

# Regional Guide

## Discover the Islands of Japan

### Geography

The islands of Japan are situated in the Pacific Ocean, consisting of 6,852 islands. The four main islands are Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, and Shikoku. Japan's diverse landscape includes mountains, forests, and coastlines. The Sea of Japan lies to the west, separating Japan from the Korean Peninsula. South Korea, on the other hand, is located on the southern part of the Korean Peninsula, bordered by the Yellow Sea to the west, the Sea of Japan to the east, and the Korea Strait to the south.

### Geology

Japan is located in a seismically active zone known as the Pacific Ring of Fire, which contributes to its numerous volcanoes, earthquakes, and hot springs. The Japanese archipelago was formed by tectonic movements, and the region continues to experience significant geological activity. South Korea features less volcanic activity but shares seismic vulnerabilities due to its proximity to tectonic plate boundaries.

### History

Japan's history is a rich tapestry woven from periods of isolation and intense interaction with the rest of the world. The early history of Japan saw the rise of powerful clans and the establishment of the Yamato state in the third century CE. The influence of Chinese culture through Korea brought Buddhism, Confucianism, and a writing system that deeply influenced Japanese society. The Heian period (794-1185) was a golden age of art, poetry, and court culture, exemplified by works such as *The Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu.

The feudal era, spanning from the Kamakura period (1185-1333) to the end of the Edo period (1603-1868), was characterized by the rule of shoguns, samurai warriors, and the establishment of a rigid social order. During this time, Japan experienced significant internal conflict but also periods of peace and cultural development, particularly under the Tokugawa shogunate. The arrival of Western powers in the mid-nineteenth century, epitomized by Commodore Perry's Black Ships in 1853, forced Japan to end its isolationist policies and led to the Meiji Restoration in 1868. This period saw rapid modernization and industrialization as Japan sought to catch up with the Western world.

South Korea's history is equally dynamic. It was once part of the broader Korean Empire, with a history deeply influenced by neighbouring China and Japan. The Korean Peninsula has seen the rise and fall of several dynasties, most notably the Silla, Goryeo, and Joseon dynasties. The latter period, marked by Confucian statecraft and cultural achievements, ended with Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910. Following World War II, Korea was divided into North and South Korea, leading to the Korean War in the early 1950s. Post-war South Korea has experienced rapid economic growth and democratization, becoming a significant player on the global stage.

## Ports of Call

### Tokyo

Tokyo, Japan's bustling capital, is a blend of ultramodern skyscrapers and historic temples. Visitors can explore the Imperial Palace, Sensoji Temple, and the vibrant districts of Shibuya and Shinjuku.

### Kanazawa

Known for its well-preserved Edo-period districts, Kanazawa offers attractions such as Kenrokuen Garden, one of Japan's Three Great Gardens, and the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art.

### Matsue

Situated between Lake Shinji and Lake Nakaumi, Matsue is famous for Matsue Castle, one of Japan's few remaining original castles, and the picturesque Yuushien Garden.

### Hagi

A historic castle town, Hagi features traditional pottery, samurai residences, and the Shizuki Park. The Akiyoshido Cave nearby is a natural wonder worth exploring.

### Ulsan, South Korea

Ulsan is a gateway to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Gyeongju, known for its ancient temples, tombs, and the National Museum, which showcases Korea's rich cultural heritage.

### Fukuoka

Fukuoka, the largest city on Kyushu Island, combines modern attractions with historical sites such as Fukuoka Castle, the Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine, and the vibrant yatai food stalls.

## **Nagasaki**

Nagasaki, historically significant for its role in international trade and the atomic bombing during World War II, offers the Peace Memorial Park, the Atomic Bomb Museum, and the historic Dejima Island.

## **Yakushima**

Yakushima Island, Japan's first UNESCO World Heritage Site, is renowned for its ancient cedar forests, including trees over 3,000 years old, and diverse flora and fauna.

## **Uwajima**

Located on Shikoku Island, Uwajima is known for its pearl farms, Uwajima Castle, and the Tenshaen Garden, offering insights into traditional Japanese horticulture.

## **Tourism**

Japan attracts over thirty million international tourists annually, with Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka being the most popular destinations. South Korea receives around seventeen million visitors each year, with Seoul, Jeju Island, and Busan being the main attractions. Tourism significantly contributes to the economies of both countries, creating jobs and promoting cultural exchange.

Tourism is a vital part of the economy for both Japan and South Korea. In Japan, tourism contributes approximately 7.4% to the national GDP and supports millions of jobs. The influx of tourists boosts local businesses, from hotels and restaurants to transportation and retail sectors. South Korea also benefits economically from tourism, with the industry contributing around 5% to the GDP. Popular destinations such as Seoul, Busan, and Jeju Island draw millions of visitors, driving growth in various service sectors.