

Discover "SETOUCHI", hidden charm

Our goal by launching a further trailblazing project is, straightforwardly, Western Japan which is focused on "The Inland Sea SETOUCHI", discovering the hidden charm, west Japan.

First of all, Hiroshima has been spotlighted of late as a city enjoying its sophisticated compound function in Western Japan, economically, historically, culturally, and ecologically, which is ideal for the 21st century. Its status has been further enhanced by the Japanese government's new project called 'Vitalizing Regional Society and Economy'. By the way, the present convenient maritime transportation system surrounded by the beautiful landscape of the Seto Inland Sea is the result of the clever



tactics by the historical navy under the Mouri Family, the most powerful 'samurai,' warrior family who had reigned over the area in the 16th century. The maritime transportation system has had a great influence for industries. Hiroshima is not only the center of business approx. 34% of the total economic base of Western Japan, but it also has engaged in positive activities to support the natural environment including initiating 'The Energy Harvest Project in the Seto Inland Sea' utilizing the wind and tidal energy of the sea, which is sending us a message on how technology should coexist with nature. We would like to make this year marking the first year to develop another exciting destination for every visitor to enjoy 'symbiosis' in a gentle light and wind seeking for true relaxation. If we should describe the district in short, it would be water of translucent blue and a gentle breeze off the Seto Inland Sea, combined with the generosity of Buddha and the open-minded kindness of the locality, all of which embrace one another in nature culminating to be the Western Japan and Shikoku Island. The glories of Western Japan and the Seto Inland Sea!!

Then more about 'Why western Japan, now': Japan is surprisingly a country made up of 6,852 islands or more!! 'So many travelers, so many ways to see the country,'; If a bird's eye of view of the Japanese archipelago should be taken, a beautiful patched work of arrangement of as many as 6,852 islands and islets with a shoreline of over 100-meters around could be observed. In particular, it is the Seto Inland Sea with more than 700 small islands and islets with the longest shoreline totaling 7,230km which immediately reminds us of a world in a watercolor painting



of which its forte is to express a tint of subtle light in the timeless time just before the dawn and/or sunset. A perfect arrangement of small islands and islets dotted in small groups in the extensive peaceful water are as it were a masterpiece created by God. Siebold, a German physician and traveler in the 19th century once claimed that he was completely captured by the illusionary scenery with islets in small groups dotted here and there in the Seto Inland Sea which had incessantly appeared and disappeared in front of him whenever even the slightest bit when the boat swung round.

The followings are places of interests including places based on what we have already mentioned on the characteristics of the district; Water of translucent blue, a gentle breeze off the Seto Inland Sea, the generosity of Buddha, the open-minded kindness of the locality and the lively energy of the people in Hiroshima. Producing an ideal route for traveling with the context of the story aforementioned can be possible needless to say when places of interest are chosen in the right way. Followings are 7 prefectures to introduce you with recommended sightseeing spots;

1) Hyogo Pref.

**Awaji Island

The largest of the Inland Sea's islands, located in the eastern part of the Seto Inland Sea between the mainland and Shikoku. The island covering a total area of approx. 600 square kilometers is closely related to the creation of Japan in mythology. It has been said that "Izanagi", the Japanese Adam and "Izanami", the Japanese Eve had created Awaji Island as the first island before Honshu, the main island, Kyushu, Shikoku, Hokkaido and other islands according to the "Kojiki", the Japanese chronicles compiled in the 8th century.

*Mizumido at Honpukuji Temple, located in Awaji Island

A very unique example of modern Japanese architecture designed by Tadao Ando, an outstanding Japanese architect has a sanctuary under the lotus pond. A self-supporting curved wall stands in front of visitors, symbolically representing the boundary between the sacred and the secular world. Stepping down the sharp stairs to reach the passage painted thoroughly in cinnabar red, leads to the sanctuary also painted completely in cinnabar red where 'Yakushi,' a main Buddhist statue has been enshrined with his back facing west in direction so as to receive the light from outside in the case in which the large door behind opens which is an ingenious scheme to recreate the Buddhist Pure Land by dyeing the statue itself into cinnabar red with light. The temple which looks completely different from an ordinary Buddhist temple suggests another way to reach supreme enlightenment to us with red and white lotus flowers in the pond creating a somewhat mysterious feeling around, maybe in Ando's unique way.

2) Kagawa Prefecture

* The Japanese Neptune; Kotohira-gu

Popularly known as Konpira-san in Kagawa Pref. in Shikoku Enshrined is the deity of the Sea, who has been protecting the fishery, voyages and safe sea traffic since ancient times. The shrine is located halfway to the top of Mt. Zosu with 785 steps to the main shrine and with a total of 1,368 steps to the inner shrine. Pilgrimages to the shrine have been very popular since the 14th century and even today hundreds of visitors are climbing the steps every day.

*Zentsuji Temple

It is one of the three most sacred Buddhist temples of the 'Shingon' enomination, Esoteric Buddhism, deeply related to Kobo Daishi, Kukai, the greatest monk in Japan, the other two temples being Mt. Koya in Wakayama Pref. and Toji temple in Kyoto. This place can be definitely the place can be the highlight of the tour in Chugoku and Shikoku districts.



The sacred premise has two sections; the Tanjoin (Western temple) section as the place where Kobo Daishi was born in 774, and the Garan (Eastern temple) section as the place where he had built a central temple which was modeled after Shoruji in Xi'an. The Garan section includes Kondo, Main hall, constructed in 1699 which has remained even today with the Yakushi Nyorai enshrined as the main deity for salvation of all suffering people, a large camphor tree with two trunks designated as natural monuments of Kagawa Pref. according to the temple history it has been surviving for more than one thousand years. And the highlight of visiting the Tanjoin (Western temple) section is 'Kaidan Meguri'. Experience the 100-meter walk along a narrow passage along the ordination platform in darkness under the Miedo which has been stood on the ruins of the Saeki family where Kobo Daishi was born. Walking in pitched darkness under the Miedo, holy place, lets visitors' consciousness approach more or less their finely honed sense, leading them to a somewhat a different dimension, which is likely to encourage them to reflect on themselves, hearing the voice of Kobo Daishi himself for guidance to people who have been suffering since ancient times. It must be a great experience to be back to ourselves for a moment by intentionally placing ourselves into profound darkness to hear the true voice regardless of any religion we may hold, as we all are anyway in the same boat on the planet, living in such a terribly complicated world, economically, politically and, first of all ecologically.

3) Ehime Pref.

*The Shimanami Kaido

Also called the Nishi (west) Seto Expressway is a 60 kilometer long toll road connecting Honshu, the main island to the island of Shikoku passing over six small islands in the Seto Inland Sea. The expressway is the only one available for bicycle riders and/or walkers among the three routes which link the main island and Shikoku.

*Dogo Onsen

Well known as Dogo Onsen Hot spring. It is located on the center of Matsuyama City (Capital city of Ehime Pref.) It is more than 3,000 years old which is the oldest hot spring in Japan and the first public bath. To be considered and "Important Cultural Property" in Japan. The building is made mostly of wood, and about 3,000 people bathe in it daily. The bathhouse in "Spirited Away", the animated movie by Hayao Miyazaki, was inspired by this building. Around this Dogo Onsen Area, there are approximately 30 hot spring resorts. As this area is an onsen district, during the evening it is filled with tourists holding bamboo Bags while wearing "Yukata" (cotton kimono) and "Geta" (Japanese wooded clogs) .



4) Yamaguchi Pref.

It is located in the westernmost part of mainland Japan. In the Middle Ages, Ouchi Culture flourished under the Lord Ouchi who had the most power in the western part of Japan.

*Karato Fish Market in Shimonoseki City

It is fresh fish market in the straits city of Shimonoseki. On weekend and holidays, The market is the site of the "Ikiiki Bakangai" sushi battle. Each shop puts the quality of its fish and its skills to test with rolled sushi and fish on Rice made with fish caught fresh that day, including famous "Fugu" (blow fish) sushi.



***Rurikoji Temple and Five-storied Pagoda (National Treasures)**

This Five-Storied Pagoda is the 10th oldest pagoda in Japan, and it is also counted as the 13rd most beautiful pagoda in Japan. It depicts the beauty of Ouchi culture with the Cherry Blossoms and Maple Trees in the background. In addition, few hours after sunset it is illuminated, so nighttime is also popular time to visit.



5) Okayama Pref.

It is located in the heart of Western Kapan and offers smooth access to many major tourist desitinations. Conveniently located between Kyoto, Osaka and Hiroshima. And it is well known the land of Sunshine. Throughout the year, it is blessed with minimal rain and mild climate (277 sunny days in the year) and it is well known as the fruit kingdom. Grown in Oyakayama's sun-soaked earth, the local fruites offer unparalleled flavor, Fragrance, and aweetness.

***Korakuen Garden**

One if the three great garden of Japan, is a cultural heritage site the world to treasure. And has been giving the rank of three stars (top rank) by Michelin Green Guide Japan. With such features as a pond, a plum grove, a tea plantation, and a Noh Stage, this circuit-style garden is packed with various attractions that visitors can enjoy along their stroll. The view from atop Yuishinzan Hill, the hill overlooking the garden, in one such must-see highlight. Visitors are encouraged to enjoy a combined tour of both the garden and Okayama Castle towering on the opposite shore of the garden's pond.



6) Tokushima Pref.

Tokushima Prefecture, on the eastern side of the island of Shikoku, is connected to mainland Japan by the Akashi-Kaikyo and Naruto Bridges, and can be reached from Osaka in two and a half hours by highway bus. Tokushima is home of the world-famous Awa Dance festival and abounds in beautiful natural scenery.

*** Awa Dance**

The world-famous Awa Dance can be viewed all year round at this dance hall. The first floor is home to an information desk and shop area for local products and tourist information. On the second floor is the Awa Dance library and an exhibition hall. The third floor is home to a museum, and on the fifth floor is the station for the ropeway to the top of Mt. Bizan.

***The Naruto Whirlpool**

At the narrow Naruto Strait, a large volumes of water is creating whirlpools more than 20 meters in diameter between the Seto Inland Sea and Kii Channel at high and low tide. A whirlpool which is a symbol of nature's power and its mysteries can be observed for fun from the bridge.



7) Hiroshima Pref.

Hiroshima of today has been full of positive energy brimming with vigor that every visitor has been welcomed with the best of 'omotenashi', Japanese hospitality, the people in Hiroshima as a traditional locality has been nurtured in natural conditions in which Hiroshima is blessed with a mild climate all year round with a summer seasonal wind blocked by Shikoku Island and a winter seasonal wind by the Chugoku mountain range. They have been enjoying the freshest seafood from the Seto Inland Sea where a catch of fish per 1.0 square meter is about 25 times as large as that of the Mediterranean Sea. How many blessings Hiroshima has been enjoying!!



We can discover real wealth and peace of mind in Hiroshima, and I would like to suggest Hiroshima as the next destination on the tour by way of Awaji Island and Shikoku. A full range of activities are to be arranged, cycling, cruising, viewing contemporary art, a new approach to Buddhist nirvana in an ultra-modern sanctuary and/or eating up the freshest 'sashimi' directly from the boat with 'sake,' rice wine are only some of the activities that come to mind. Of course, meditating to get back to yourself in front of the peaceful Inland Sea is another way to spend your precious time. The British greatest business person Thomas Cook once wrote, recalling the peace of the Sea; 'I have been to almost all of the beautiful lakes in England, Scotland, Ireland, Switzerland, and Italy, but it is the Seto Inland Sea that is the most beautiful of all the lakes. It is as beautiful as an imaginary lake formed by extracting and gathering the most attractive part of the scenery from each lake I have visited in Europe.'

Finally, we would like to finish by introducing a German geographer who had mentioned West Japan with the Seto Inland Sea in the 19th century. His name is Richthofen in the 19th century, he had foreseen the attractiveness of the Seto Inland Sea in his writing, saying, "the scenery extended gracefully in such a manner that can't be discovered anywhere else but only in the Seto Inland Sea. The time will come when it would be highly appreciated as one of the most charming sites in the world, drawing a great attention and a number of visitors in the future."

For further detail, please visit SETOUCHI Finder

<http://setouchifinder.com/en/>