

Shikoku 四国

HIGHLIGHTS

- Setting out on the big walk – the 88 Sacred Temples of Shikoku Pilgrimage – from **Ryōzen-ji** (p293), north of Tokushima City
- Climbing to the summit of sacred **Tsurugi-san** (p298), then heading west along the peaks to Miune-san
- Clambering up the metal chains to reach the ‘stone hammer’ summit of **Ishizuchi-san** (p302), then picking your way along the knife-edge ridge to the high-point of Tengu-dake
- Soaking away your aches in Matsuyama’s **Dōgo Onsen** (p297) after coming down off Ishizuchi-san
- Exploring the *fufu-bashi* (husband and wife vine bridges) at **Oku-Iya Kazura-bashi** (p299) after hiking Tsurugi-san
- Walking the last few kilometres down the Yoshino valley back to **Ryōzen-ji** (p293) to complete your 1300km pilgrimage around Shikoku

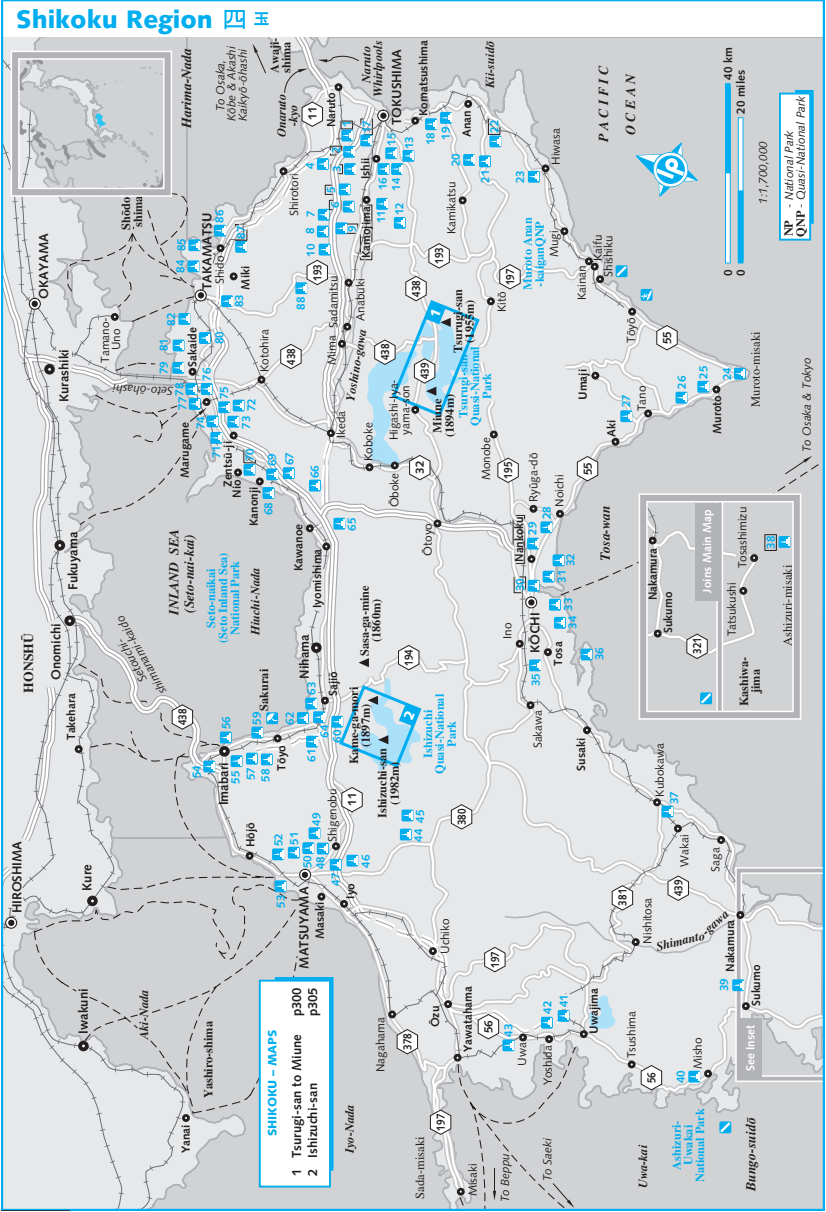


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In Japan’s feudal past, the island of Shikoku was divided into four regions – hence the name *shi* (four) and *koku* (region). The provinces of Awa, Tosa, Iyo and Sanuki are now the modern-day prefectures of Tokushima, Kōchi, Ehime and Kagawa. Despite its geographical proximity to the historical centres of power – Osaka and Kyoto. Shikoku has always been considered somewhat remote. It was accessible only by boat until three bridge links to Honshū were built in the last couple of decades. The majority of Shikoku is mountainous, and the island offers excellent hiking and a wide variety of choices for anyone seeking outdoor pursuits. Although Shikoku is Japan’s fourth largest island, it is predominantly rural and remains off the standard tourist track.

For more than a millennium, *o-henrō* (pilgrims) have walked clockwise around Shikoku in the footsteps of the great Buddhist saint Kōbō Daishi (774–835), who achieved enlightenment on this island. Known as Shikoku Hachijū-hakkaisho (the 88 Sacred Temples of Shikoku), the 1300km journey is Japan’s best known pilgrimage and oldest tourist trail, much has changed in recent centuries.

As with the rest of Japan, Shikoku is a land of contradictions – lightning-fast trains speed alongside lumbering fishing boats and mountain top shrines are lit-up by vending machines. More than other destinations, however, Shikoku is home to that elusive bit of lost Japan that seems virtually absent from the modern cityscape. Today, travellers can still hike age-old trails that bear the footprints of countless others who set out in that ever-elusive quest for enlightenment.



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