



Okinawa & the Southwest Islands

Includes ➔

Ōsumi Islands	724
Amami Islands	731
Okinawa-hontō	737
Miyako Islands	747
Yaeyama Islands	750

Best Beaches

- ➔ Ida-no-hama, Iriomote-jima (p756)
- ➔ Sunset Beach, Ishigaki-jima (p751)
- ➔ Sunayama Beach, Miyako-jima (p747)
- ➔ Nishibama Beach, Aka-jima (p745)
- ➔ Furuzamami Beach, Zamami-jima (p745)

Best Diving Destinations

- ➔ Yonaguni-jima (p759)
- ➔ Kerama Islands (p744)
- ➔ Ishigaki-jima (p750)
- ➔ Iriomote-jima (p756)

Why Go?

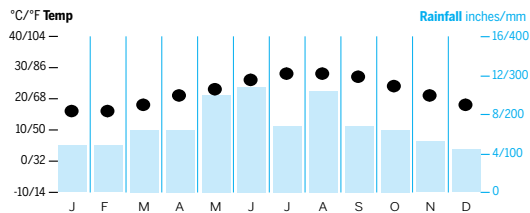
Japan's Southwest Islands (南西諸島; Nansei-shotō) are *the other Japan*: a chain of semitropical, coral-fringed islands that feels more like Hawaii or Southeast Asia.

They're a nature lover's paradise: in the northern Kagoshima Prefecture lush primeval forests hide among the craggy peaks of Yakushima, and the starfish-shaped Amami-Ōshima has fine beaches on its convoluted coastline. Heading south, Okinawa-hontō (沖縄本島) is the bustling main island of Okinawa Prefecture. The nearby Kerama Islands are tiny gems with white-sand beaches and crystal-clear waters. Miyako-jima boasts killer beaches and a laid-back scene. And furthest south, the Yaeyama Islands have Japan's best coral reefs, subtropical jungles and mangrove swamps.

But spectacular nature is only part of it – the Southwest Islands exude a peculiarly 'un-Japanese' culture. Indeed, they made up a separate country for most of their history, and the Ryūkyū cultural heart still beats strongly here.

When to Go

Naha



May & Jun Travel may coincide with the rainy season; while it's not too intense, sunshine may be scarce.

Jul-Sep This is the best time to enjoy the beaches, but expect some big crowds.

Oct-Mar The water is cooler but swimmable, and you'll have entire beaches to yourself.



Okinawa & the Southwest Islands Highlights

- 1 Soaking up the sun on one of the white-sand beaches of the **Kerama Islands** (p744)
- 2 Hiking into the mountainous heart of **Yakushima** (p724) to commune with ancient *yakusugi* trees
- 3 Diving with playful mantas off **Ishigaki-jima** (p750)
- 4 Exploring the mangrove swamps, jungles and coral reefs of Japan's last frontier, **Iriomote-jima** (p756)
- 5 Taking a ferry to a simpler time on the 'living museum' island of **Taketomi-jima** (p758)
- 6 Chilling out on peaceful **Yoron-tō** (p735), with its blissful scenery of beaches and sugarcane
- 7 Searching the horizon for Taiwan from **Yonaguni-jima** (p759), Japan's westernmost island, and diving its mysterious underwater ruins