

INTO THE WILD

White-sand beaches, infinite emerald-colored waters, countless carved tunnels, natural sea walls and caves formed by the raging waves of the Sea of Japan — step into Tottori's largest open-air naturally formed museum exhibiting all the wonders of geology.

Located within the San'in Kaigan UNESCO Global Geopark, the Uradome Coast is a stunning stretch of approximately 15-kilometer-long coastline at the far eastern tip of Tottori Prefecture. Earning a well-deserved reputation for its transparent waters (in some zones visibility extends down as far as 25 meters), and magnificent sights, the coast is an ideal destination for snorkeling, swimming, kayaking, a family beach day and other marine adventures. Home to mysterious pine trees sitting atop its rocks, to many, the coastline would be reminiscent of a beautiful bonsai tree garden. The raw beauty of this vast coastline is one of Tottori's best-kept secrets.

Taking a cruise tour is a popular way to fully embrace the beauty of the area. Hop on a vessel and let yourself be taken to unknown sites through jagged rocks and giant cliffs as you feel the power of the waves all the way through.





SEA PARADISE

Its proximity to the Sea of Japan gives Tottori the gift of some of the country's freshest and most delicious seafood. Scattered around the prefecture are many fish markets selling the latest catch from the sea. The fish markets in Sakaiminato City, one of Japan's leading fishing ports, and the Karoichi Fish Market in Tottori City are especially enjoyable for visitors. Bustling with the energy of its fishmongers and boasting delicious seafood taken in the area's freshwaters, the markets pride themselves with having Japan's largest annual crab and bluefin tuna catch. You can enjoy browsing at and tasting local delicacies, especially Tottori's famous crab in winter, Sakaiminato salmon in spring, and tuna and oysters in summer.



CRAB MATTERS

If there is one thing that makes Tottori's people more proud than their sand dunes, it's the crab. The giant, sweet, succulent meat of freshly caught bright red snow "Matsuba" crabs, the most sought after winter luxury on a Japanese table. Also known as the "crabbing prefecture" for being the region with the largest annual crab haul in Japan, Tottori worships the catch so much that it has all sorts of dishes inspired by it. Crab *nabe* (hot pot) is a highly recommended one, especially on extra cold days. Tottori also has a crab museum, the Tottori Karo Crab Aquarium, where visitors can get acquainted with crabs with the longest leg span in the world. In December 2019, Tottori's Matsuba Itsuki-boshi crab brand was certified by the Guinness Book of World Records as the most expensive crab sold at auction — it sold for 5 million yen.

THE VIBRANT COLORS OF YODOE UMBRELLAS

The former town of Yodoe (now part of Yonago City) is known for its former mass production of hand-made *Yodoegasa* — traditional umbrellas that are today mostly utilized as decorative attributes in performances and festivals. These colorful umbrellas' history dates back to the early 19th century and is linked to one clever man who came, settled and forever changed the future of this beautiful but otherwise ordinary town. His name was Shuzo Kurayoshiya, an artisan who made Yodoe his new home and opened an umbrella shop to make ends meet. The lush bamboo forests in the district's vicinity were a rich source for the primary material for making umbrellas. At the same time, the wide sandy Tottori beaches facing the Sea of Japan provided the perfect location to dry dozens of them instantly. The snowy winters in the region further increased the business' demand, which thrived in the area for over a century since its establishment. By the early 20th century, there were 71 artisan shops in Yodoe, handcrafting some 500,000 umbrellas a year at peak times.

Made of bamboo frames as a base, woven with vibrantly colored silk threads beneath the canopy, decorated with oil-coated *washi* paper, and dried until perfection in the sun, the making of a single Yodoe umbrella required 70 detailed steps that were completed in the hands of multiple artisans. The umbrellas' quality and the dedication of Yodoe's artisans made the Yodoegasa popular all over Japan. The popularity continued until around the 1950s when the increased import of cheaper foreign umbrellas contributed to their gradual decline in demand.

The Yodoegasa craft was designated as an intangible cultural property in 1976. To preserve the tradition, local artisans founded the Wagasa Denshokan to nurture the artistry of the Yodoe umbrella, inviting visitors to learn about the tradition and even opt for making Yodoegasa-inspired crafts. Thanks to the locals' efforts to preserve the tradition, today, the Yodoe area is one of the few remaining Japanese places where traditional umbrellas still thrive. In modern days, Yodoegasa are used primarily in traditional festivals, such as the Shanshan Matsuri in August, weddings and other cultural events.



SHANSHAN FESTIVAL

A local legend says that once upon a time, an old man tried to save a town suffering from a prolonged drought by dancing with an umbrella until his last breath on earth. On the day he died, it started pouring rain and the town was saved. Today, the legend lives in the form of the Shanshan Festival, the largest and most colorful festival in Tottori City, held annually in mid-August outside Tottori Station. Some 4,000 kimono-clad dancers take to the streets, dancing the night away while carrying colorful umbrellas adorned with bells. More people stand by to watch and enjoy the rhythms. The celebration is part of Japan's Obon tradition, which honors the spirits of one's ancestors. The name "shan shan" derives from a Japanese onomatopoeia for the sound of a bell ringing. The Shanshan Festival is a special night that unites locals, travelers, young and old, in celebrating life, community and nature's blessings. In 2014, it was certified by the Guinness Book of World Records as the world's largest umbrella dance lasting for over five minutes.





KIRINJISHI: TOTTORI'S LION DANCE

When the day of the festivals comes, the red-adorned *kirin* tours shrines and people's homes to ward off evil under the sounds of flutes and taiko drums. This vibrant dance's history dates back to the early years of the Edo Period, some 350 years ago, when Mitsunaka Ikeda, the first generation lord of the feudal Tottori clan, constructed the Toshogu Shrine in Tottori and decided to introduce a new form of lion dance to celebrate the achievement.

The dance greatly resembles a typical lion dance (*shishimai*), which is practiced in various regions in Japan. The most striking difference is observed in the lion's mask, which in Kirinjishi is a kirin, a mythical creature of high virtue of Chinese origin. At first, Kirinjishi was confined to the Tottori Toshogu Shrine, but it later spread to nearly 150 places in the eastern part of Tottori. Today, the dance is practiced at various shrines in the prefecture, typically during autumn and spring festivals.

A group of about ten people performs Kirinjishi, but only two constitute the kirin — one wearing the mask and moving the forelegs, the second on the backside, acting as a supporter and guide. The two are led by a red-clad, red-haired and red-masked character known as Shojo, who carries a long wooden stick. The kirin dances to the tune of flutes, drums and bells and the movements are elegant and slow, somewhat reminiscent of the traditional Japanese theatrical art of Noh. Kirinjishi begins at shrines but continues to people's homes where they visit to "bite" residents on the heads for good luck and health.

Men traditionally performed the dance, but in recent years, mainly due to the declining population, women have also begun performing. Kirinjishi was designated as Japan Heritage, the first since the new Reiwa Era launch in 2019.

KAGURA: AMUSING THE GODS

When gods are watching, they want to see something extraordinary, something extravagant, something loud and clear that impresses them so much that they'd cast their mercy on people and give them safety and good fortune. If that's the case, then Kagura, one of the oldest living traditions in Japan, ticks all boxes.

The vivid costumes, elaborate masks and blasting chants tell the powerful story of Kagura, a sacred ceremonial dance dedicated to Japanese Shinto gods. Meaning "entertaining gods," Kagura was once performed by Shinto priests at festivals to pray for good harvests and ward off evil. Today, it is performed by dedicated artists who strive to preserve the tradition, which like many of its kind, is slowly losing its spotlight in contemporary Japan.

Kagura is ultimately a form of storytelling that reenacts classic Japanese folklore tales of good versus evil. As in every storytelling, Kagura is represented differently according to each region's take on the stories. Choreography, music and costumes vary too. Tottori Kagura strives to maintain the dance's traditional origins and has remained relatively unchanged since the late Edo period.

One of Tottori Kagura's most popular three-part acts is *Yaegaki Noh*, a powerful performance that hails from the myths of Izumo. It tells the story of Sun goddess Amaterasu who has banished her impulsive brother Susa-no-o, the god of storms and the sea, from the heavens. Lost and alone, Susa-no-o travels the earthly land of Izumo-no-Kuni where he meets an elderly couple whose daughter has been taken by an eight-headed serpent Orochi. Susa-no-o slays the serpent, saves the young woman and regains the gods' respect in a cumulative moment of Kagura that stays with viewers long after it has finished.



Masks commonly used in Tottori Kagura



SARUTAHIKO
Leader of the earthly deities and a bridge between the earthly and heavenly gods



SUSA-NO-O
The god of storms and the sea who is banished from the Shinto heavens



ASHINAZUCHI
An earthly deity. The father of the daughter taken by the giant serpent in *Yaegaki Noh*



INADAHIME
A goddess in Japanese mythology. One of the wives of the god Susa-no-o, who rescued her from the monster serpent Orochi



HANNYA
A jealous female demon



DINING BACK IN
TIME IN MITAKIEN

The sound of rustling leaves, birds chirping and streams floating welcome you as you pass the main gate. Ahead of you stands a water mill, a thatched-roof building and an open hearth. On its opposite side is a small waterfall. Japanese persimmons decorate some of the buildings' exterior, but that isn't just aesthetics, they're there to dry before being served. Surrounding it all is infinite greenery and mountain echoes that take you far, far away from the big city's busy rhythm of life. Here is Mitakien, a Michelin Guide restaurant in Chizu Town where time has willingly stopped, inviting you to pause and enjoy the small gifts in life.

"He would often say that 'the countryside's time has come,'" says Setsuko Teratani, the owner of the restaurant of her husband, Seichiro, the former town mayor who built Mitakien nearly five decades ago as a place to celebrate the slow countryside life. Today, Mitakien occupies six different dining buildings, each inspired by an old Japanese countryside home. The cuisine served there is on par with the overall nostalgic ambiance — it's simple, handmade, additive-free and entirely locally sourced. Guests can choose from three different courses, all of which feature beautifully presented original dishes inspired by the season. From freshly grilled fish with original sansho miso to maple leaf tempura, tofu in miso dip and steamed mountain vegetables and rice — there are over a dozen small items on your table and every single one has a delightful taste.

Carrying on the founder's legacy, Mitakien's charming "ochakosan" — the women and men kindly serving the meals and always taking the extra time to explain each dish — have worked tirelessly to make the place Mitakien is today: a step back in time when every day is a good old day.

