess dumpling soup," as the soft, springy texture of the dumplings is reminiscent of the skin of a princess.



With shallows, deep pools and waterfalls of various sizes, you can enjoy beautiful streams and forest landscapes at the Kikuchi Gorge



Arao-higata is a great spot to watch the sunset.  
You may also see rare waterbirds who stop off here on their migrations

## Must-see Spot



Designated as a National Important Cultural Property, Yachiyoza preserves the kabuki theater style of the Edo period (1603 to 1868).

### ● Yachiyoza (Yamaga City)

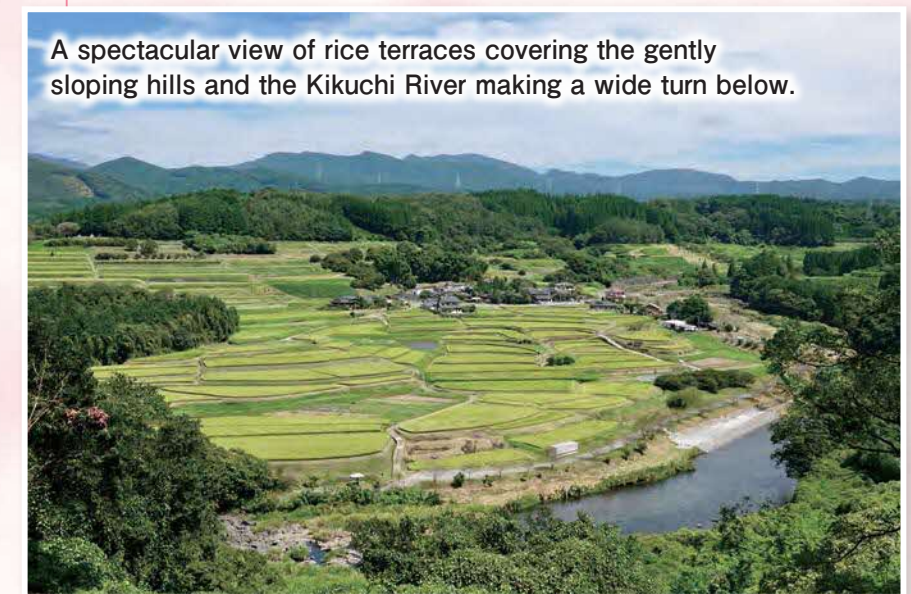
This historic theater was built in 1910 by businessmen based in Yamaga. It retains much of its original decorations, like the large advertisements covering the ceiling and a brass chandelier. Today, the theater continues to host kabuki shows, along with other performances and special events, and there are tours of the inside.

## Tsunagu Tanada Heritage

### ● Taki Tanada (Kikuchi City)

Rice terraces along the waterfront have been built in to the lower reaches of the Kikuchi Gorge. There is a lookout on the opposite shore of the Kikuchi River overlooking the rice terraces, where seasonal flowers add color to the scenery. You can see rows of cherry trees in spring, sunflowers in summer, and cosmos and autumn leaves in fall.

A spectacular view of rice terraces covering the gently sloping hills and the Kikuchi River making a wide turn below.



\*Tsunagu Tanada Heritage (Connecting Terraced Rice Fields Heritage) is a certification system developed to follow on from the 100 Terraced Rice Fields of Japan designation. It evaluates efforts related to the reconstruction of rice terraces and aims to revitalize rice terrace areas and promote understanding of their functions.

## Local Souvenirs

This regional wine made by local farmers is highly valued in Japan and beyond.

### ● Kikuka Wine (Yamaga City)

This wine is 100% domestically produced, made from wine grapes grown in Kikuka Town, Yamaga City. The chardonnay in particular has won numerous awards at wine competitions in Japan and abroad. The Kikuka Winery, which features a vineyard and a brewery, also has a tasting room and a shop selling a selection of delicious food and drinks.



## Hot Springs



Whether you want to stay overnight or enjoy the hot springs on a day-trip, there are plenty of options here including day-use hot springs, footbaths and hotel hot springs.

### ● Yamaga Onsen, Kikuchi Onsen, Tamana Onsen and more

The hot springs in Northern Kumamoto, including the Yamaga Onsen, are simple, soft, alkaline hot springs that are smooth to the touch and known for their skin-beautifying properties. In addition to onsen inns, there are also many public bathhouses, family baths, and other facilities that can be enjoyed on a day trip.

## Event

The Big Rice Straw Bale Rolling Race is an exciting competition to pray for a bumper crop!

### ● Tamana Oodawara Matsuri (Tamana City)

This festival is held to express gratitude for the bountiful harvest in Tamana, and its history as a hub for selling rice in the Edo period. A particularly exciting part of the festival is the Big Rice Straw Bale Rolling Race, where competitors roll huge rice straw bales weighing 1 ton and measuring 4 m in width and 2.5 m in diameter! The festival is held every year on November 23, Labor Day in Japan.





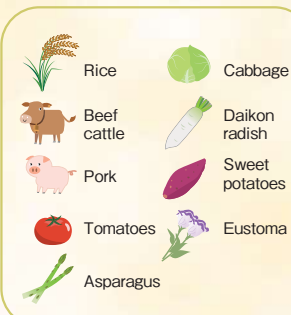
# Aso Area



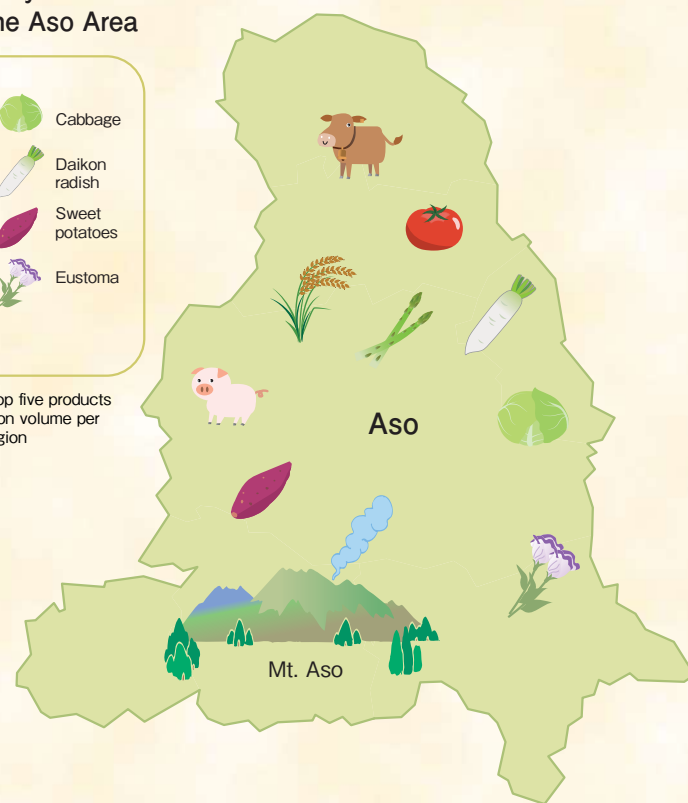
Where is the Aso area?

Aso City, Minamioguni Town, Oguni Town, Ubuyama Village, Takamori Town, Nishihara Village, Minamiaso Village

Agricultural, forestry and marine products of the Aso Area



Selected from the top five products in terms of production volume per category in each region



The **Aso area** is blessed by magnificent scenery and nature's gifts, all born from a volcano.

Home to one of the world's largest active volcanoes, the people and animals who live here enjoy a relaxing lifestyle

Standing as a symbol of the Aso area is Mt. Aso, one of the world's largest active volcanoes with a caldera. The name "Mt. Aso" actually refers to five peaks, including Mt. Takadake and Mt. Nakadake, known as the "Five Mountains of Aso," as well as the outer rim of the crater. Those who visit the Minamiaso Village on the south side of the caldera often find themselves feeling soothed by the peaceful rural landscape and clear springs bubbling up here and there. The Aso area has a thriving agricultural industry known for its rice, vegetables and livestock. At the area around the foot of Mt. Aso and the outer rim of the crater, you'll find idyllic views of Japanese Brown cows leisurely munching on grass in vast prairie lands. The volcano has also blessed this area with many hot springs, making it famous for having the cream of the crop when it comes to spring quality and variety.

Kusasenri is a vast prairie with a view of Mt. Nakadake, a large pond and horses grazing on the land.



## Local Cuisine

A delicious marriage of rice and mustard greens, cultivated in the volcanic soil



### ● Takana-meshi (with pickled Aso mustard greens)

Aso mustard greens are cultivated in the harsh coldness of winter, growing in soil that has good water drainage thanks to the volcanic ash in it. The stems are harvested in spring, pickled and eaten within a few days as a way to herald the arrival of the season. Takana-meshi is another delicious way to enjoy this vegetable. After the mustard greens have been pickled for a while, they are grilled and then mixed with rice.



Reviving the grasslands with fire: A spring event that has continued for 1,000 years.

## Local Souvenirs

There are loads of products that take advantage of Aso vegetables, like ketchup made with fully-ripened tomatoes.

### ● Aso Story

This is a line of processed products made with Aso's vibrant vegetables and fruits, featuring a rich tomato ketchup, dressings, jams, yakiniku sauce and more. You can buy the products from Michinoeki Aso.



## Tsunagu Tanada Heritage

A roughly 25-year long effort has seen sixty-six rice terraces with views of the Five Mountains of Aso restored!

### ● Aso Mizukake Tanada (Aso City)

These rice terraces overlooking the Five Mountains of Aso are blessed with rich soil and the Otogogawa Springs, one of the Top 100 Waters in Kumamoto. These favorable conditions promote the cultivation of good rice and have a great effect on groundwater recharge. According to one theory, the terraces in this area were the first to be built when agriculture began in Aso during the Yayoi period (300 BC to 250 AD).



\*Tsunagu Tanada Heritage (Connecting Terraced Rice Fields Heritage) is a certification system developed to follow on from the 100 Terraced Rice Fields of Japan designation. It evaluates efforts related to the reconstruction of rice terraces and aims to revitalize rice terrace areas and promote understanding of their functions.

## Event

### ● Controlled burns (Aso City, Minamiaso Village, etc.)

Controlled burns are conducted in February to March each year to exterminate insects that are harmful to humans and livestock and to grow new grass for cattle and horses to feed on. After the fields are burnt, they leave swathes of muted color across the landscape that can be seen even after Golden Week (a week of national holidays around early May). This starkly contrasts with the vivid green hues common to this time of the year—a view unique to spring in Aso.



## Hot Springs

Many types of baths can be found here, from indoor and outdoor baths to steam baths and mud baths.

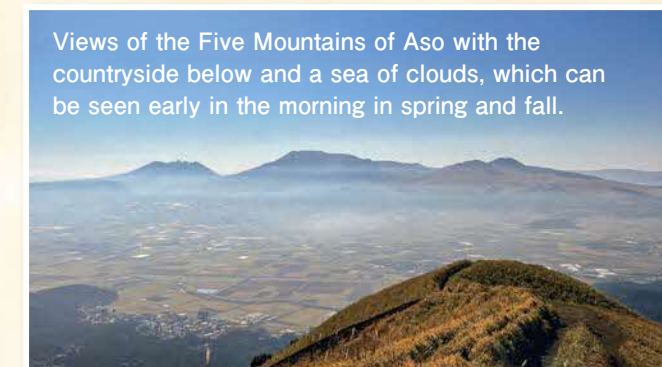
### ● Kurokawa Onsen, Uchinomaki Onsen, Minamiaso Onsenkyo and more

There's such a diverse array of hot springs that it's worth visiting a few. The Kurokawa Onsen is great for taking a stroll around the hot spring town, the Uchinomaki Onsen was loved by great writers, and the Minamiaso Onsenkyo has mud baths. There's also the Tsuetate Onsen, where you can enjoy cuisine made using the hot spring steam and the Waita Onsenkyo, where the hot spring water varies from location to location.

## Must-see Spot

### ● Daikanbo (Aso City)

Standing at an elevation of 936 m, this scenic spot is located at the northern outer rim of the Mt. Aso crater. You can see the Kuju Mountain Range and the Five Mountains of Aso. The latter are nicknamed Nehanzo (reclining Buddha), because they look like Buddha lying down. This spot also offers panoramic views of Aso's city streets and rural landscapes.



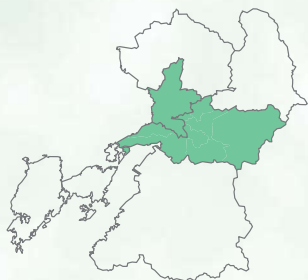
Views of the Five Mountains of Aso with the countryside below and a sea of clouds, which can be seen early in the morning in spring and fall.



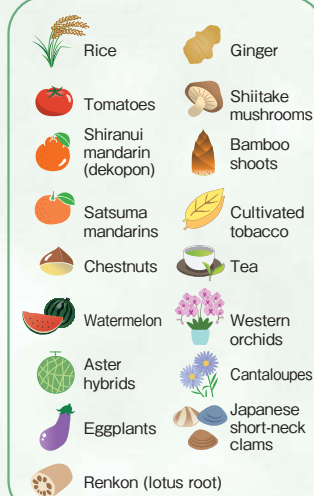
# Central Kumamoto

Where is the Central Kumamoto?

Kumamoto City, Uto City, Uki City, Misato Town, Mifune Town, Kashima Town, Mashiki Town, Kosa Town, Yamato Town



Agricultural, forestry and marine products of Central Kumamoto



Selected from the top five products in terms of production volume per category in each region

**Central Kumamoto** stretches from mountain villages linked by stone bridges to a town abounding with seafood

From the mountains in the east to the peninsula extending out to the west, the Central Area traverses a large part of the Kumamoto Prefecture.

Bordering the southern limits of Kumamoto City, the Central Kumamoto area is not only blessed with seafood from the Uto Peninsula, but the land is also rich with vegetables, fruit and other crops. Uki City has many flowering plants, including the Western orchid. Towards the Kyushu Mountains, there are many towns where you can enjoy views of satoyama (border zones between mountain foothills and arable flat land) and villages connected by stone bridges including the Reidaikyo Bridge and the Tsujunkyo Bridge, which is recognized as a National Treasure. The region was also one of the first in Kyushu to adopt footpaths like those that originated in England to enjoy walking through tranquil landscapes and old towns. There are a variety of footpath routes and regular events. The region is also home to some of the prefecture's best tea-growing areas, and is famous for its kamairicha (pot-roasted tea), which has a distinctive aroma called kamaka (pot aroma).



During low tide, beautiful curved patterns in the sand are revealed at the Okoshiki Seashore in Uto City. This place was selected as one of Japan's Top 100 Sunsets.



Constructed in 1829, the Futamata Bridge crosses the Shakain River, a clear stream flowing through Misato Town.

## Local Cuisine

With the flavor and natural sweetness of dried persimmon, this traditional food is like a high-end Japanese sweet.

### ● Makigaki (rolled persimmon)

Carefully seeded dried persimmon are stacked and rolled up with bamboo bark and straw. The name makigaki also carries the idea of "drawing fortune closer," so it has long been served as an auspicious snack to celebrate the New Year.



## Hot Springs

Relax at a roadside rest area in the mountains or at a public bathhouse along a prefectural road with 100% natural hot spring water.

### ● Amizu Onsen and More

Central Kumamoto is home to various simple alkaline hot springs, like the Amizu Onsen, that are reputed to give you soft, supple skin. Many of the hot springs are easy to stop by, like Samatanoyu, located at the Michinoeki Misato roadside rest area in Misato Town.



One of the largest stone arch aqueducts in Japan. A large water release can be enjoyed on limited dates and times.

## Must-see Spot

### ● Tsujunkyo Bridge (Yamato Town)

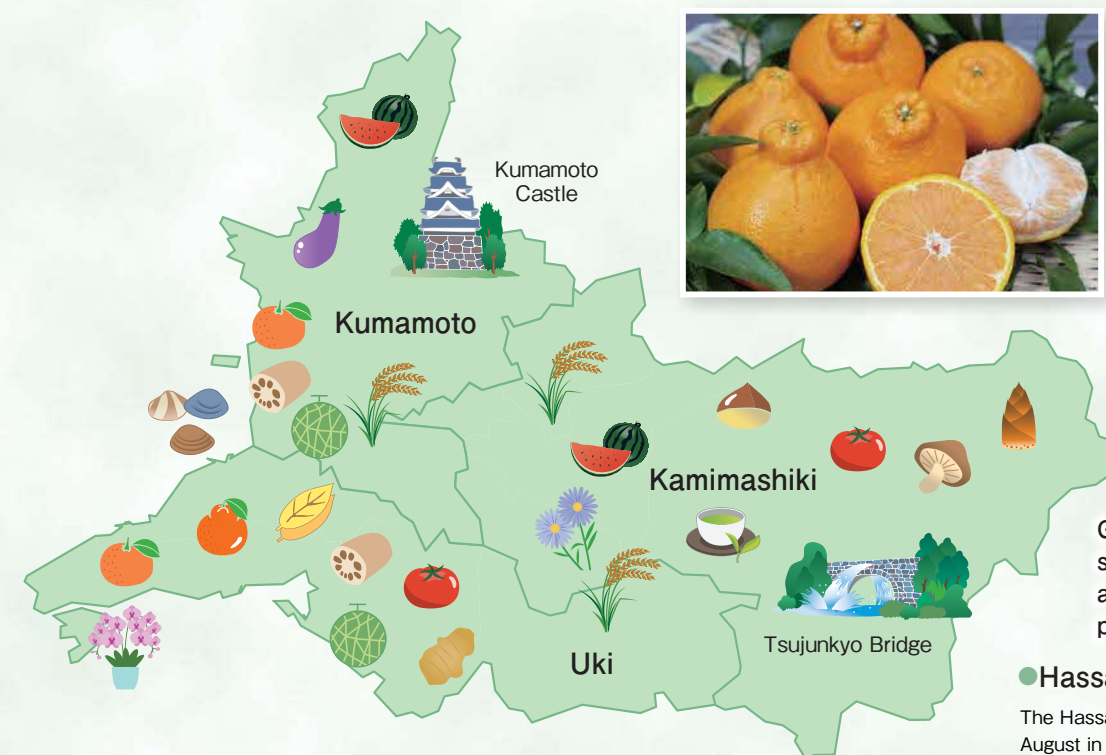
Built in 1854 to secure water for agriculture, this is one of the largest arched aqueducts in Japan. The bridge is 20.2 m high, 75.6 m long, and the arch has a radius of 27.6 m. On weekends and national holidays, except from early May to mid-July, a large amount of water is released from the center of the bridge for 15 minutes once each day.

## Local Souvenirs

Underneath the protruding bump at the top is a mass of sweet, juicy fruit.

### ● Shiranui mandarin (dekopon)

This mandarin is a hybrid of the tanger (a hybrid of a mandarin orange and a sweet orange) and the ponkan orange tangerine. To be sold under the name dekopon, the mandarins must have a sugar level above 13° Bx and citric acid below 1.0%.



## Event

Giant floats made from plants such as bamboo, Japanese cedar and Japanese pampas grass are paraded around the town.

### ● Hassaku Festival (Yamato Town)

The Hassaku Festival is held on the first day of August in the old lunar calendar (now the first Saturday and Sunday of September). This festival has been held to pray for a good harvest and a bountiful year for roughly 260 years. The giant, elaborately constructed floats are works of art made of natural materials, and the sight of them being paraded around town is breathtaking!



## Tsunagu Tanada Heritage

### ● Shiraishino Tanada (Misato Town)

The hilly area at the foothills in the southwest part of Misato Town offers views of rice terraces. During the autumnal equinox, the vibrant red spider lilies that grow in the ridges between rice paddies create a beautiful symphony with the golden rice seed heads. In Misato Town, there is a footpath route where you can take in this scenery.

In fall, red spider lilies add a splash of red to the gently sloping terraced rice paddies at the foot of the mountains



\*Tsunagu Tanada Heritage (Connecting Terraced Rice Fields Heritage) is a certification system developed to follow on from the 100 Terraced Rice Fields of Japan designation. It evaluates efforts related to the reconstruction of rice terraces and aims to revitalize rice terrace areas and promote understanding of their functions.



# Southern Kumamoto

Where is the Southern Kumamoto?

Yatsushiro City, Hitoyoshi City, Minamata City, Hikawa Town, Ashikita Town, Tsunagi Town, Nishiki Town, Taragi Town, Yunomae Town, Mizukami Village, Sagara Village, Itsuki Village, Yamae Village, Kuma Village, Asagiri Town



## Southern Kumamoto extends from the Kuma River basin to the coast of the Yatsushiro Sea

The mountains of the Kuma district are as deep as the history of this area, while the Yatsushiro and Ashikita districts are brimming with the fruits of the sea and the mountains.

The Southern Kumamoto area faces the Yatsushiro Sea and is home to the Kuma River basin. Rich bounties are harvested from the sea and the mountains, including the largehead hairtail, dotted gizzard shad, shio (salt) tomatoes, salad onions, banpeiyu (a type of pomelo) and Japanese pears. This area is rich in nature with mountains surrounding the basin of the Kuma River, one of the Three Major Rapids of Japan. You can find a variety of river-related products, including river fish, such as ayu and land-locked trout, and Kuma Shochu spirits made from the beautiful waters. River cruises and white-water rafting are also popular pastimes, taking advantage of the rapids. Southern Kumamoto boasts many charming hot spring resorts, such as Hitoyoshi Onsen, which has more than 50 hot spring sources in the city and some of the oldest hot spring towns in the prefecture including Hinagu Onsen and Yunoko Onsen. It also produces roughly 90% of Japan's rush grass, which is the raw material for tatami mats.

Rich and thick like cheese, this appetizer is a perfect match for rice or sake.

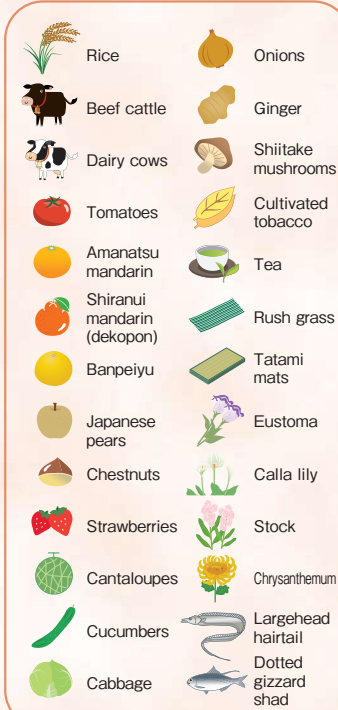


## Local Cuisine

### ●Kazura Tofu Misozuke

This is a traditional preserved food from the Yatsushiro region, made by draining firm tofu (kazura tofu) produced in the Ayugaeri region of Sakamoto-machi, Yatsushiro City, and pickling it in miso for a week to six months.

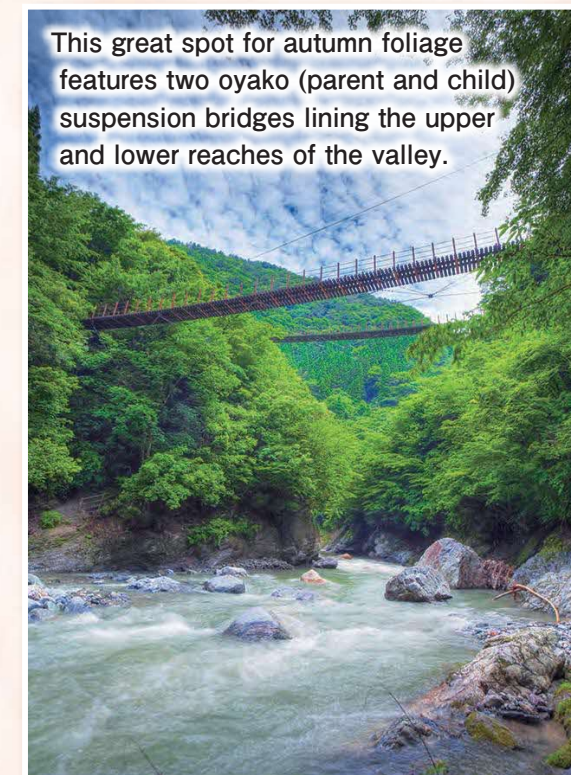
Agricultural, forestry and marine products of Southern Kumamoto



Selected from the top five products in terms of production volume per category in each region



In the Yatsushiro Sea, a traditional fishing method—utase net fishing—from a sailing boat is still used to catch kuruma prawns, crab and mantis shrimp



This great spot for autumn foliage features two oyako (parent and child) suspension bridges lining the upper and lower reaches of the valley.



## Local Souvenirs

Charming, colorful wooden toys with a history of over 800 years.

### ●Kijiuma and Hanatebako

Legend has it that Heike warriors who were fleeing their enemies began making these crafts out of empress tree and other woods in the Hitoyoshi Kuma region, while reminiscing about the capital. Kijiuma, a horse with wheels, is popular as a good-luck charm, and the brightly designed hanatebako come in a variety of sizes and styles.



### ●Hitoyoshi Kuma's Hinamatsuri Festival

This event is held from February to the end of March every year. Ornamental dolls are displayed around 10 municipalities in the Hitoyoshi Kuma area, including Kyusendo Caves in Kuma Village. On weekends, there are also stage shows, outdoor tea ceremonies, flea markets, and various hands-on events.

## Must-see Spot

### ●Momigi-no Tsuribashi (Yatsushiro City)

Located in Gokanoshō, Yatsushiro City, an area known for its autumn foliage, are two suspension bridges that are bound to get your heart pumping. The Ayatori-bashi (Cat's Cradle Bridge) is 72 m long and 35 m high, and the Shakunage-bashi (Alpine Rose Bridge) is 59 m long and 17 m high. There is also a lookout where you can see both bridges.

## Tsunagu Tanada Heritage

The rice terraces in Minamata boast beautiful stonework and are host to an illumination event in May every year



### ●Rice Terraces in the Kugino School District (Minamata City)

This group of rice terraces in the eastern part of the Minamata City consists of several stacked rice terraces with stone walls, including Samukawa Tanada. Fragrant rice produced here can be purchased at a nearby facility called Airinkan. In May, before rice planting, the rice paddies are lit up by the magical glow of bamboo lamps.



\*Tsunagu Tanada Heritage (Connecting Terraced Rice Fields Heritage) is a certification system developed to follow on from the 100 Terraced Rice Fields of Japan designation. It evaluates efforts related to the reconstruction of rice terraces and aims to revitalize rice terrace areas and promote understanding of their functions.

## Hot Springs

### ●Hitoyoshi Onsen, Hinagu Onsen, Yunoko Onsen, Yunotsuru Onsen and more

Southern Kumamoto is dotted with historic hot spring resorts, including Yunoko Onsen, which is said to have been discovered approximately 1,900 years ago. In addition to the quality of the hot springs, the nostalgic atmosphere of the old-fashioned public bathhouses and the charming therapeutic bath towns will soothe your soul.

Hot springs with a rich history can be found along the river, by the sea, and in the mountains.

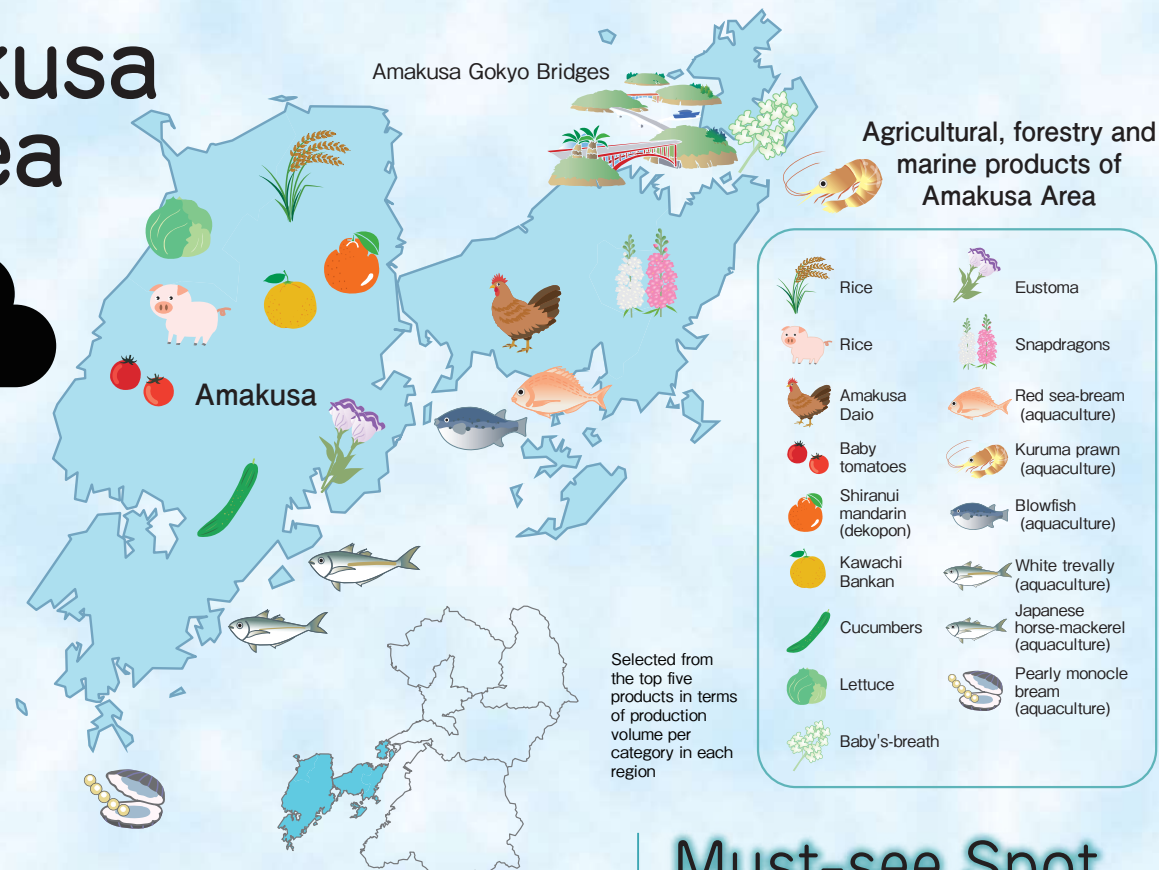




# Amakusa Area

Where is the Amakusa area?

Kamiamakusa City, Amakusa City, Reihoku town



With over 120 islands of various sizes, the **Amakusa area** feels like it could be in another country entirely

Cross the bridges connecting the islands and you'll find seasonal island produce and a rich history and culture.

The gateway to the Amakusa area is home to islands connected by many bridges including the Amakusa Gokyo Bridges (Five Bridges of Amakusa). It specializes in seafood such as kuruma prawns, citrus fruits such as Amakusa bankan, and flowers such as baby's-breath. Many people enjoy stand-up paddleboarding, parasailing and other marine sports in the beautiful ocean. The region encompassing the western side of Kamishima Island, Shimoshima Island and Goshoura Island is known for its seafood, citrus fruits and local specialties such as Amakusa Daio, the largest local breed of chicken in Japan. The west coast of Shimoshima Island is the production site of Amakusa pottery stone, the raw material for ceramics. Amakusa is also abounding in unique experiences, history and culture, including dolphin watching, which boasts a 98% encounter rate, and the Sakitsu Village, a World Heritage Site.

On the western side of Shimoshima Island, home to Reihoku Town and Shimoda Onsen, is the Takabuto Mountain Observatory in Kamiamakusa City, a famous sunset viewing spot. The observatory boasts views of the islands connected by the Amakusa Gokyo Bridges and even Mt. Unzen in Nagasaki Prefecture.



## Must-see Spot

### ●Sakitsu Village in Amakusa (Amakusa City)

This seaside village is one of the components of a World Heritage Site: Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki and Amakusa Region. Take a stroll around the large Gothic Sakitsu Church and if the timing is right, you can even see the mysterious morning mist that floats into the Yokaku Bay, protecting the village.

A peaceful village where the history and culture of Kakure Kirishitan (hidden Christians) remains.



Rice terraces reconstructed by the Tokugawa shogunate after the Shimabara-Amakusa Rebellion



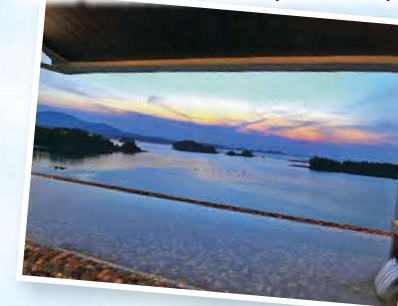
## Tsunagu Tanada Heritage

### ●Osakuyama Senmida (Kamiamakusa City)

Located at the southern tip of Kamishima Island, Mt. Ryugatake has a view of islands in the Yatsushiro Sea. Halfway up the mountain are rice terraces that are over 300 years old. They are stunning to look at both in the summer when the fields are a rich green and in the fall when they turn a beautiful golden color.

\*Tsunagu Tanada Heritage (Connecting Terraced Rice Fields Heritage) is a certification system developed to follow on from the 100 Terraced Rice Fields of Japan designation. It evaluates efforts related to the reconstruction of rice terraces and aims to revitalize rice terrace areas and promote understanding of their functions.

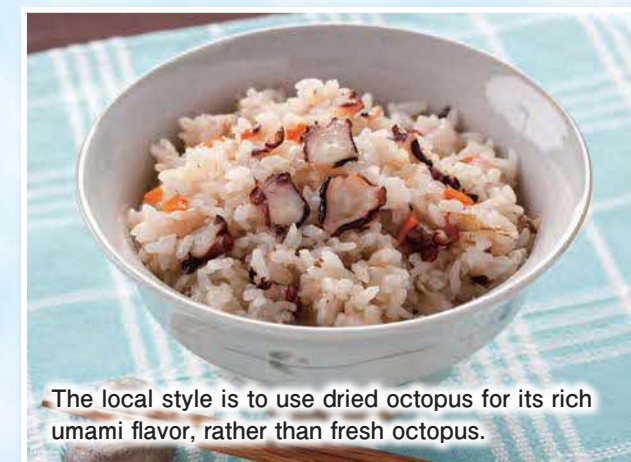
There is a rich variety of hot springs including outdoor baths with spectacular views, hot springs with brown water and baths that boast 100% pure hot spring water from the source.



## Hot Springs

### ●Kamiamakusa Onsenkyo & Shimoda Onsen

Kamiamakusa Onsenkyo, an area centering on two major hot spring areas on Oyano Island and Matsushima on Kamishima Island, has many hot springs overlooking the sea. Shimoda Onsen, located on the west coast of Shimoshima Island, has been in operation for 340 years. Many of the facilities use hot spring water from the source. Other hot spring facilities are scattered throughout the island.



The local style is to use dried octopus for its rich umami flavor, rather than fresh octopus.

## Local Cuisine

### ●Tako-meshi

Octopus with a strong taste and elasticity can be caught in Amakusa year-round. Octopus has long been eaten as a way to beat the heat, and tako-meshi (octopus rice) is a classic example of that. Locals enjoy this dish by cooking the dried octopus in a broth that soaks up the flavor.

## Local Souvenirs

Rare and high-quality pure oil produced and squeezed in Amakusa.

### ●Olive oil products

Amakusa has long daylight hours, warm winters and relatively cool summers. Shimoshima Island, which has a similar climate to the Mediterranean Sea, also has a thriving olive-growing industry. In addition to edible oil made from the fruit harvested every fall, there are also beauty products such as moisturizing cream.



## Event ●Haiya Festival (Amakusa City)

Haiya folk songs from across Japan all have their roots in Ushibuka Town, Shimoshima Island. On the third Saturday and Sunday of April every year, the Ushibuka Haiya Festival is held, where people dance and sing the Haiya verse. In fall, the Amakusa Hondo Haiya Festival can be enjoyed near the Amakusa City Hall.

A grand parade of people wearing vibrant yukata (kimono for summer) or happi (traditional coat for festivals), dancing merrily en masse.







**Catching Japanese mud shrimp**

**Near Tamana Onsen**

Japanese mud shrimp are caught on the Arao-higata (tidal flat), a 30-minute drive from Tamana Onsen. A kind of hermit crab similar to mantis shrimp, it is very tasty as tempura! When the shrimp is in season (late spring to early fall), you can also enjoy a traditional fishing method using a calligraphy brush.

**Mandarin picking**

The mountains to the south of Tamana Onsen are a major mandarin production area. There are many sightseeing farms where you can enjoy picking mandarins and various citrus fruits such as Satsuma mandarins and navel oranges, while overlooking the Ariake Sea.



# Rural areas

## Fun things to do near the hot springs



Kumamoto Prefecture is a kingdom of hot springs—it's the fifth largest hot spring area in Japan in terms of the total number and the amount of water flowing from the sources. Why not add some of these experiences to your itinerary when you visit one of the hot spring areas? You can learn a lot about the rural areas, enjoy exciting activities, and then refresh your body and mind in a hot spring!

**Near Yamaga Onsen**

**Mud-dyeing experience**



One of Yamaga's most scenic sights are the oddly shaped rocks called fudo-iwa (immovable rocks). In this mud-dyeing experience, you can use the red soil at the base of the fudo-iwa to make a one-of-a-kind handkerchief or stole with fine, beautiful colors.

**Fruit picking**



**Near Ueki Onsen**

Ueki Town is a fruit-growing area. Although you can buy fruit from the farmers' markets, nothing quite beats going to a sightseeing farm and doing the picking yourself! With strawberries and mandarins in season from winter to spring and fragrant cantaloupes from April, you can enjoy this activity throughout the year.



**Near Kamiamakusa Onsenkyo**

There are various fishing experiences on offer—for example, you can take a boat out to catch big fish offshore with the guidance of fishers who hold a wealth of knowledge about the waters and fish in the Amakusa area. If you're a beginner, try fishing for horse mackerel from the breakwaters. If you're lucky, you'll get to take home some delicious, seasonal Amakusa seafood.



**Fishing experience**



**Rice cooking experience and satoyama lunch**



**Near Kurokawa Onsen**

At Kurokawa Onsen's inns, you can try the highly regarded rice produced in Minamioguni Town. Although rice cooked in a rice cooker is delicious, cooking it the traditional way on a kamado (traditional stove) will increase the aroma and sweetness! You'll also get to enjoy exceptional side dishes from the mountains served with the freshly cooked rice!



**Dolphin watching**

**Near Shimoda Onsen**

About 200 Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins live off the north coast of Shimoshima Island. Cruise tours guided by local fishers who are familiar with the dolphin's life and habits are very popular and can be enjoyed throughout the year.

**Near Yunoko Onsen**

**Largehead hairtail fishing**

From April to November, you can enjoy largehead hairtail fishing near the seaside hot springs of Yunoko Onsen. The boatman will give you a detailed explanation on everything from how to bait the hook with banded blue sprat to how to fish. It's always exciting when a fish gives a strong tug on the rod and its shiny body can be seen splashing in the water.



**Near Hitoyoshi Onsen**

**Rafting**

Rafting on the Kuma River, one of the Three Major Rapids of Japan, is a great way to enjoy Hitoyoshi between April and October. While navigating the rapids, you can go under waterfalls and jump off rocks into the river. It's an experience full of spectacular scenery, thrills, and excitement.



**Cycling to springs**

**Near Minamiaso Onsenkyo**



Minamiaso Village boasts seven springs selected as part of the Top 100 Waters of the Heisei Period (1989 to 2019) in Japan, including the Shirakawa Suigen. You can rent a bicycle to explore these springs. Why not stop off at a few to find your favorite one?



Have even more fun by staying overnight and exploring the area!

## Must-try itineraries for an overnight trip in the rural areas by the sea or in the mountains

Why not stay the night and enjoy the food and scenery of the rural areas that can only be experienced at night? These pages offer ideas for overnight trips by the sea or in the mountains, as well as easy day trips.

### Overnight trip in the Amakusa Area

Along with fresh seafood, enjoy Amakusa's unique history, culture, and activities.



Sea

#### Day one



12:00 pm

Amakusa champion is loaded with fresh vegetables and seafood from the islands.

Amakusa champion is known as one of the three best champion in Japan along with that made in Nagasaki. Start your rural area trip by enjoying a generous serving of vegetables and seafood in a rich chicken broth.



2:00 pm

Tour the World Heritage Site designated church that keeps watch over the peaceful fishing village.

The Sakitsu Church is the symbol of Christianity in Amakusa. If you contact them in advance, you can tour the church from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm and from 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm when there are no masses or other church events.



4:00 pm

Experience life on the island by staying at a friendly local's home in a fishing village.

For accommodation, you can stay at a minshuku (family-operated guest house) run by a fisher. You can also experience fishing just a short walk from the minshuku. Enjoy a dinner of local Amakusa cuisine and take in the stars shining brightly in the clear air.

#### Day two



11:00 am

Hop in a sea kayak and head towards uninhabited islands floating in the peaceful sea.

Start your second day by enjoying some island pastimes. A sea kayak tour led by an experienced guide will take you to uninhabited islands made of seashells, where you'll encounter ancient geological formations.



1:00 pm

You should try kaisendon - a bowl of rice topped with Amakusa seafood - at least once during your stay!

Amakusa has a rich variety of seafood, including red sea-bream, octopus, kuruma prawns, sea urchin, Japanese spiny lobster, and tuna. It's also home to many restaurants that pride themselves on serving up bowls of seasonal ingredients deliciously presented on top of a bed of rice.



3:00 pm

Pick up some of the delicious produce you tried during your trip at a farmers' market.

Amakusa is dotted with many farmers' markets, including six roadside rest areas. In addition to fresh seafood, vegetables, and fruits, be sure to check out the fresh flowers that are such a local specialty that Amakusa is known as the Island of Flowers.

### Overnight trip in the Aso Area

Enjoy the richness of a life lived in harmony with nature in Aso, a designated Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System



Mountains

#### Day one



12:00 pm

Savor the rich taste and softness of Japanese Brown beef donburi.

The Aso Area is the largest producer of Kumamoto Akaushi (Japanese Brown beef), a local brand. There are many restaurants and inns where you can try various beef dishes, including the popular Japanese Brown beef donburi (rice bowl topped with beef) featuring rose-colored steak meat.



2:00 pm

Visit Kusasenri, a picturesque spot in Aso where you can enjoy seasonal scenery.

From bright green hues in the summer to a magical, silvery white world in the winter, Kusasenri shows a different face with each season. From early March to the end of November you can enjoy rope-led horse riding.



4:00 pm

Enjoy a hotpot with freshly picked vegetables at a farmer's minshuku.

You'll be coming back for seconds after trying the delicious meals made with freshly harvested vegetables and rice! They also have various experiences that you can join, including a local cuisine cooking class.

#### Day two



11:00 am

Feel the wind in your hair as you take a mountain bike ride through pastures that are normally inaccessible!

Take a guided tour on an electric mountain bike into pastures that are normally inaccessible. Experience the grasslands of Aso, recognized as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System and a Global Geopark.



1:00 pm

Slurp soba handmade with special care in Minamioguni Town, home to the Soba Kaido

This place has many soba restaurants, particularly on the Soba Kaido (Soba Road), which specialize in handmade soba using buckwheat flour produced in Aso. Why not visit various soba restaurants and find your favorite?



3:00 pm

Pick up seasonal mountain produce and local sake, and enjoy some Jersey soft-serve ice cream.

Wrap up your trip with a visit to a roadside rest area. You can buy all sorts of souvenirs including fresh vegetables and pickles from Aso, Japanese Brown beef (including processed products), and sweets made from the milk of Oguni Jersey cows.

### 1 DAY

#### Hitoyoshi road trip

Experience the river's gifts! Eat, play and finish the day with a soak in a hot spring.

12:00 pm



Prepare yourself for the day's activities by fueling up on freshwater eel - a Hitoyoshi specialty. There are many famous freshwater eel restaurants in Hitoyoshi City. Fill up on this tasty cuisine before hitting the Kuma River.

1:30 pm



Take a leisurely cruise on the Kuma River in a kotatsu boat. This Hitoyoshi winter tradition can be enjoyed from December to March. Relax under a warm kotatsu and take in the winter scenery of the Kuma River.

4:00 pm



Soak in the soft waters at an onsen ryokan or public bathhouse. In addition to drop-in hot spring baths at onsen ryokan, there are must-visit retro public bathhouses with a traditional attendant's booth, such as Motoyu, which was established in 1934.

### Easy, breezy day-trips!

### 1 DAY

#### Misato Town road trip

Have lunch in the great outdoors and enjoy activities and hot springs at Misato Town, roughly in the center of Kumamoto

11:00 am



Enjoy a BBQ lunch at a lakeside campground, which is full of fun things to do. At the Misato Garden Place Family Village campground, you can enjoy a BBQ and zip-lining at the adjacent Forest Adventure Park.

1:30 pm



Take a leisurely stroll on a footpath through beautiful rice terraces. There are fifteen footpath routes, which will take you past landscapes straight out of ancient history, such as rice terraces, tea fields and paths through bamboo groves.

4:00 pm



After taking a stroll on the footpath, you can refresh at a hot spring adjoining a roadside rest area. The roadside rest area in Misato Town has a farmers' market, restaurant and hot spring. The large open-air bath with abundant water is incredibly soothing.