



Okinawa & the Southwest Islands

Includes ➔

Kagoshima Prefecture	752
Ōsumi Islands	752
Amami Islands	759
Okinawa Prefecture ..	766
Okinawa-hontō	766
Islands Near Okinawa-hontō	774
Miyako Islands	776
Yaeyama Islands ...	780

Best Beaches

- ➔ Ida-no-hama, Iriomote-jima (p786)
- ➔ Sunset Beach, Ishigaki-jima (p782)
- ➔ Sunayama Beach, Miyako-jima (p777)
- ➔ Nishibama Beach, Aka-jima (p774)
- ➔ Furuzamami Beach, Zamami-jima (p774)

Best Diving Destinations

- ➔ Yonaguni-jima (p789)
- ➔ Kerama Islands (p774)
- ➔ Ishigaki-jima (p780)
- ➔ Iriomote-jima (p786)

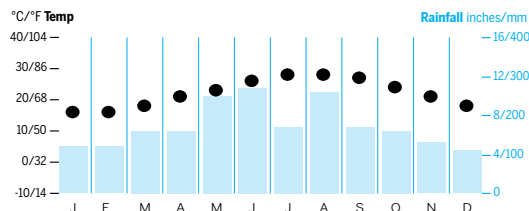
Why Go?

Japan's Southwest Islands (南西諸島; Nansei-shotō) are a Japan you may not know exists: a chain of semitropical, coral-fringed islands evocative of 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 and jumping-off point for the nearby Keramas, tiny gems with white-sand beaches and crystal-clear waters. Miyako-jima boasts killer beaches and laid-back, retro appeal. And furthest south, the Yaeyama Islands boast 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

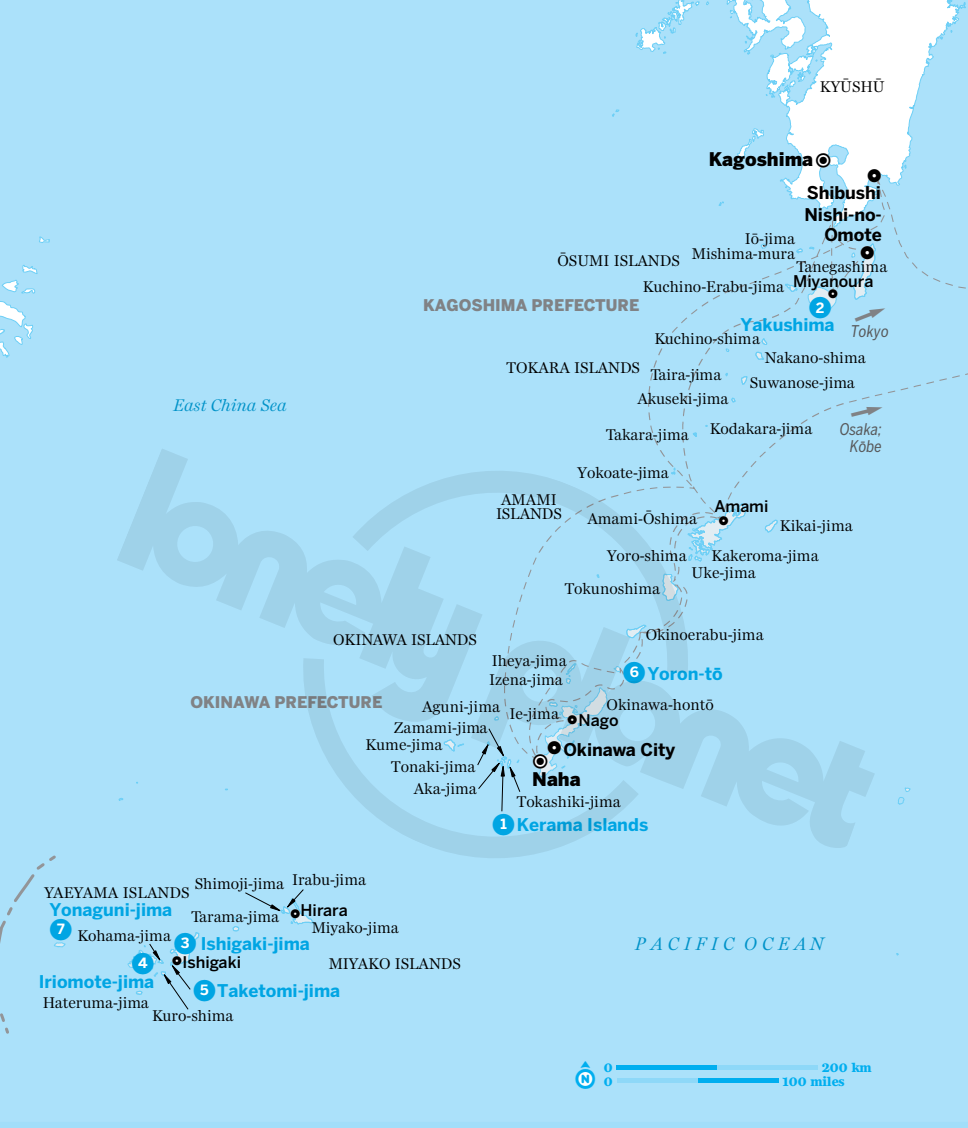
Naha



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** (p774).

2 Hiking into the mountainous heart of **Yakushima** (p752) to commune with ancient *yakusugi* trees.

3 Diving with playful mantas off **Ishigaki-jima** (p780).

4 Exploring the mangrove swamps, jungles and coral reefs of Japan's last frontier, **Iriomote-jima** (p786).

5 Taking a ferry to a simpler time on the 'living museum' island of **Taketomi-jima** (p788).

6 Chilling out on peaceful **Yoron-tō** (p764), with its

blissful scenery of beaches and sugarcane.

7 Searching the horizon for Taiwan from **Yonaguni-jima** (p789), Japan's westernmost island, and diving its mysterious underwater rock formations.