Okinawa & the Southwest Islands

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

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.

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)

When to Go

Naha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>°C/°F Temp</th>
<th>Rainfall inches/mm</th>
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<tr>
<td>40/104</td>
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<td>0/32</td>
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<td>-10/14</td>
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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.
Soaking up the sun on one of the white-sand beaches of the Kerama Islands (p744)
Hiking into the mountainous heart of Yakushima (p724) to commune with ancient yakusugi trees
Diving with playful mantas off Ishigaki-jima (p750)
Exploring the mangrove swamps, jungles and coral reefs of Japan’s last frontier, Iriomote-jima (p756)
Taking a ferry to a simpler time on the ‘living museum’ island of Taketomi-jima (p758)
Chilling out on peaceful Yoron-tō (p735), with its blissful scenery of beaches and sugarcane
Searching the horizon for Taiwan from Yonaguni-jima (p759), Japan’s westernmost island, and diving its mysterious underwater ruins