



Hiroshima & Western Honshū

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Why Go?

Travellers to Western Honshū (本州西部) will find two contrasting coastlines. San-yō (literally 'sunny side of the mountains'), looking out over the Inland Sea, boasts the bigger cities, the narrow-laned portside and hillside towns, ceramic history and the bullet train. This is the coast that holds the region's big name – indelibly scarred, thriving, warm-hearted Hiroshima.

On the other side of the dividing Chūgoku mountain range, San-in (literally 'in the shade of the mountains') gazes out across the expanse of the Sea of Japan. Up here, it's all about an unhurried pace, onsen villages that see few foreigners, historic sites, wind-battered coastlines and great hospitality.

Head inland for hikes along gorges and through caves. Or you can escape the mainland altogether – to the Inland Sea and its galaxy of islands, or to the remote and rugged Ōki-shotō in the Sea of Japan.

Best Islands

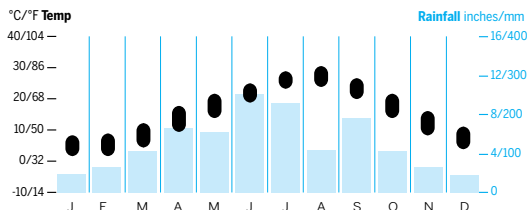
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Best Historic Sites

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When to Go

Hiroshima



Mar–May & Sep–Nov Mild and photogenic, spring and autumn get most of the attention.

Jul–Sep Beach weather draws crowds to the Inland Sea islands and the Sea of Japan coast.

Aug Hiroshima remembers 6 August with services and a river full of lanterns.

① Getting Around

The *shinkansen* (bullet train), linking Osaka and Kyoto with Okayama, Hiroshima and other cities on the way to Shimonoseki, is the fastest way to get around along the Inland Sea coast of Western Honshū. Along the Sea of Japan the *shinkansen* is not an option. Trains operate all the way from Tottori to Hagi, hugging some beautiful rugged coastline on the way, but services are generally infrequent and it's hard to avoid the slow 'local' services. If you're really in a hurry up here (and to get way off the beaten track), it's worth hiring a car. There are few train and bus lines servicing inland destinations – the major rail link between the two coasts runs between Okayama and Yonago.

HIROSHIMA & AROUND

Hiroshima

☎ 082 / POP 1,187,000

To most people, Hiroshima means just one thing. The city's name will forever evoke thoughts of 6 August 1945, when Hiroshima became the target of the world's first atomic-bomb attack. Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Park is a constant reminder of that day, and it attracts visitors from all over the world. But leafy Hiroshima, with its wide boulevards and laid-back friendliness, is a far from depressing place. Present-day Hiroshima is home to a thriving and internationally minded community, and it's worth spending a couple of nights here to experience the city at its vibrant best.

👁 Sights

★ Atomic Bomb Dome

(原爆ドーム, Genbaku Dome; 🏛 Genbaku-dōmu-mae) Perhaps the starkest reminder of the destruction visited upon Hiroshima in WWII is the Atomic Bomb Dome. Built by a Czech architect in 1915, it was the Industrial Promotion Hall until the bomb exploded almost directly above it. Everyone inside was killed, but the building was one of very few left standing near the epicentre. A decision was taken after the war to preserve the shell as a memorial.

The building has since become a haunting symbol of the city, and was declared a Unesco World Heritage Site in 1996. Try to wander past in the evening when it's quiet and the propped-up ruins are floodlit.

HISTORIC SITE

Peace Memorial Park

PARK

(平和記念公園; Heiwa-kinen-kōen; 🏛 Genbaku-dōmu-mae) Hugged by rivers on both sides, Peace Memorial Park is a large, leafy space criss-crossed by walkways and dotted with memorials. Its central feature is the long tree-lined Pond of Peace leading to the **cenotaph** (原爆死没者慰霊碑). This curved concrete monument holds the names of all the known victims of the bomb. Also at the pond is the **Flame of Peace** (平和の灯), set to burn on until all the world's nuclear weapons are destroyed.

Look through the cenotaph down the pond and you'll see it frames the Flame of Peace and the Atomic Bomb Dome across the river – the park was planned so that these features form a straight line, with the Peace Memorial Museum at its southern end.

Just north of the road through the park is the **Children's Peace Monument**, inspired by Sadako Sasaki, who was two years old at the time of the atomic bomb. When Sadako developed leukaemia at 11 years of age, she decided to fold 1000 paper cranes. In Japan, the crane is the symbol of longevity and happiness, and she believed if she achieved that target she would recover. She died before reaching her goal, but her classmates folded the rest. A monument was built in 1958. Sadako's story inspired a nationwide spate of paper-crane folding that continues to this day. Surrounding the monument are strings of thousands of colourful paper cranes sent here from school children around the country and all over the world.

Nearby is the **Korean Atomic Bomb Victims Memorial** (韓国人原爆犠牲者慰霊碑). Many Koreans were shipped over to work as slave labourers during WWII, and Koreans accounted for more than one in 10 of those killed by the atomic bomb. Just north of this memorial is the **Atomic Bomb Memorial Mound** – the ashes of thousands of unclaimed or unidentified victims are interred in a vault below.

There are other monuments and statues throughout the park, and plenty of benches, including along the riverside looking across to the Atomic Bomb Dome, making this a pleasant area to take a break and reflect.

★ Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

MUSEUM

(広島平和記念資料館; www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp; 1-2 Nakajima-chō, Naka-ku; admission ¥50; ☎ 8.30am-5pm, to 6pm Mar-Nov, to 7pm Aug; 🏛 Genbaku-dōmu-mae or Chūden-mae) The main