

# Chūgoku 中国

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Exploring the lone volcanic peak of **Daisen** (p191) rising majestically from the San-in coast
- Wandering through the beautiful forests, impressive waterfalls, crystal clear rivers, and rocky cliffs of **Sandan-kyō** (p196)
- The natural beauty of **Miya-jima** (p198) complemented by its ancient shrines and temples
- The classic views from the top of **Miya-jima** (p198) of pine trees and craggy bluffs silhouetted against the backdrop of the Inland Sea

Although the Chūgoku region is quite mountainous, aside from rugged Daisen – which looks as though it would be more at home in the Japan Alps – its mountains are not of the same stature as the rest of Japan. This is because most of Chūgoku's mountains were built tectonically through the raising of the seabed rather than volcanic activity. Hiking trails are found throughout the region but, due to the low elevation of the mountains, few large areas of natural forest remain.

The region's major city is Hiroshima, known worldwide for the devastation of the world's first atomic bomb: visiting the displays of the city museum and trying to fathom the scenes of disaster can be an emotional but essential experience for young and old. From the ashes a vibrant region has risen, with man-made and natural attractions to please the eye on your travels. Along with Daisen, the major natural drawcards of the area include the Nishi-Chūgoku-Sanchi Quasi-National Park, with its beautiful gorge Sandan-kyō, the Akiyoshi-dai karst (limestone) region – encompassing the largest cave system in Japan – and Miya-jima, an island nature haven that might give you that perfect postcard shot of Japan. Fortunately two of the most scenic areas are easily reached from Hiroshima by public transport. Daisen is far from most urban centres but its beauty is worth the effort of getting there and is a gateway to further exploration along the remote and rugged San-in coast.



## ENVIRONMENT

The southern coast of this region is called the San-yō coast, literally the sunshine coast. The northern counterpart is unfortunately labelled the San-in coast, the shady side of the mountains. Not surprisingly, the former is more populated, while the latter is slower and nature still dominates. The two are separated by the Chūgoku mountain range. Tottori-ken on the San-in coastline is the least populated of Japan's 47 prefectures.

## CLIMATE

The weather in Chūgoku is similarly mild to that of neighbouring Kyūshū and Shikoku, except that the winter is more severe on the San-in coast. Winter storms dump large amounts of snow, making Daisen the best place in western Japan for winter mountaineering. As in Kyūshū and Shikoku, the rainy season lasts longer than in northern Japan and typhoons frequently hit the area.

## PLANNING

### Maps

Free regional maps are available from the tourist information offices mentioned below. In major cities large bookshops, such as Kinokuniya and Maruzen, have a complete selection of Shōbunsha's Yama-to-Kōgen series of hiking maps.

### Books

There are some books in Japanese on hiking in Chūgoku, the most informative of which are the *Arupen Gaido No 19 Chūgoku/Shikoku-no-yama* and *Arupen Gaido No 26 Chūgoku-no-yama*, both by Yamakei. They also publish good, full-colour hiking guides for each prefecture called *Toku-sen Gaido*. Lastly, pick up the *Bunken Tozan Gaido for Tottori-ken* and *Hiroshima-ken*, which includes many colour pictures of the walks in the region. See Lonely Planet's *Japan* for more general sightseeing information on the Chūgoku region.

### Information Sources

There is little information on hiking in the Chūgoku region in English but the tourist information office at Hiroshima station (☎ 0822-61-1877; [www.hcvb.city.hiroshima.jp](http://www.hcvb.city.hiroshima.jp); 9am-5pm) has pamphlets on regional attractions, as well as

English-speaking staff that can assist with reservations and inquiries. The **tourist information offices** in Okayama (☎ 0862-22-2912), Matsue (☎ 0852-21-4034) and Kyoto (☎ 0753-44-3300) can also lend assistance in English.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Sandwiched between Kyūshū and the Kansai conurbations of Osaka and Kyoto, travel to this region will most likely be by rail, with *shinkansen* linking stations dotted along the bustling southern coastal built-up area. The San-in coast is refreshingly slower paced, the trains are a reflection of that. Unless you want to take the time, the tokkyū (limited express) trains are highly recommended to maximise your time on terra firma. With numerous roads running north-south and between, and winding roads hugging the coastline, bus journeys are rewarding and not that much slower than the local trains. Driving your own vehicle is a great adventure in this region, especially along the San-in coast.

## GATEWAYS

See Hiroshima (p199) and Okayama (p200).

### DAISEN 大山

**Duration** 2 days

**Distance** 36km

**Difficulty** moderate-demanding

**Start** Daisen

**Finish** Senjō-san

**Nearest Towns** Yonago, Daisen

**Transport** bus

**Summary** The biggest volcano in Chūgoku is a local favourite with lots of variety, offering great views of the Japan Sea, large tracts of virgin forest and some impressive mountain scenery.

Rising dramatically from the San-in coast, Daisen is the highest mountain in the Chūgoku region. It dominates one part of the Daisen-Okai National Park, the other part incorporates the coastline near Matsue and the Oki islands. When seen from afar, Daisen's conical shape

