

# Kyūshū 九州

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Hiking among the spectacular Miyama-Kirishima azaleas and stunning volcanic views at **Kirishima** (p331)
- Walking the exposed ridges of **Aso-san** (p321) and peering down into the bowels of a steaming volcano
- Stepping back in time at **Hiko-san** (p314) as you walk the ancient pilgrim trail
- Feeling far from the troubles of the world in the remoteness of the walk from **Sobo-san** to **Katamuki-yama** (p323)
- Relaxing in some of Japan's best hot springs around the hikes of **Aso-Kujū National Park** (p316)
- Wandering through the wild valley of the Hōri-gawa and striking granite mounds of **Ōkue-yama** (p327)

Kyūshū, Japan's third-largest island, is blessed with outstanding natural beauty. Among its attractions are active volcanoes, some of the country's finest hot springs, grass-covered highlands, intriguing islands and even excellent surf beaches. None of the mountains rise above 2000m, but due to their steepness and thickly forested slopes they offer wide-ranging options for hikers of all abilities. Sparsely populated compared with many parts of Japan, much of Kyūshū's landscape is a sea of green – from wet rice fields, to lush green pastures and dense native forest. Higher up, the barren volcanic wonderlands of Aso-san, Kujū-san, and the mountains of Kirishima provide striking contrast. Spring brings cherry blossoms, and the high mountains are covered in colourful azaleas through June. Summer is hot and sticky, and Kyūshū is often buffeted from the southeast by remorseless typhoons. Autumn produces stunning colours. The mountains of Kyūshū offer tremendous hiking opportunities – plus a sense of remoteness and peacefulness long since gone from many parts of Japan.

Kyūshū has long been considered one of Japan's most internationally minded regions. Coinciding with the decline of the samurai tradition, young Kyūshū intellectuals of the Meiji Restoration led a reluctant Japan into the modern world. Today the cosmopolitan city of Fukuoka is a major international arrival point. Located in the north of the island, Fukuoka is one of Japan's main centres of trade, cuisine, fashion, and nightlife. The southern cities of Kagoshima and Miyazaki are known for their balmy climate and for the quality of their *shōchū*, a popular drink distilled from sweet potato or grains.



## CLIMATE

Kyūshū, while more southern than much of Japan, has extremes that vary tremendously from season to season. In the winter it can be quite cold, and many of the mountains are snow capped. Spring and autumn produce the most comfortable temperatures, and with them, spectacular flowers in spring and beautiful autumnal hues in autumn. During the rainy season the island is inundated with heavy, often torrential rain, and Kyūshū is pounded by the majority of typhoons that hit Japan from June to October. Travellers should bring layers of clothing and a waterproof rain shell, as it is often too windy to use an umbrella. Summer is hot and humid, but is the time of year when hikers have their holidays.

## PLANNING

### When to Hike

Kyūshū has to cope with some extreme weather patterns, particularly over the warmer half of the year, but the silver lining to this dark cloud is that the best opportunity for good weather is often during the most beautiful times to visit Kyūshū. These are in May and early June when the azaleas are blooming, and in autumn when the trees are ablaze with colour.

## Maps

Tourist information offices have free regional maps. Shōbunsha's Yama-to-Kōgen 1:50,000 series of topographical hiking maps are the recommended maps for the hikes.

## Place Names

The cities of Fukuoka and Hakata have grown into each other and are now commonly referred to as just Fukuoka. Its main train station is called Hakata. Similarly, a conglomerate of five cities – Wakamatsu, Yahata, Moji, Tobata and Kokura – is simply known as Kita-kyūshū, with its main train station called Kokura.

In Kyūshū, the Kujū and Aso mountain ranges contain peaks bearing the same names, and in the case of Kirishima the range is better known than any of its peaks. When speaking with Japanese about the mountains it may help to mention both the range and the peak, for example *Kirishima-no-Takachiho-dake* (Kirishima's Mt

Takachiho). To add to the potential confusion, Aso and Takachiho are the names of mountains, villages and regions.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are major airports at Fukuoka, Ōita (Beppu), Kita-kyūshū, Nagasaki, Kagoshima, Kumamoto and Miyazaki. There are also flights to islands off the coast of Kyūshū and to the islands southwest of Kagoshima down to Okinawa. Using one of the JAL or ANA air passes or cheap add-on fares is a cheap way to go (p373).

There are numerous sea connections to Kyūshū from Honshū, Shikoku, Okinawa and Korea. Local ferry services operate between Kyūshū and islands off the northwest and southern coasts.

The *shinkansen* (bullet train) line from Tokyo and Osaka crosses to Kyūshū from Shimonoseki and ends at Hakata station (Fukuoka).

## GETTING AROUND

Major cities in Kyūshū are connected by *tokkyū* (limited express) train services. The Kyūshū *shinkansen* is being built to link Fukuoka and Kagoshima, but at the time of research only the section in the south between Kagoshima and Yatsushiro was in operation. Once it's all up and running, it will be possible to travel by *shinkansen* from Tokyo to Kagoshima.

Kyūshū has an extensive highway bus system, while major cities and offshore islands are served by several domestic airlines.

## GATEWAYS

If you're coming from Honshū by train or bus, your gateway to Kyūshū will probably be Fukuoka. One of Japan's ten most populated cities, Fukuoka has been an important trading and cultural city for many centuries due to its proximity to the Asian mainland and was chosen by the Mongol invasion forces as their landing point in the 12th century. If you come by ferry, you'll probably arrive at Fukuoka, Kagoshima, Miyazaki or Beppu. By air, you could turn up at any of the island's major cities.

Information on many of these gateways is included in the Towns & Facilities section at the end of this chapter, or in the hike descriptions themselves. For more detail, pick up a copy of Lonely Planet's *Japan*.

