



# Okinawa & the Southwest Islands

## Includes →

Ōsumi Islands .....	771
Amami Islands .....	778
Okinawa-hontō .....	785
Naha .....	786
Kerama Islands .....	794
Kume-jima .....	797
Miyako Islands .....	798
Yaeyama Islands .....	802

## Best Places to Eat

- Nanraku (p801)
- Pōcha Tatsuya (p801)
- Yūnangi (p790)
- Nuchigafu (p790)

## Best Places to Sleep

- Sōyōtei (p775)
- Sankara Hotel & Spa (p775)
- Minshuku Sango Beach (p779)
- Minshuku Gettō (p789)
- Soraniwa (p802)

## Why Go?

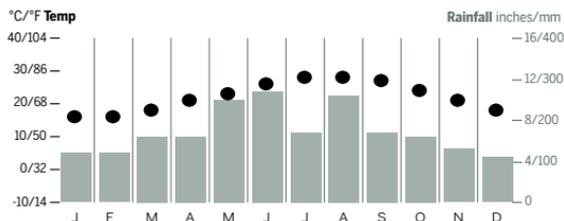
The Southwest Islands (南西諸島; Nansei-shotō) reveal a Japan you may not know exists: a chain of semitropical, coral-fringed islands evocative of Hawaii or Southeast Asia.

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 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** Coincides with rainy season; while not too intense, sunshine may be scarce.

**Jul–Sep** Best time to enjoy the beaches, but expect some big crowds and occasional typhoons.

**Oct–Mar** Water is cooler but swimmable, and you'll have entire beaches to yourself.



## Okinawa & the Southwest Islands Highlights

- 1 Kerama Islands** (p794)  
Soaking up the sun on one of the islands' white-sand beaches.
- 2 Yakushima** (p771) Hiking into the mountainous heart to commune with ancient *yakusugi* trees.
- 3 Ishigaki-jima** (p802)  
Diving with playful manta rays.
- 4 Iriomote-jima** (p808)  
Exploring the mangrove swamps, jungles and coral reefs of Japan's last frontier.
- 5 Taketomi-jima** (p811)  
Taking a ferry to a simpler time on this 'living museum' island.
- 6 Yoron-tō** (p784) Chilling out in peace, against a blissful scenic backdrop of beaches and sugar cane.
- 7 Yonaguni-jima** (p813)  
Searching the horizon for Taiwan from Japan's westernmost island, and diving its mysterious underwater rock formations.