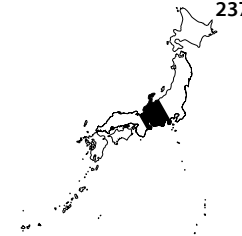


# Central Honshū

## 本州中部



Central Honshū is Japan's heartland in both geography and attitude. Stretching between the two great megalopolises of Kantō (Greater Tokyo) and Kansai (Osaka–Kyoto–Kobe), the Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Japan, this region is filled with commercial centres and traditional towns, the massive Japan Alps and a rugged northern coastline.

In Central Honshū's southern prefectures, called 'Chūbu' in Japanese, trekking takes you through valleys and summits in the Japan Alps National Park, and *onsen* (mineral hot-spring) towns offer welcome recovery for the hikers and skiers, drawn to the Olympic slopes of Nagano-ken. The Sea of Japan side of this region ('Hokuriku' in Japanese) boasts cliff-top vistas, remarkable temples and incredibly fresh seafood.

Busy Nagoya, Japan's fourth-largest city, is the nation's industrial heart, with a can-do spirit and unique foods. Hokuriku's hub is Kanazawa, a historic yet thriving city whose handsome streets once housed samurai and geisha. Lovely Takayama is admired for its traditional riverside houses, delicious cuisine and verdant countryside. Matsumoto is another favourite with visitors for its striking 16th-century black-and-white castle and many galleries.

The mountainous Unesco World Heritage sites of Shirakawa-gō and Gokayama showcase Japan's rich architectural tradition, and Central Honshū is traversed by the Nakasendō, the Edo-period trunk road through the mountains.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Stroll the streets of **Takayama** (p255), with its traditional architecture and skilled woodworkers
- Hike the stunning mountain scenery of the **Kamikōchi** (p267)
- Step back in time at the National Treasure castles **Inuyama-jō** (p250) and **Matsumoto-jō** (p283)
- Discover the rugged beauty of **Noto-hantō** (p299), a windswept peninsula of fishing hamlets and seafood feasts
- Ski, ski, ski at the Olympic resorts **Shiga-Kōgen** (p279), **Nozawa Onsen** (p279) and **Hakuba** (p280)
- Take in arts in **Kanazawa**, from the ancient garden Kenroku-en (p294) to the architecturally daring 21st Century Museum (p294)
- Train with Zen Buddhist monks in the 13th-century **Eihei-ji temple** (p305) or be awed by Nagano's **Zenkō-ji** (p274)
- Sleep in a thatched-roofed house in **Shirakawa-gō** (p263)



## Climate

Central Honshū's climate varies with its landscape. In the Japan Alps, winters are cold and long with abundant snowfall from November to February, with the highest peaks covered until June. July and August tend to be most agreeable for hikers; the snows are generally melted and temperatures warmest. In the lowlands the best times to visit are April and May or late September to early November; temperatures are mild and clear sunny skies are the norm. Expect heavy rains in the early summer *tsuyu* (monsoon) season followed by sticky summers in the lowlands; typhoon season usually peaks in September.

## National Parks

Japan Alps National Park (p267), accessible via Matsumoto or Takayama, is dotted with spectacular peaks and features *onsen* towns, ski slopes and some excellent hiking trails. A few hours west, Hakusan National Park (p304) is another fine place to enjoy the mountains, attracting skiers in the winter, hikers in the summer and *onsen*-lovers year-round.

## Getting There & Away

Nagoya is the gateway to Central Honshū; its new international airport (Centrair) provides easy access. Nagoya is one of Japan's major *shinkansen* stops on the Tōkaidō line; a separate *shinkansen* line links Tokyo with Nagano.

Travellers coming from Russia can arrive by sea. Ferries operated by **FKK Air Service** (☎ 0766-22-2212; <http://fkk-air.toyama-net.com> in Japanese; one-way adult/child from ¥27,600/18,000) travel between Fushiki in Toyama-ken and Vladivostok, departing Vladivostok on Monday at 6pm and arriving 39 hours later in Fushiki. From Japan ferries leave on Friday at 6pm, arriving in Russia on Sunday morning.

## Getting Around

Nagoya is Chūbu's transport hub. The mountainous inland is served by the JR Takayama and Chūō lines, roughly parallel from north to south with hubs in Takayama (Takayama line) and Matsumoto and Nagano (Chūō line). The JR Hokuriku line follows the coast along the Sea of Japan, linking Fukui, Kanazawa and Toyama.

Bus is the main form of transport in Chūbu's mountains, but schedules can be inconvenient or, between November and May, stop entirely (except for ski resorts).

For some destinations – particularly Notohantō, Shirakawa-gō and Gokayama – hiring a car makes sense.

## NAGOYA 名古屋

☎ 052 / pop 2.2 million

Japan's fourth-largest city, Nagoya is an industrial powerhouse; it's also the birthplace of *pachinko* (Japanese pinball). None of this marks Nagoya as a top-rank tourist destination, but it offers a worthy castle, museum and gardens, fine foods, and plenty of urban amusement, on a far more relaxed scale than Tokyo.

Despite its size, locals and expats alike take pride in the hometown character of this friendly city that's often overlooked on tourist itineraries. Nagoya is also a convenient base for day trips nearby and to Ise-jingū (p435).

## HISTORY

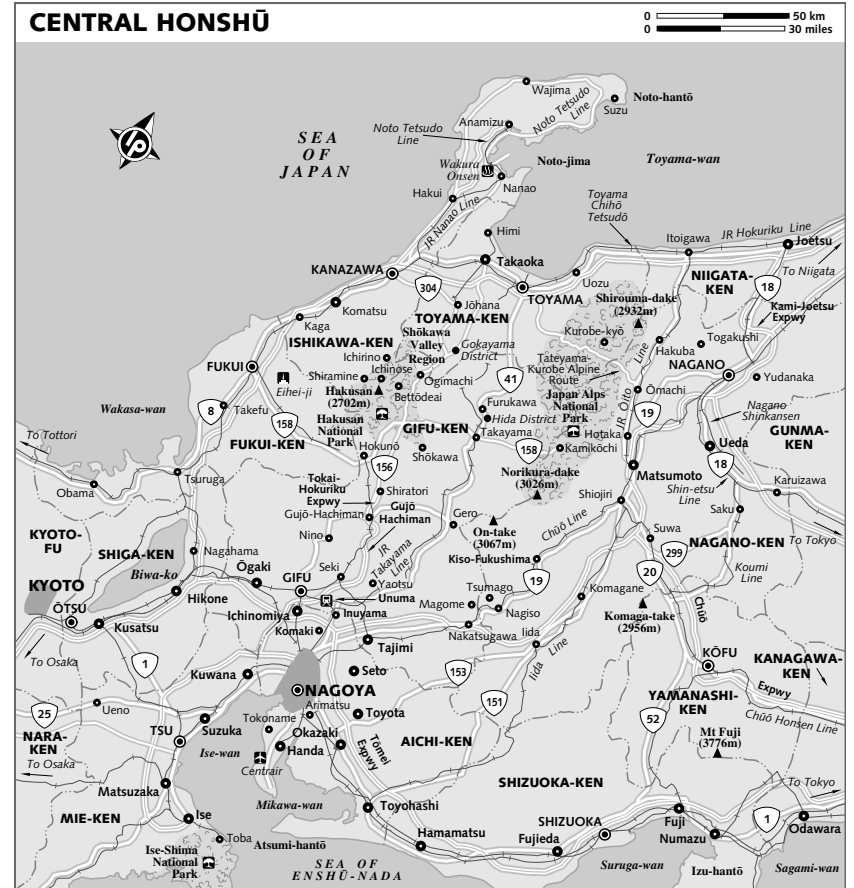
Nagoya did not become a unified city until 1889, but it had a strong influence for centuries before. It is the ancestral home of Japan's 'three heroes': Oda Nobunaga, the first unifier of Japan, followed by the *shōgun* Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu, whose dictatorial reign from Edo also ushered in an era of peace, prosperity and the arts. Ieyasu ordered the construction of Nagoya Castle, an important outpost for 16 generations of the family.

Nagoya grew into a commercial, financial, industrial, transport and shipping hub; during WWII some 10,000 Zero fighters were produced here. This manufacturing prominence led to massive Allied bombing – citizens were evacuated and roughly one quarter of the city was obliterated. The resulting blank slate allowed officials to plan the city you see today: wide avenues, subways, gleaming skyscrapers and green space.

Today Nagoya and its surrounding prefectures would rank among the top 10 economies worldwide. Leading industries include car manufacturing, machinery, electronics and ceramics, and one look at its many department stores shows the city's thriving commercial sector.

## ORIENTATION

On the western edge of the city centre, JR Nagoya station (known locally as Meieki) is



a city in itself with department stores, boutiques, restaurants, hotels and observation decks around the two semi-cylindrical 50-plus-storey JR Central Towers. Several train lines converge here. *Shinkansen* platforms are on the station's west side, other JR lines are in the centre, and on the east side are the private regional lines Meitetsu and Kintetsu, as well as subway and bus stations.

From the east exit, Sakura-dōri runs towards the massive TV tower, in the centre of the narrow Central Park (Hisaya-ōdōri-kōen). South and west of the TV tower are the Sakae and Nishiki districts, more atmospheric than Meieki and booming with shopping, dining and nightlife. The castle, Nagoya-jō, is just north of the city centre, while the Osu Kan-

non and, much further, Nagoya Port areas are to the south.

English-language signs make navigating Nagoya relatively easy.

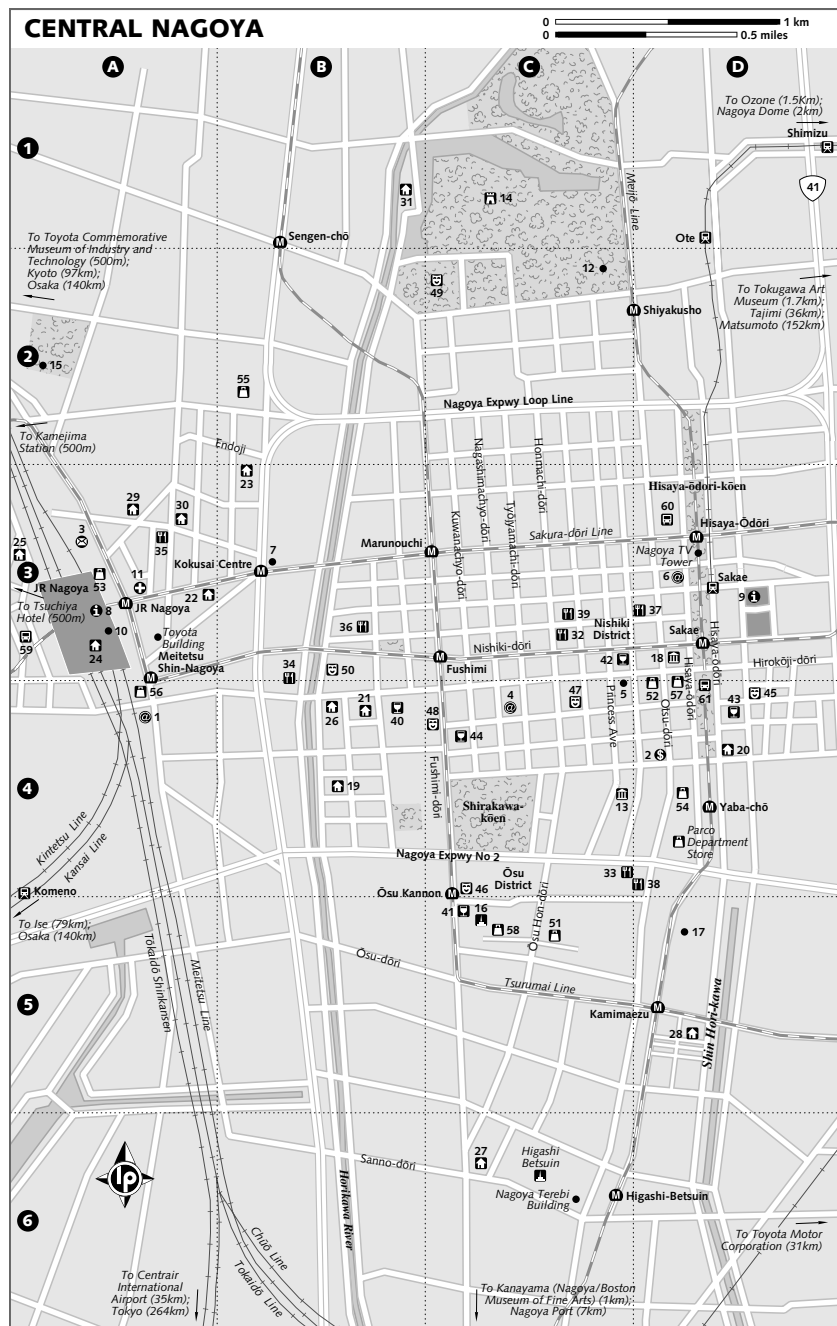
## INFORMATION Bookshops

Nagoya has English-language bookshops both in Sakae and Meieki.

**Kinokuniya Books** (Map p240; ☎ 585-7526; 5th fl, Meieki 1-2-1; ☎ 10am-8pm) In the Meitetsu Melsa building, two blocks west of Yaba-chō station.

**Maruzen** (Map p240; ☎ 261-2251; 3-2-7 Sakae; ☎ Sakae) On busy Hirokoji-dōri.

**Sanseidō** (Map p240; ☎ 450-6004; 1-1-4 Meieki; ☎ Nagoya) On the 11th floor of JR Takashimaya department store at Nagoya station.



CENTRAL HONSHŪ

CENTRAL HONSHŪ

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- Kinokuniya Books 紀伊国屋 ..... (see 56)
- Maruzen 丸善 ..... 5 C4
- Media Café Popeye ..... 6 D3
- Nagoya International Centre ..... 7 B3
- Nagoya Station Post Office ..... (see 10)
- Nagoya Tourist Information ..... 8 A3
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- Nagoya-jō 名古屋城 ..... 14 C1
- Noritake Garden ノリタケの森 ..... 15 A2
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**Emergency**

**Kyukyuiryō Jōhō Sentā** (Emergency Medical Information Centre; ☎ 263-1133) Advice (in Japanese only) on where to receive weekend and holiday emergency treatment.

**Nagoya International Centre** (Map p240; ☎ 581-0100; 1-47-1 Nagoya; ☎ 9am-8.30pm Tue-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun & holidays; ☎ Kokusai Centre) Provides emergency advice; the best place to call (English is spoken).

**Internet Access**

**Chikōraku** (Map p240; ☎ 587-2528; 1-25-2 Meieki; 1st hr ¥490; ☎ 24hr; ☎ Nagoya) In the basement of the Meitetsu Lejac building.

**Kinko's** (Map p240; ☎ 231-9211; 2-3-31 Sakae; 1st 10min ¥100, 1st hr ¥1100; ☎ 24hr; ☎ Fushimi station)

**Media Café Popeye** (Map p240; ☎ 955-0059; 3-6-15 Nishiki; per hr from ¥300; ☎ 24hr; ☎ Sakae). One block south of Hisaya-Ōdōri station, on the 3rd floor of the Tatenomachi building facing the TV tower.

**Nagoya International Centre** (Map p240; ☎ 581-0100; 1-47-1 Nagoya; per 15min ¥100; ☎ 9am-7pm Tue-Sun; ☎ Kokusai Centre)

**Internet Resources**

**Nagoya Convention and Visitors Bureau** (www.ncvb.or.jp) Good overview, including accommodation and transport.

**Nagoya International Centre** (www.nic-nagoya.or.jp) Up-to-date listings of local events, plus cultural and practical info.

**Medical Services**

Nagoya's Prefecture, **Aichi-ken** (☎ 249-9799; www.qq.pref.aichi.jp) has a list of medical institutions with English-speaking staff, including specialities and hours of operation.

**Tachino Clinic** (Map p240; ☎ 541-9130; Dai-Nagoya Bldg, 3-28-12 Meieki) Opposite the east exit of Nagoya station, with English-speaking staff.

**Money**

Citibank has some 24-hour Cirrus ATMs that are located in the Sugi building (☎ Sakae, exit 7), in the arrival lobby at Centrair airport, and also on the 33rd floor of the JR Nagoya Towers.

## Post

**Eki-mae post office** (Map p240) North of the station's east exit.

**Nagoya station post office** Off the main concourse.

## Tourist Information

Useful publications for visitors include *Live Map Nagoya*, a handy brochure with just about all the tourist information you'll need, the advertising-sponsored *Info Guide* and a public transport map. English-language listings publications include *Japanzine*, *Avenues* and *Nagoya Calendar*.

**Nagoya International Centre** (Map p240; ☎ 581-0100; 3rd fl, Kokusai Centre Bldg, 1-47-1, Nagono; ☎ 9am-8.30pm Tue-Sat, 8am-5pm Sun & holidays; ☎ Kokusai Centre station, exit 2) Has English-speaking staff and info on both Nagoya and regional destinations. There's a library, overseas TV newscasts and a bulletin board for postings.

**Nagoya Tourist Information** Nagoya station (Map p240; ☎ 541-4301; ☎ 9am-7pm) In the central concourse; Kanayama station (☎ 323-0161; ☎ 9am-7pm; ☎ Kanayama); Oasis 21 Building (Map p240; ☎ 963-5252; ☎ 10am-8pm; ☎ Sakae) In Sakae. All locations have at least one English speaker on hand.

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

### Nagoya Station Area

#### NORITAKE GARDEN ノリタケの森

Take a stroll around the tree-planted grounds of the original factory of one of Japan's best-known **porcelain makers** (Map p240; ☎ 561-7290; www.noritake-elec.com/garden; 3-1-36 Noritake-shinmachi; garden admission free; ☎ Kamejima). The **craft centre** (☎ 561-7114; adult/high school student/child & senior ¥500/300/free; ☎ 10am-5pm) offers a peek at the production process and a museum of old Noritake pieces, plus a chance to glaze your own dish (¥1500). The **Noritake Gallery** (☎ 562-9811; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) has changing exhibitions of paintings, sculpture and ceramic works. Signage is in English throughout the grounds.

Naturally, there are shopping opportunities including the Box outlet store, which offers a 40% discount on discontinued items.

#### TOYOTA COMMEMORATIVE MUSEUM OF INDUSTRY & TECHNOLOGY

トヨタテクノミュージアム産業技術記念館 Japan may be synonymous with cars these days, but Toyota, now the world's largest auto maker, started in another very Japanese industry: weaving. A short walk northwest

of Noritake Garden, this **museum** (Map p249; ☎ 551-6115; www.tcmitt.org; 4-1-35 Noritake-shinmachi; adult/child ¥500/300; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sat; ☎ Sako, Meitetsu Nagoya line) is on the site of the company's original Nagoya weaving plant (1911). It's filled with displays and demonstrations of metal processing and textile machinery, and hands-on experiences on principles of force, electronics and such, but the rubber meets the road in the 7900-sq-metre automotive pavilion. (See boxed text, p251, for information on factory tours.)

### Sakae Area

**ROBOT MUSEUM** ロボットミュージアム *Otaku* (geeks) will be in heaven, and just about anyone will find it fascinating. This appropriately futuristic **building** (Map p240; ☎ 0120-156-610; 3-25-20 Nishiki; adult/student/child ¥1300/1000/700; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat & Sun, closed 3rd Wed of month; ☎ Sakae, exit 9), near the heart of Sakae, is a legacy of the 2005 World Expo. A ground-floor gallery displays robots, art and robot-art, while the upstairs showcases robots both real and imaginary. English-language versions of the audio guide were in the works as we went to press. A large shop sells robots both practical and fanciful.

#### RAN NO YAKATA ORCHID GARDENS

##### ランの館

These **gardens** (Map p240; ☎ 243-0511; 4-4-1 Osu; adult/child ¥700/free; ☎ 10am-8pm Thu-Tue; ☎ Yaba-chō) contain more than 250 species of orchid, presented inside a greenhouse and a walled garden, with a path leading through the flowering plants. There are indoor and outdoor cafés.

#### INTERNATIONAL DESIGN CENTRE NAGOYA

##### 国際デザインセンター

Just a short walk from Sakae, the futuristic, swooping skyscraper Nadya Park houses this **museum** (Map p240; ☎ 265-2106; 4th fl, 3-18-1 Sakae; adult/student/child under 16 ¥300/200/free; ☎ 11am-8pm Wed-Mon; ☎ Yaba-chō, exit 5 or 6). It's a secular shrine to the deities of conceptualisation, form and function, from Art Deco to the present, from the Electrolux to Isamu Noguchi, from Arne Jacobsen to the Mini Cooper. Signage is in English.

Also in Nadya Park is the Loft department store, which design-shoppers will find equally alluring. Nadya Park is about five minutes' walk from Yaba-chō station.

## North of the City Centre

### NAGOYA-JŌ 名古屋城

Tokugawa Ieyasu ordered **Nagoya Castle** (Map p240; ☎ 231-1700; 1-1 Honmaru; adult/child under 15 yrs ¥500/100; ☎ 9am-4.30pm; ☎ Shiyakusho, exit 7) to be built for his ninth son on the site of an older castle, from 1610 to 1614. Although it was destroyed in WWII and replaced in 1959 with a ferroconcrete replica, it's worth a visit for the fine museum inside featuring armour, treasures and histories of the Oda, Toyotomi and Tokugawa families. A lift will save you climbing stairs. Note the 3m-long replicas of the famous *shachi-hoko*, gilded dolphinlike sea creatures, at either end of the roof (and in every souvenir shop).

Within the castle grounds, the garden, Ninomaru-en (二の丸園), has a teahouse in an attractive setting. It's lovely during the cherry-blossom season, and on Fridays ceremonial tea is served here from a golden urn (¥525). Nearby is the elegant **Nagoya Noh Theatre** (Map p240; ☎ 231-0088; 1-1-1 San-no-maru; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm), which has a small museum.

#### TOKUGAWA ART MUSEUM 徳川美術館

A must for anyone with even a passing interest in Japanese culture and history, this **museum** (Map p240; ☎ 935-6262; www.tokugawa-art-museum.jp; 1017 Tokugawa-chō; adult/senior/student/child/child under 7 ¥1200/1000/700/500/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) has a 10,000-plus piece collection that includes national treasures and important cultural properties that once belonged to the *shōgun* family: furnishings, arms and armour, tea-ceremony implements, calligraphy, painted scrolls, masks and costumes from the Nō theatre, and lacquerware. A priceless 12th-century scroll depicting *The Tale of Genji* (see p64) is locked away except for a short stint in late November; the rest of the year, visitors must remain content with a video.

The museum is three minutes' walk from the Tokugawaen-Shindeki bus stop, east of Nagoya-jō. Several buses serve the stop from the Nagoya station and Sakae areas.

## South of the City Centre

### ŌSU KANNON AREA 大須観音周辺

The much-visited **Ōsu Kannon temple** (admission free; ☎ 5.30am-7pm; ☎ Ōsu Kannon, exit 2) traces its roots back to 1333. The temple was considered so auspicious that Tokugawa Ieyasu ordered that it be moved here around 1610. Although the current buildings are 20th-century recon-

structions, it still retains a traditional atmosphere. It's not uncommon to hear chanting piped in throughout the temple grounds.

Osu is equally famous for the vibrant shopping district that draws bargain hunters. See Shopping (p247).

### ATSUTA-JINGŪ 熱田神宮

Hidden among 1000-year-old cypress trees, the 1900-year-old **Atsuta-jingū** (Map p249; ☎ 671-4151; www.atsutajingu.or.jp; 1-1-1 Jingū; admission free; ☎ 24hr; ☎ Jingū-mae, Meitetsu Honsen line or Jingu-nishi, exit 2) is one of the most sacred shrines in all of Shintō. It is said to house the *kusanagi-no-tsurgu* (sacred sword: literally, the 'grass-cutting sword'), one of the *sanshu no jingi* (three regalia) that were, according to legend, handed down to the imperial family by the goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami. (The other two are the curved jewels at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, p110, and the sacred mirror housed at Ise Jingū, p435.) You won't be able to view the regalia but don't feel left out; no one but the emperor and a few selected Shintō priests ever gets to see them.

There is a small **museum** (Treasure Hall; Hōmotsukan; ☎ 671-0852; adult/child ¥300/150; ☎ 9am-4.30pm, closed last Wed of month), housing Tokugawa-era swords, masks and paintings, including some important cultural properties.

The shrine is about three minutes' walk west from Jingū-mae station on the Meitetsu Nagoya Honsen line, or five minutes' walk east from Jingū-nishi station on the Meijō subway line.

### NAGOYA/BOSTON MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

#### 名古屋ボストン美術館

This excellent **museum** (Map p249; ☎ 684-0786; www.nagoya-boston.or.jp; 1-1-1 Kanayama-chō; adult/senior & student/child special & long-term exhibitions ¥1200/900/free, long-term exhibitions only ¥400/300/free; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun; ☎ Kanayama station JR, Meitetsu or Meijō subway lines) is a collaborative effort between Japanese backers and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Rotating exhibitions showcase both Japanese and non-Japanese masterpieces, and have good English signage.

The museum is to the right of the south exit of Kanayama Station.

### NAGOYA PORT AREA 名古屋港

Redeveloped to attract tourists, the **cargo port** (☎ Nagoya-kō station, Meijō subway line) now

boasts several attractions. The hi-tech **Port of Nagoya Public Aquarium** (Map p249; ☎ 654-7000; www.nagoyaaqua.jp; 1-3 Minatomachi; adult/child ¥2000/1000; ☎ 9.30am-8pm Tue-Sun 21 Jul-31 Aug, 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-20 Jul & Sep-Nov, 9.30am-5pm rest of year) is one of Japan's largest and it's generally a hit with kids. The **Port Building** (Map p249; ☎ 652-1111; 1-3 Minatomachi; ☎ 9museum .30am-5pm Tue-Sun) offers good views of the harbour and Ise Bay from 53m up and also contains a Maritime Museum on the 3rd floor and the Fuji Antarctic Exploration Ship outside. Admission to any of the Port Building attractions is ¥300/200 (adult/child) individually, ¥700/400 for all three, or ¥2400/1200 including the aquarium. Attractions are signposted in English.

Allow 30 minutes to reach Nagoya Port from Nagoya station by train.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

**Atsuta Matsuri** Displays of martial arts, sumō and fireworks in early June at Atsuta-jingū (p243).

**Tennō Matsuri** On the first Saturday and Sunday of June there's a parade of floats with large *karakuri* (mechanical puppets) around the shrine, Susano-jinja, near the Tokugawa Art Museum (p243).

**Nagoya Bashi sumō tournament** One of six annual championship tournaments, held on the first to third Sunday of July at Aichi Prefectural Gymnasium (Map p240; ☎ 962-9300; 1-1 Honmaru; seats from ¥2800). Arrive early in the afternoon to watch the lower-ranked wrestlers up close.

**Minato Matsuri** Street parade in Nagoya Port, around 20 July, with 1500-plus dancers, a water-logging contest dating back to the Edo period and fireworks.

**Nagoya Matsuri** At Hisaya-ōdōri-kōen, Nagoya's big annual event (mid-October) includes costume parades, processions of floats with *karakuri* puppets, folk dancing, music and a parade of decorated cars.

**Kiku-no-hana Taikai** Chrysanthemum Exhibition at Nagoya-jō in late October to late November. A *ningyō* (doll) pavilion incorporates the flowers into scenes from Japanese history and legend.

## SLEEPING

Accommodation in Nagoya is clustered around Nagoya station and Sakae. As a rule, Nagoya's ryokan do not have en-suite toilet or bathing facilities except as noted.

## Budget

**Aichi-ken Seinen-kaikan Youth Hostel** (Map p240; ☎ 221-6001; fax 204-3508; www.jyh.or.jp; 1-18-8 Sakae; dm ¥2992; ☎ Fushimi, exit 7) This central, 50-bed hostel is usually the first budget place to fill

up. It has dorms, private single rooms and Japanese-style family rooms. From the station, walk three blocks west and take a left after the Hilton, from where it's two blocks further south. Check-in is 3pm to 8pm, curfew 11pm.

**Kimiya Ryokan** (Map p240; ☎ 551-0498; fax 565-0465; hott@hotmail.com; 2-20-16 Nagano; r per person ¥4500; ☎; ☎ Kokusai Centre, exit 1) This friendly 14-room family-ryokan is good value for its tatami rooms. The best ones overlook the garden. Not much English is spoken, but the owners dispense a helpful map and prepare Japanese meals (extra charge). From the subway, walk north about five minutes. It's on the left; if you reach Endōji shopping arcade, you've passed it.

**Ryokan Meiryū** (Map p240; ☎ 331-8686; fax 321-6119; www.japan-net.ne.jp/~meiryu; 2-4-21 Kamimaezu; s/d ¥5250/8400; ☎ ☎; ☎ Kamimaezu, exit 3) This 22-room ryokan doesn't look like much from the outside, but inside it's quite professional, with friendly English-speaking staff, coin laundry, women's communal bath and a steam room in the men's. Home-style Japanese meals are available. From the station, walk along the street and take the first left. It's 1½ blocks down, on the left.

**Ryokan Marutame** (Map p240; ☎ 321-7130; fax 321-3626; www.jin.ne.jp/marutame; 2-6-17 Tachibana; s/tw/tr ¥5040/8820/11,340; ☎; ☎ Higashi Betsuin, exit 4) Narrow staircases testify to this ryokan's 50-plus-year history, yet it's modern with clean but basic rooms, English-speaking staff, coin-operated laundry and simple Japanese meals (extra charge). Try for the lovely private *hanare* (apart) room in the back garden. From the station, cross the street, walk past the Nagoya Terebi building and Higashi Betsuin temple and turn right. It's on the left.

The Nagoya station area also offers a couple of capsule hotels, although they're available for male visitors only. For approximately ¥3500, guests get a sarcophagus-sized cubicle with air vent and TV, and use of the common baths. Ask at tourist information offices for referrals.

## Midrange

**Petit Ryokan Ichifuji** (Map p249; ☎ 914-2867; fax 981-6836; www.jin.ne.jp/ichifuji; 1-7 Saikōbashi-dōri, kita-ku; s/d incl breakfast from ¥6100/9600; ☎ ☎ ☎; ☎ Heiandori, exit 2) Well worth the 20-minute subway ride from Nagoya station. It's dramatically lit, clean and comfortable with designer basins and a com-

munal cypress-wood bath. Japanese-Western fusion dinner is available with advance notice; after dinner the dining room turns into a little bar. From the station, walk south (right) for three minutes. The ryokan is signposted in English, down a gravel alley across from the Pola store.

**Toyoko Inn Nagoya-eki Sakura-dōri-guchi Shinkan** (Map p240; ☎ 562-1045; fax 562-1046; www.toyoko-inn.com; 3-9-16 Meieki; s/d or tw ¥6510/8610; ☎ ☎ ☎ wi-fi; ☎ Nagoya, Sakura-dōri exit) Everyone likes free stuff, and this new business hotel gives simple Japanese breakfast, water and coffee, internet access and even short phone calls...all before you leave the lobby. It's almost enough to make up for the microscopical rooms. Note: this is the *shinkan* (new building); there's an older building (*honkan*) diagonally across the street.

**Royne Hotel Nagoya** (Map p240; ☎ 212-1055; fax 212-1077; www.royne.co.jp; 1-2-7 Sakae; s/d/tw from ¥7800/10,800/15,500; ☎ ☎ ☎; ☎ Fushimi, exit 7) This new business hotel offers relatively large, spic-n-span rooms in a handsome shell, with darkwood furniture, hi-tech desk lamps and English-language news on flat-panel TVs. Rates quoted here are 'member' rates; become a member on registration. It's four minutes' walk from the station, past the Hilton along Hirokōji-dōri.

**B Nagoya** (Map p240; ☎ 241-1500; fax 264-1732; www.ishinhotels.com; 4-15-23 Sakae; s/d or tw from ¥8800/12,000; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎; ☎ Sakae, exit 13) Finally, a hotel in Sakae that's as stylish as it is functional. Opened in 2006, its rooms make up in panache (think PJs with piping and embroidered logos) for what they lack in space. Buffet breakfast is a bargain at ¥500.

**Tsuchiya Hotel** (Map p249; ☎ 451-0028, toll-free 0120-144-028; fax 451-9361; www.tsuchiya-hotel.co.jp; 1-1-2 Meieki; per person from ¥8400; ☎ ☎ ☎; ☎ Nagoya, west exit) This Tsuchiya oozes character despite its nondescript neighbourhood. Craft-style tiles line the hallways to Japanese-style rooms. Some have private facilities, but you'll want to use the common baths: a pottery tub in this region's famous *Mino-yaki* style for the ladies or stone for the gents. Meals and station pickup available with advance notice.

**Hotel Castle Plaza** (Map p240; ☎ 581-2121; fax 582-8666; www.castle.co.jp/plaza; 4-3-25 Meikei; s/d or tw from ¥10,972/15,015; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎; ☎ Heiandori, exit) A sane, reasonably priced choice a few minutes east of Nagoya station. Kind, efficient and English-speaking staff; the café-bar has a

retro-mod mid-century charm; and there's a fitness club with swimming pool.

**Natural Hotel Elséreine** (Map p240; ☎ 459-5344, toll free 0120-793-489; fax 453-7188; www.htl-el.com; 1-23 Tsubaki-cho; s/tw from ¥11,500/18,480; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎; ☎ Nagoya, west exit) Walk past those drab business hotels out Meieki's west exit to this new, gracious, all-nonsmoking hotel. Beds of flowering plants grace the lobby. Rooms, while not breaking any size records, are comfy and sparkling clean.

## Top End

**Hilton Nagoya** (Map p240; ☎ 212-1111, toll-free 0120-489-852; fax 212-1225; www.hilton.com; 1-3-3 Sakae; s/d from ¥16,500/23,500; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ wi-fi; ☎ Fushimi, exit 7) You are greeted by a soaring lobby with piano player and manicured shrubs. Western-style rooms have Japanese touches like *shoji* and blackout panels on the windows. There's a well-equipped fitness centre and great views from the top-storey bar.

**Sofitel the Cypress Nagoya** (Map p240; ☎ 571-0111; fax 569-1717; www.sofitelthecypress.com; 2-43-6 Meieki; s/d from ¥20,000/25,000; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎; ☎ Nagoya) A quiet atmosphere prevails steps from Meieki in this 115-room European-style hotel. Deluxe doubles offer extra space and interesting layouts. From Nagoya station, exit on the Sakura-dōri side, turn left and cross by the post office.

**Pick Nagoya Marriott Associa Hotel** (Map p240; ☎ 584-1111; fax 584-1112; www.associa.com/english/nma; 1-1-2 Meieki; s/d from ¥20,000/28,000; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎; ☎ Nagoya) The Marriott literally begins where other hotels leave off. The palmy lobby (accessed via elevator from Nagoya station) is on the 15th floor, and 774 spacious rooms start from the 20th, fitted with deluxe everything. The 18th-storey gym has views across the city.

**Westin Nagoya Castle** (Map p240; ☎ 521-2121; fax 531-3313; www.castle.co.jp; 3-19 Hinokuchi-cho; s/d from ¥16,000/33,000; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎; ☎ Sengen-chō) You can't get closer to Nagoya-jō than this, across the moat. The Castle is popular with executives for its 'heavenly beds', spacious bathrooms, fitness facilities and restaurants. Look for web-only specials. Shuttle bus to/from Nagoya station.

## EATING

Nagoya is famous for local specialities which, unlike elsewhere in Japan, are also palatable to non-Japanese tastes. *Kishimen* are flat, hand-made noodles; *miso-nikomi udon* is noodles in

heartily miso broth, and *miso-katsu* is breaded, fried pork cutlet with miso sauce. *Kōchin* (free-range chicken) and *hitsumabushi* (*unagi* – eel – sets) are also popular, and there's plenty of international fare.

Sakae has the best restaurant browsing.

**Yamamotoya-Sōhonke** (Map p240; ☎ 222-0253; 2-2-16 Nishiki; dishes ¥924-1606; ☎ 11am-midnight Sun-Thu, 11am-3am Fri & Sat; ☎ Sakae) Since 1925 Yamamotoya has been dishing out *miso-nikomi udon*. The branch near Sakae is open good and late.

**Ebisuya** (Map p240; ☎ 961-3412; 3-20-7 Sakae; dishes from ¥650; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; ☎ Sakae) One of the city's best-known *kishimen* chains, Ebisuya has a laid-back atmosphere and tasty, inexpensive bowls of noodles, which you can often catch chefs making. Picture menu available.

**Torigin Honten** (Map p240; ☎ 973-3000; 3-14-22 Nishiki; dishes ¥450-1750; ☎ dinner; E; ☎ Sakae) For top *kōchin*, Torigin has been going strong for decades. Chicken is served in many forms, including *kushiyaki* (skewered), *kara-age* (deep-fried chicken pieces), *zōsui* (mild rice hotpot) and sashimi (what you think it is). Individual dishes are a bit dainty for the price, but *teishoku* (set menus; from ¥3000) are more substantial. It's next door to Sabatani.

**Yabaton** (Map p240; ☎ 252-8810; 3-6-18 Ōsu; dishes ¥735-1365; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun; E; ☎ Yaba-chō, exit 4) Throw dietary caution to the wind at this spotless, workmanlike local institution for *miso-katsu* since 1947. *Waraji-tonkatsu* is a cutlet flattened to big-as-your-head, or try *kami-korokke* (crab croquettes). *Yabaton-salada* (boiled pork with miso sesame sauce over vegetables) is almost good for you. Look for the pig-in-an-apron logo.

**Misen** (Map p240; ☎ 238-7357; 3-6-3 Ōsu; dishes ¥580-1680; ☎ 5.30pm-2am; ☎ Yaba-chō, exit 4) Around the corner from Yabaton, Misen has little atmosphere and no English menu, but the *Taiwan ramen* (¥580) induces rapture, a spicy concoction of ground meat, chilli, garlic and green onion, served over noodles in a hearty clear broth. Other faves include *gomoku mame-itame* (stir-fried green beans with meat; ¥800) and *mabō-dōfu* (tofu in spicy meat sauce; ¥700).

**Atsuta Horaiken** (Map p249; ☎ 682-5598; 2-10-26 Jingu, Atsuta-ku; mains ¥1680-2520; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon; E; ☎ Temma-chō) Near Atsuta Shrine, this revered *hitsumabushi* shop has been in business since 1873. Expect a long queue during the summer peak season for Horaiken's

charcoal-grilled eel, basted in a secret *tare* (sauce) and served atop rice in a lacquered box. Set menus (from ¥2520) include sides like green onion and wasabi for making *ochazuke* (tea-based broth).

**Tarafuku** (Map p240; ☎ 566-5600; 3-17-26 Meieki; dishes ¥400-800, omakase course from ¥3000; ☎ dinner; ☎ Nagoya) Ambitious, young gourmets have turned the *izakaya* (Japanese pub) concept on its head, installing a stainless-steel kitchen in a falling-down house. Fusion dishes include airy potato croquettes in a fried tofu crust; tomato and eggplant au gratin; house-cured ham, or beef in wine sauce. There are 150-plus varieties of wine, plus *shochu*, sake and 50-plus cocktails. It's diagonally across from both Tōyoko Inns.

**Nanaya Colonial** (Map p240; ☎ 587-5778; 5-24-1 Meieki; dishes ¥480-980; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner; E; ☎ Fushimi, exit 8) This fashionable restaurant overlooking the Hori-kawa serves beautifully presented Pan-Asian dishes to match its Asian-modern style. Among the eclectic choices: Chinese yam with scallops, rare tuna steak and grilled eel with rice. Open 'til midnight for stylish drinks, too.

**Tiger Café** (Map p240; ☎ 220-0031; 1-8-26 Nishiki; sandwiches/lunch specials from ¥500/800; E; ☎ 11am-3am Mon-Sat, 11am-midnight Sun; ☎ Fushimi) Fashionistas grace the windows of this re-creation of a Parisian bistro, with tiled floors, sidewalk seating and Deco details. Smoked salmon sandwich and the *croque-monsieur* (toasted ham and cheese sandwich) are favourites, as are the good-value lunch specials.

## DRINKING

**Heaven's Door** (Map p240; ☎ 971-7080; 3-23-10 Nishiki; ☎ 6pm-4am Tue-Sun; ☎ Sakae, exit 8) Probably Nagoya's best bar, Heaven's Door follows a simple recipe: cosy ambience, friendly staff and fantastic music (all vinyl, no less). Rolling Stones fans should visit just to see the loo. From Sakae station, walk one block west down Nishiki-dōri and take a left. It's on the right, down the stairs next to CoCo Curry House.

**Eric Life** (Map p240; ☎ 222-1555; 2-11-18 Ōsu; ☎ noon-midnight Thu-Tue; ☎ Ōsu Kannon, exit 2) Minimalist and kitsch-free café behind Ōsu Kannon, perfect for chilling over a coffee, cocktail or snack. Being in the Ōsu district it gets a youngish crowd.

**Shooters** (Map p240; ☎ 202-7077; 2-9-26 Sakae; ☎ 5pm-3am Mon-Fri, 11.30am-3am Sat & Sun; ☎ Fushimi, exit 5) This US-style sports bar attracts a mostly

*gaijin* (foreign), mostly raucous crowd. Japanese and foreign staff pour daily drink specials, and the menu includes burgers, pasta and Tex-Mex.

**Elephant's Nest** (Map p240; ☎ 232-4360; 1-4-3 Sakae; ☎ 5.30pm-1am Sun-Thu, 5.30am-2am Fri & Sat; ☎ Fushimi, exit 7) Near the Hilton, Elephant's Nest is another favourite expat haunt, with a welcoming vibe, darts and traditional English fare. It's on the 2nd floor.

**Red Rock Bar & Grill** (Map p240; ☎ 262-7893; 4-14-6 Sakae; ☎ 5.30pm until late Tue-Sun) In Sakae, the Aussie-owned Red Rock has a warm ambience and plenty of tasty pub food.

## ENTERTAINMENT

Nagoya's nightlife might not match Tokyo's or Osaka's, but what it lacks in scale it makes up for in ebullience.

For movie listings in English, [www.nagoya-movies.com](http://www.nagoya-movies.com) has detailed info including maps showing the theatres. Check English-language listings magazines for dates and times of clubs. The website [www.mangafrog.com](http://www.mangafrog.com) also has updated club gig listings.

**Misono-za** (☎ 222-1481; [www.misonoza.co.jp](http://www.misonoza.co.jp) in Japanese; 1-6-14 Sakae; ☎ Fushimi, exit 6) The city's venue for kabuki theatre in April and October, although it does not have the translation facilities of theatres in other cities.

**Nagoya Noh Theatre** (Map p240; ☎ 231-0088; 1-1-1 San-no-maru) In the grounds of Nagoya-jō.

**Nagoya Dome** (Map p249; ☎ 719-2121; ☎ Nagoya Dome-mae Yada) Baseball fans will want to visit this 45,000-seat stadium, home of the Chunichi Dragons baseball team. Large concerts also take place here.

**Electric Lady Land** (☎ 201-5004; [www.ell.co.jp](http://www.ell.co.jp) in Japanese; 2-10-43 Ōsu; ☎ Ōsu Kannon, exit 2) An intimate concert venue purveying the underground music scene in a cool post-industrial setting. Nationally known bands perform in the 1st-floor hall, while the 3rd floor sees more up-and-coming acts.

**Club JB's** (Map p240; ☎ 241-2234; [www.shs-city.com/jbs](http://www.shs-city.com/jbs); 4-3-15 Sakae) Club kids (20 and over) come for an excellent sound system and famous DJs.

**Emporium** (Map p240; ☎ 269-1731; [www.statexs.co.jp/english/index.html](http://www.statexs.co.jp/english/index.html); 3-10-14 Sakae, 9th floor Lion Bldg Sakae) An English owner brings a bit of Brit-club culture to Nagoya. Salarimen are known to frequent the place, but don't let that put you off. The interior and sound system are primo.

**Shu** (Map p240; ☎ 223-3788; [www.geocities.com/mensbar\\_shu\\_japan](http://www.geocities.com/mensbar_shu_japan); 10-15 Nishiki 1-chome; ☎ Wed-Mon;

☎ Fushimi, exit 7) There aren't a whole lot of options for gay visitors to Nagoya (especially those from overseas), but this bar for gay men, opened earlier this decade, welcomes all ages and nationalities.

## SHOPPING

Nagoya and the surrounding area are known for arts and crafts, including *Arimatsu-narumi shibori* (elegant tie-dyeing from Arimatsu, p248), cloisonné, ceramics and *Seki* blades (swords, knives, scissors etc).

The streets around the Ōsu Kannon temple host some of Nagoya's most enthusiastic browsers. Along Ōsu Kannon-dōri and its continuation, Banshō-ji-dōri, a youthful energy fills vintage clothing shops, electronics and music shops, cafés and a hodge-podge of old and new; look for **yen=g** (Map p240; ☎ 218-2122; 2-20-25 Ōsu), which sells used clothing by weight, or **Kurazanmai** (Map p240; ☎ 0120-553-584; 3-25-25 Ōsu) for discount kimono, obi and accessories (though still not *cheap-cheap*). Just east of this district, Ōtsu-dōri is called the Akihabara of Nagoya for its proliferation of manga shops. The temple itself hosts a colourful antique market on the 18th and 28th of each month, while the temple **Higashi-Betsuin** (Map p240; ☎ 321-9201; ☎ Higashi Betsuin, exit 4) has a flea market on the 12th of each month.

The speciality in the Meidōchō district, north of Nagoya station and west of Nagoya-jō, is *okashi*, Japanese snacks and penny nibbles (*sembei* rice crackers to sweet-potato sticks, dried fish to sponge cake), plus small toys like action figures, beads and balloons. Dozens of wholesalers display their wares in a manner that may dispel any notion of Japanese neatness.

Other major shopping districts are in Sakae and around Nagoya station with malls above ground and below. For crafts, browse in the giant department stores, such as Matsuzakaya (two locations, next to Nagoya station and in Sakae), Maruei and Mitsukoshi in Sakae, or Takashimaya or Meitetsu & Kintetsu near Nagoya station.

For more shopping possibilities, see Noritake Garden (p242).

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

Nagoyans rave about **Central Japan International Airport (Centrair)** (NGO; ☎ 0569-38-1195; [www.centrair](http://www.centrair)



.jp/en/), the city's newest gateway. It opened in 2005 on a manmade island in Ise-wan (Ise Bay), 35km south of the city, with a shopping mall and *onsen* bath in the building. Coming from Tokyo, the *shinkansen* is generally quicker (two hours) than flying.

Nagoya is well served by about 30 airlines from around the world. Some 430 flights per week connect Centair with 32 international cities (in Europe, North America, Australia and especially Asia) and 22 Japanese cities. Check with travel agents for the latest schedules and fares. Note that if you're coming from Tokyo, Osaka or Kyoto, the *shinkansen* is quicker than flying once you add in airport transfers and such.

### Boat

**Taiheiyō ferry** (☎ 582-8611) runs between Nagoya and Tomakomai (Hokkaidō, from ¥9400, 38½ hours) via Sendai (from ¥6100, 21 hours) every second evening at 8pm. Take the Meijō subway south to its terminus at Nagoya-kō Station and head for Nagoya port.

### Bus

**JR and Meitetsu Highway buses** (☎ 563-0489) operate services between Nagoya and Kyoto (¥2500, 2½ hours, hourly), Osaka (¥2900, three hours, hourly), Kanazawa (¥4060, four hours, 10 daily) and Tokyo (¥5100, six hours, 14 daily). Overnight buses run to Hiroshima (¥8400, nine hours).

### Train

Nagoya is a major *shinkansen* hub, including *Nozomi* trains, with fares and times as follows: Tokyo (¥10,580, two hours), Osaka (¥6380, one hour), Kyoto (¥5440, 44 minutes) and Hiroshima (¥13,530, three hours). The Kintetsu line also has indirect services to Nara (*tokkyū*, ¥3750, 2¼ hours), though services are faster via *shinkansen* with a transfer in Kyoto.

To the Japan Alps, you can take the JR Chūō line to Nagano (Shinano *tokkyū*, ¥7330, 2¾ hours) via Matsumoto (¥6070, two hours). A separate line serves Takayama (Hida *tokkyū*, ¥6070, 2¼ hours).

### GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Central Japan International Airport is accessible from Nagoya station via the Meitetsu Kūkō (Airport) line. Express trains take 28 minutes (¥870).

### Bus

Trains run a few times per hour between central Nagoya and the airport terminal. We can't imagine why you'd want to take the bus, but some 17 buses a day run between the airport and Nagoya Station area (¥1500, 80 minutes). Alternatively, you can expect to pay as much as ¥13,100 from central Nagoya by taxi.

### Subway

Nagoya's **Transportation Bureau** ([www.kotsu.city.nagoya.jp](http://www.kotsu.city.nagoya.jp)) operates an excellent subway system with six lines, clearly signposted in English and Japanese. The most useful lines for visitors are the Meijō (purple), Higashiyama (yellow) and Sakura-dōri (red) lines. The last two serve Nagoya station. Fares cost ¥200 to ¥320. If you plan to do a lot of travel by bus and subway, a one-day pass (¥850, ¥740 for subway only), available at subway stations, includes all transport plus discounted admission to many attractions. On Saturday and Sunday the *donichi eco-kippu* (Saturday-Sunday eco-ticket) gives the same benefits for ¥600.

## AROUND NAGOYA

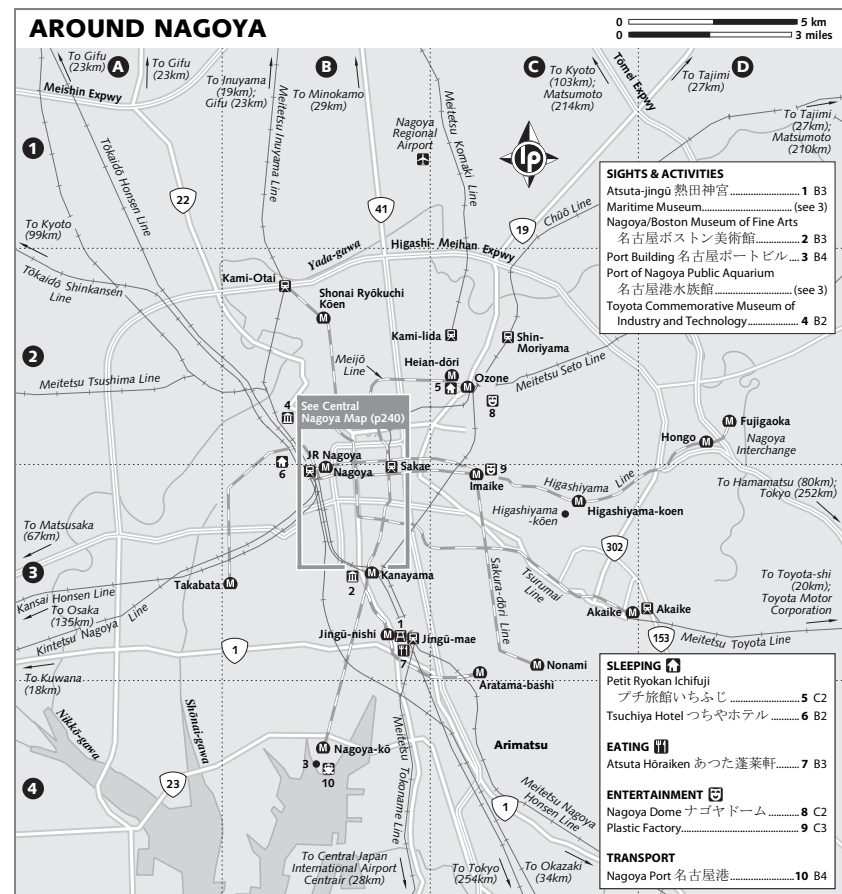
### 名古屋近辺

The main destinations in this area, consisting of outlying Aichi-ken and southern Gifu-ken, are easy day trips from Nagoya. Inuyama has a National Treasure castle and some worthwhile side trips, and both Inuyama and the city of Gifu are famed for *ukai* (cormorant fishing), in which the trained birds, with cords around their necks, dive for river trout and smelts. Gujō-Hachiman is an attractive mountain town crisscrossed by rivers and is the workshop of the nation's plastic food samples.

### ARIMATSU 有松 ☎ 052

For centuries, this suburb southeast of central Nagoya has been famous for the art of *shibori* (tie-dyeing). No 1960s flower-power here: Arimatsu *shibori* artists tie cotton threads to create precise patterns. The tiny boxes of the *kanoko* (fawn spot) pattern are perhaps the most recognisable style, but there over 100 others. To tie and dye the fabric for a full kimono takes four to six months.

At the **Arimatsu-Narumi Shibori Kaikan** (有松鳴海絞会館; Tie-Dyeing Museum; ☎ 621-0111; www



.shibori-kaikan.com/kaikan-e.html; admission free, film & exhibitions adult/child ¥300/100; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Thu-Tue), a video in English explains the process and artisans are on hand to demonstrate. Shops at the museum and along the main street sell *shibori* products.

Floats used in the town's festival feature *kakakuri* depicting – wait for it – *shibori*. The oldest float dates from 1674, and you can see one on display at the small **Arimatsu Dashi Kaikan** (有松山車会館; Festival Float Museum; ☎ 621-3000; admission ¥200; ☎ 9am-4pm).

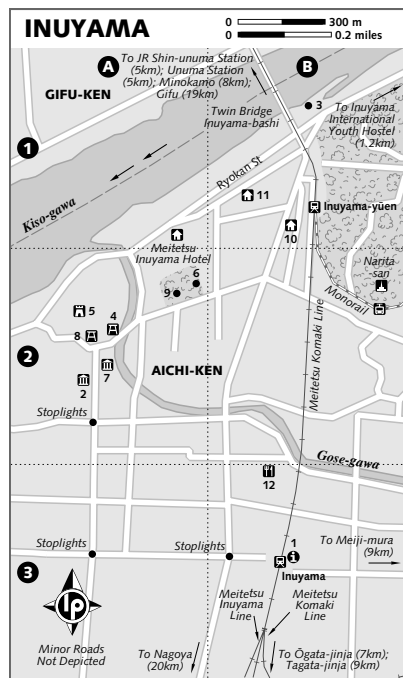
Arimatsu was also a stop along the Tōkaidō (see boxed text, p189); you can see it in Hiroshige's 53 Views of the Tōkaidō. The main street, with its Edo-period wooden structures including some historic merchant homes,

has been designated a historic preservation zone.

Arimatsu is a stop on the Meitetsu Nagoya line from Meitetsu-Nagoya station (¥340, 20 minutes, frequent departures). From the station, turn left onto the street perpendicular to the tracks and another left at the first corner (at Shinseidō bookstore).

### INUYAMA 犬山 ☎ 0568 / pop 71,800

Dubbed the 'Japan Rhine' by a 19th-century geologist, Inuyama's Kiso River sets a picturesque scene beneath the town's striking castle. At night the setting becomes all the more cinematic as fishermen come to practise *ukai*. By day, Inuyama's quaint streets, its manicured



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SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Artefacts Museum 犬山市文化資料館	2 A2
Cormorant Fishing Pier 鶺鴒棧橋	3 B1
Haritsuna Jinja 針綱神社	4 A2
Inuyama-jō 犬山城	5 A2
Jo-an Teahouse 茶室如安	6 A2
Marionette (Karakuri) Exhibition	7 A2
Room からくり展示館	8 A2
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restoration to remain an excellent example of Momoyama-period architecture. Stone walls reach 5m high, and inside are narrow, steep staircases and military displays. There's a fine view of mountains and plains from the top storey.

The castle is a 15-minute walk to the west of Inuyama-yūen station (20 minutes northwest from Inuyama station). Just south are the shrines **Haritsuna Jinja** and **Sankō-Inari Jinja**, the latter with interesting statues of *komainu* (protective dogs).

**MARIONETTE (KARAKURI) EXHIBITION ROOM & ARTEFACTS MUSEUM** からくり展示館・犬山市文化資料館  
Included in your admission ticket to Inuyama-jō are these two collections.

One block south of the castle, the **Marionette (Karakuri) Exhibition Room** (☎ 61-3932; admission purchased separately ¥100; ☎ 9am-5pm) contains a small display of Edo- and Meiji-era puppets. On Saturday and Sunday you can see the wooden characters in action (10.30am and 2pm).

To see the puppets as they were meant to be used, visit during the **Inuyama Matsuri** (Inuyama Festival, first Saturday and Sunday in April), designated an Intangible Cultural Asset by the Japanese government. Dating back to 1650, the festival features a parade of 13 three-tiered floats decked out with lanterns and *karakuri*, which perform to music. At night, it's lit by 365 lanterns.

Nearby, the **Artefacts Museum** (☎ 65-1728; admission purchased separately ¥100; ☎ 9am-5pm) has one of the festival floats on display.

## URAKU-EN & JO-AN TEAHOUSE

有楽園・茶室如安

The garden **Uraku-en** (☎ 61-4608; admission ¥1000; ☎ 9am-5pm Mar-Nov, 9am-4pm Dec-Feb) is 300m east of Inuyama-jō, in a corner of the grounds of the Meitetsu Inuyama Hotel. One of the finest teahouses in Japan and a National Treasure, **Jo-an** was built in 1618 in Kyoto by Oda Urakusai, a younger brother of Oda Nobunaga, and it spent time in Tokyo and Kanagawa prefecture before moving here in 1972.

Urakusai was a renowned tea master who founded his own tea-ceremony school. He was also a closet Christian whose adopted name (the Portuguese 'João') was bestowed on the teahouse. Visitors may peek into the teahouse but are not allowed inside, except for four days in March and November.

## CORMORANT FISHING 鶺鴒い

*Ukai* takes place close to Inuyama-yūen station, by Twin-Bridge Inuyama-bashi. Book your ticket at the Inuyama tourist office in the morning or at the **dock office** (☎ 61-0057; Jul & Aug from ¥2800, Jun & Sep from ¥2500), near the cormorant-fishing pier.

Boats depart nightly at 5.30pm from June to August, with the show starting around 7.45pm. In September boats depart at 5pm, with things kicking off at 7.15pm.

## FAMOUS FACTORIES FOR FREE

Nagoya is the hub of a major industrial centre and visitors have a unique opportunity to visit some of the world's leading manufacturers. Bookings are required.

As we went to press, Toyota Motor Corporation had its first quarter outselling GM as the world's largest auto-maker. Two-hour tours of its main plant in Toyota city depart from the **Toyota Kaikan Exhibition Hall** (☎ 0565-23-3922; fax 0565-23-5712; www.toyota.co.jp/en/about\_toyota/facility/toyota\_kaikan; ☎ 11am Mon-Fri). Tours are by reservation only and must be booked at least two weeks in advance. Check the website for details and directions; allow at least one hour to get to Toyota city from central Nagoya. See also Toyota Commemorative Museum of Industry and Technology (p242).

The Nagoya brewery of **Asahi Beer** (☎ 052-792-8966; fax 052-792-8967; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-3pm, closed irregularly most days) welcomes visitors for 1¼ hours. Sample the wares for the tour's final 20 minutes; woo-hoo! Request about one week in advance for English guidance. Take the JR Chūō line to Shinmoriyama station; it's a 15-minute walk.

The town of Okazaki, southeast of Nagoya, is the home of *hatchō* miso, a 600-year-old recipe for an especially healthful miso variety. **Hatchō Miso no Sato** (☎ 0564-21-1355; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-6pm) claims to be the world's most popular miso museum, although we're not sure there's a heck of a lot of competition. Production here is low-tech: 2m-tall cedar vats where miso is fermented as in days of old: three years with lids weighted down by stones. Book for tours in English at least one week in advance. From Nagoya, Meitetsu Honsen line trains serve Okazaki-Koen-Mae (¥650, 40 minutes); you may have to change trains at Chiryu.

If none of that starts your motor, visit www.sangyokanko.jp for more ideas.

Uraku-en garden and 17th-century teahouse make for a day trip from Nagoya after exploring its castle. Other attractions include the architecture of Meiji-mura Museum, shooting the rapids down the Kiso-gawa and some rather racy shrines.

## Orientation & Information

The castle and *ukai* area are within easy walking distance of Inuyama-yūen station on the Meitetsu Komaki line. However, the **tourist information office** (☎ 61-6000; ☎ 9am-5pm) is in Inuyama station, one stop south, where the Meitetsu Komaki line meets up with the Meitetsu Inuyama line. It has useful English-language pamphlets and maps, and can book accommodation. On the web, visit www.city.inuyama.aichi.jp/english/index.html.

## Sights & Activities

### INUYAMA-JŌ 犬山城

A national treasure, Japan's oldest **castle** (☎ 61-1711; adult/child ¥500/100; ☎ 9am-5pm) is said to have originated with a fort in 1440; the current donjon (main keep) dates from 1537 and has withstood war, earthquake and

## KISO-GAWA RAPIDS TRIP

Flat-bottomed wooden boats shoot the rapids on a 13km section of the Kiso-gawa. With many daily departures, the ride takes an hour and costs ¥3400/1700 for adults/children; it entails little risk, except of a soaking. Contact **Nihon Rhein Kankō** (☎ 0574-28-2727; ☎ mid-Mar-late Nov).

## Festivals & Events

In addition to the **Inuyama Festival** (first weekend in April; opposite), the city also hosts the summer **Nihon Rhine Festival**, every 10 August on the banks of the river, culminating in fireworks.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Inuyama International Youth Hostel** (犬山国際ユースホステル; ☎ 61-1111; fax 61-2770; tatami r/s/d ¥3700/5800, Western-style tw ¥6400) Inuyama's cheapest option (25 minutes' walk northeast of Inuyama-yūen station – access it from along the river) has comfortable rooms, friendly staff and a stone bath. Reservations recommended. Meals available by advance notice – and recommended (no restaurants nearby).

**Minshuku Yayoi** (☎ /fax 61-0751; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥6300; ☎ ) Across from Inuyama-yūen station, this friendly inn has simple but comfy tatami rooms and shared bathrooms. Prides itself on its home cooking.



**Rinkō-kān** (☎ 61-0977; fax 61-2505; rinkokan@triton.ocn.ne.jp; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥12,750; ☺) Overlooking the river, this cheery, flower-filled hot-spring hotel has handsome Japanese rooms. It is known for its fabulous stone baths, *rotemburo* (open-air baths), Jacuzzi and local cuisine.

**Narita** (なりた多; ☎ 61-0120; courses from ¥2000; ☺ lunch & dinner) Chichi French restaurant in a cultural heritage building. Weekday lunches are a good deal, including hors d'oeuvres, soup, main and coffee. It's near the Gozegawa, a block west of the Inuyama Miyako Hotel.

### Getting There & Away

Inuyama is connected with Nagoya (¥540, 30 minutes) and Shin-Gifu station in Gifu city (¥440, 35 minutes) via the Meitetsu Inuyama line. JR travellers can connect via Gifu to Unuma (¥320, 20 minutes) and walk across the river from Inuyama.

### AROUND INUYAMA 犬山近辺 Museum Meiji-mura 明治村

Few Meiji-period buildings have survived war, earthquake or rapid development, but this open-air museum (☎ 67-0314; www.meijimura.com; 1 Uchiyama; adult/senior/student/elementary & junior high school student ¥1600/1200/1000/600; ☺ 9.30am-5pm Mar-Oct, 9.30am-4pm Nov-Feb, closed Mon Dec-Feb) has brought together more than 65 of them from all over Japan. Opened in 1965, this museum houses one-time public offices, private homes and banks, as well as some trains and buses. Among them is the entryway designed by Frank Lloyd Wright for Tokyo's Imperial Hotel (since replaced by a more generic version), the home of Sōseki Natsume (the novelist whose image appears on the ¥1000 bill) and early Kyoto trams. Note the coming-together of Western and Japanese architectural styles. Allow at least half a day to enjoy it at an easy pace.

A bus to Meiji-mura (¥410, 20 minutes) departs every 30 minutes from Inuyama station's east exit.

### Ōgata-jinja 大縣神社

This 2000-year-old shrine (☎ 67-1017) is dedicated to the female Shintō deity Izanami and draws women devotees seeking marriage or fertility. The precincts of the shrine contain rocks and other items resembling female genitals.

The popular **Hime-no-Miya Grand Festival** takes place here on the Sunday before 15 March (or on 15 March if it's a Sunday). Locals pray for good harvests and prosperity by parading through the streets bearing a *mikoshi* (portable shrine) with replicas of female genitals.

Ōgata-jinja is a 30-minute walk southeast of Gakuden station on the Meitetsu Komaki line.

### Tagata-jinja 田県神社

Izanagi, the male counterpart of Izanami, is commemorated at this shrine (☎ 76-2906). The main hall has a side building containing a collection of phalluses, left as offerings by grateful worshippers.

The **Tagata Hōnen Sai Festival** takes place on 15 March at the Tagata-jinja when the highly photogenic 2m-long, 60kg 'sacred object' is paraded, amid much mirth, around the neighbourhood. Arrive well before the procession starts at 2pm.

Tagata-jinja is five minutes' walk west of Tagata-jinja-mae station, one stop south of Gakuden station on the Meitetsu Komaki line.

### Yaotsu 八百津 ☎ 0574 / pop 13,500

This Kiso River town has become a pilgrimage site as the birthplace of Sugihara Chiune (1900–86), Japan's consul in Lithuania during early WWII. Sugihara saved some 6000 Jews from the Nazis by issuing transit visas against Japanese government orders; the 'Sugihara survivors' escaped to Kobe and Japanese-controlled Shanghai and, later, to other countries. The story is the subject of the 1997 Academy Award-winning film *Visas and Virtue*.

On Yaotsu's Jindō-no-oka (Hill of Humanity; 人道の丘) is a museum (adult/child ¥300/100; ☺ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun) with photos and thought-provoking exhibits related to this inspiring story. Further information can be found at www.town.yaotsu.gifu.jp, or contact the city office (☎ 43-2111, ext 2253), which has an English speaker available.

Yaotsu is easiest reached by car, but from Inuyama you can take the Meitetsu Hiromi train line to Akechi (¥440, 30 minutes, via Shin-Kani), then transfer to the Yao bus (¥400, 25 minutes) to Yaotsu; it's a short bus or taxi ride to the museum. The city office may be able to help with logistics if you phone with enough advance notice.

### GIFU 岐阜

☎ 058 / pop 423,730

Historically, Gifu has a strong association with Oda Nobunaga (p40), *daimyō* (regional lords under the *shōgun*) of the castle and bestower of the city's name in 1567. It was later visited by famed haiku poet Matsuo Bashō, who witnessed *ukai* here in 1688; Charlie Chaplin did the same in his day.

Contemporary Gifu shows little evidence of those historic times. In 1891 Gifu was hit by a colossal earthquake, followed by a thorough drubbing in WWII, so the city centre is not much to look at. Still, it remains a popular destination for *ukai* on the Nagara-gawa and handicrafts, as well as a reasonably colourful district of sidestreets near the station and a post-war reconstruction of the castle Gifu-jō atop the nearby mountain, Kinka-zan.

### Orientation & Information

JR Gifu station and Meitetsu Shin-Gifu station are separated by several minutes' walk in the southern part of the city centre.

The **tourist information office** (☎ 262-4415; ☺ 9am-7pm Mar-Dec, to 6pm Jan-Feb) on the 2nd floor of the JR Gifu station provides useful English-language city maps and can make same-day hotel reservations. Some English is spoken.

### Sights & Activities

#### UKAI

During Gifu's **cormorant fishing** season (11 May to 15 October), boats depart nightly (except after heavy rainfall or on the night of a full moon) from the bridge, Nagara-bashi, or you can view the action from a distance by walking along the river east of the bridge.

Bookings are strongly advised. Tickets are sold at hotels or, if any tickets remain after 6pm, at the **booking office** (☎ for advance reservations 262-0104; adult/child ¥3300/2900; ☺ departures 6.15pm, 6.45pm & 7.15pm) just below Nagara-bashi. Food and drink are not provided on the boats; you can bring food aboard the first departure of the evening but not on later departures. On Monday to Friday, fares for the two later departures are ¥3000/2600 per adult/child.

Nagara-bashi can be reached by bus 11 (¥200) from JR Gifu station.

### GIFU-KŌEN 岐阜公園

A few of the attractions of this lush, hillside park are the **Gifu City History Museum** (岐阜市歴史博物館; ☎ 265-0010; 2-18-1 Ōmiya-chō; adult/child

¥300/150; ☺ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) and the **Mt Kinka Ropeway** (金華山ロープウェイ; ☎ 262-6784; 257 Senjōjiki-shita; return adult/child ¥1050/520; ☺ 9am-5pm mid-Oct-mid-Mar, to 10.30pm late Jul-Aug, to 6pm mid-Mar-late Jul & Sep-mid-Oct) up to the summit of Kinka-zan (329m). From here you can check out **Gifu-jō** (岐阜城; ☎ 263-4853; 18 Kinka-zan, Tenshukaku; adult/child ¥200/100; ☺ closes 30min before ropeway), which is a small but picturesque modern reconstruction of the original castle. Those who'd rather huff it can hike to the castle (one hour). To reach the park take bus 11 from Gifu station to Gifu-kōen mae (¥200, 20 minutes).

### SHŌHŌ-JI 正法寺

The main attraction of this orange-and-white temple (☎ 264-2760; 8 Daibutsu-chō; admission ¥150; ☺ 9am-5pm) is the papier-mâché *daibutsu* (Great Buddha; 1832), which is nearly 14m tall and is said to have been fashioned over 38 years using about a tonne of paper sutras. The temple is a short walk southwest of Gifu-kōen.

### Sleeping & Eating

The narrow streets between Gifu's two stations are happy hunting ground for cafés, restaurants and *izakaya*.

**Comfort Hotel Gifu** (コンフォートホテル岐阜; ☎ 267-1311; fax 267-1312; s/tw incl breakfast ¥6090/11,550; ☺ ☺ ☺ wi-fi) Practically across from JR Gifu station, this simple business hotel offers liquid crystal TVs, wireless internet access from rooms and a coin laundry.

**Daiwa Roynet Hotel Gifu** (ダイワロイネットホテル岐阜; ☎ 212-0055; fax 212-0056; s/d from ¥6800/9000; ☺ ☺ ☺) A posher choice, with nice linens and rooms outfitted for business. It's steps from Meitetsu Gifu station (look for the Lawson convenience store on the ground floor).

### Shopping

Gifu is famous for *wagasa* (oiled paper parasols/umbrellas) and Gifu *chōchin* (paper lanterns elegantly painted with landscapes etc). You can find mass-produced versions in souvenir shops, or the tourist information office has a map to high-quality speciality stores.

**Sakaida Eikichi Honten** (坂井田永吉本店; ☎ 271-6958; ☺ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) and **Hirano Shōten** (平野商店; ☎ 271-0468; ☺ irregular) make and sell *wagasa*. The shops are near each other, a 12-minute walk southeast of JR Gifu station. Given these shops' irregular hours, it's wise to phone before

setting out. Expect to pay ¥8400 and up for a quality *wagasa*.

For Gifu *chōchin*, try **Ozeki Chōchin** (小関提灯; ☎ 263-0111). Prices start at around ¥10,000. Take bus 11 to Ken-Sōgōchōsha-mae, then walk towards the temple Higashi Betsuin.

### Getting There & Away

The JR Tōkaidō line will get you here from Nagoya (*tokkyū*, ¥1180, 20 minutes; *futsū*, ¥450, 30 minutes). Meitetsu line trains from Shin-Nagoya station serve Shin-Gifu (¥540, 35 minutes) and continue to Inuyama (¥440, 35 minutes).

### GUJŌ-HACHIMAN 郡上八幡

☎ 0575 / pop 16,000

Nestled in the mountains at the confluence of several rivers, Gujō-Hachiman is a small, pleasant town famed for its **Gujō Odori Matsuri**, Japan's third-largest folk dance festival, and as the place where all those plastic food models you see in restaurant windows come from.

The **tourist office** (観光協会; ☎ 67-0002; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) is by the bridge Shin-bashi in the centre of town, about five minutes' walk from the Jōka-machi Plaza bus terminal.

The festival first: following a tradition dating to the 1590s, townsfolk let down their hair with frenzied dancing on 31 nights between July and early September. Visitor participation is encouraged, especially during the four main days of the festival (13–16 August) and during *tetsuya odori* days, when the dancing goes all night. At other times of year the town's sparkling rivers, narrow lanes and stone bridges make for a relaxing stopover.

Those incredibly realistic **food models** are one of life's great mysteries, and here's your chance to suss them out. In an old *machiya* (merchant

house), **Shokuhin Sample Kōbō Sōsakukan** (食品サンプル工房創作館; ☎ 67-1870; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mar-Nov, 9am-5pm Fri-Wed Dec-Feb) lets you view the almost-good-enough-to-eat treats and try creating them yourself (by reservation). Tempura (¥1000 for three pieces) and lettuce (free) make memorable, only-in-Japan souvenirs. It's three minutes' walk from Jōka-machi Plaza.

Gujō-Hachiman's other attractions include the tiny hilltop castle **Gujō Hachiman-jō** (郡上八幡城; ☎ 65-5839; adult/child ¥300/150; ☎ 8am-6pm Jun-Aug, 9am-5pm Sep-May), which had been a humble fortress dating back to about 1600; the current, grander building dates from only 1933. It contains weapons, armour and the like, and offers fine views. From the bus terminal it's about 20 minutes' walk.

Gujō-Hachiman is also known for its waterways. A famous spring, **Sōgi-sui**, near the centre of town, is something of a pilgrimage site, named for a Momoyama-era poet. People who rank such things place Sōgi-sui at the top of the list for clarity.

**Gujō Tōsenji Youth Hostel** (郡上洞泉寺ユースホステル; ☎ 67-0290; fax 67-0549; dm per person ¥3200; ☎ closed mid-Aug; ☎ ☎) is an attractively refurbished hostel pleasantly situated on the grounds of a temple, though there is no bath on the premises (there's a *sentō* – public bath – nearby). Breakfast is ¥500.

**Bizenya Ryokan** (備前屋旅館; ☎ 65-2068; fax 67-0007; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥11,550; ☎ ☎) boasts large rooms with shared facilities around a handsome garden. This 30-bed ryokan provides a relaxing, quietly upscale experience. It's between the bus terminal and tourist office.

The most convenient access to Gujō-Hachiman is via bus from Gifu (¥1560, one hour, four daily). From Nagoya station, the easiest

way is also by bus (¥3500, three hours). The town centre is easily walkable, or the tourist office hires out bicycles (¥300/1500 per hour/day).

## HIDA DISTRICT 飛騨地域

The centrepiece of this ancient, mountainous region is the handsome town of Takayama, where the legacy of a strong craft tradition lives on in its merchant houses, temples and shrines. Hida is known for *gasshō-zukuri* (hands-in-prayer) architecture, which you'll spot in the Unesco World Heritage sites of Shirakawa-gō and nearby Gokayama, though the latter is not part of Hida. Hida's culinary fame rests in its Hida beef and its *soba* (buckwheat noodles).

### TAKAYAMA 高山

☎ 0577 / pop 95,904

With its old inns, shops and sake breweries, Takayama is a rarity: a 21st-century city (admittedly a small one) that's also retained its traditional charm. Vibrant morning markets, hillside shrines and a laid-back populace add to the town's allure, and it should be a high priority on any visit to Central Honshū. Give yourself at least two days to enjoy the place; it's easily tackled on foot or bicycle.

Takayama was established in the late 16th century as the castle town of the Kanamori clan, but in 1692 it was placed under direct control of the *bakufu* (shōgunate) in Edo. The present layout dates from the Kanamori period, and its sights include more than a dozen museums, galleries and exhibitions covering lacquer and lion masks, folk craft and architecture.

Takayama remains the region's administrative and transport hub, and it makes a good base for trips around Hida and Japan Alps National Park (p267).

### Orientation

All the main sights except Hida-no-Sato (Hida Folk Village) are to be found in the centre of town, within walking distance of the station. Northeast of the station, Kokubun-ji-dōri, the main street, heads east, across the river Miya-gawa (about 10 minutes' walk), where it becomes Yasugawa-dōri. South of Yasugawa-dōri is the historic, picturesque Sanmachi-suji (Sanmachi district) of immaculately preserved old homes.

Hida-no-Sato is a 10-minute bus ride west of the station.

### Information

The town's **tourist information office** (☎ 32-5328; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Nov-Mar, 8.30am-6.30pm Apr-Oct), directly in front of JR Takayama station, has English-speaking staff, as well as English-language maps and information on sights (the *Hida Takayama* pamphlet is a good start) and accommodation. It can also provide info on Takayama's festivals, as well as bus schedules between Takayama and Japan Alps National Park and Ogimachi in Shirakawa-go, and has one computer available for internet access. On the web, visit [www.hidatakyama.or.jp](http://www.hidatakyama.or.jp).

To arrange a home visit, homestay or volunteer interpreter for non-Japanese languages (including sign language), contact the city's **International Affairs Office** (☎ 32-3333, ext 2407; 2-18 Hanaoka), located inside the Takayama Municipal Building, one month in advance.

Internet access is also available at the **City library** (☎ 32-3096; ☎ 9.30am-9.30pm), east of the Sanmachi district, and at **Takayama Municipal Office** (2-18 Hanaoka; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri), which has two computers.

The main post office is on Hirokōji-dōri, a few blocks east of the station. Ōgaki Kyōritsu Bank has foreign-card ATMs southeast of the station and near the Miya-gawa Morning Market. Jōroku Bank can change cash or travellers cheques.

### Sights & Activities

#### SANMACHI-SUJI 三町筋

The centre of the old town, this district of three main streets (Ichi-no-Machi, Ni-no-Machi and San-no-Machi) is lined with traditional shops, restaurants, museums and private homes. Sake breweries are easily recognised by the spheres of cedar fronds, though most of the year they just sell their wares.

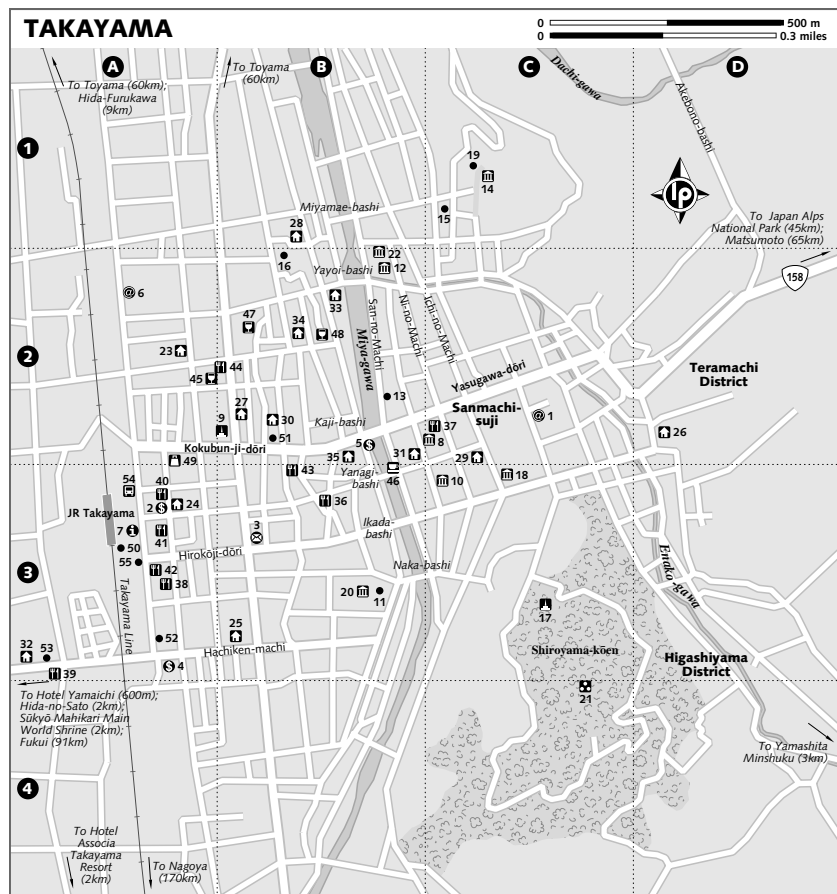
**Fujii Folkcraft Art Gallery** (☎ 35-3778; 69 San-no-Machi; adult/child ¥700/350; ☎ 9am-5pm) is a private collection in an old merchant's house, with folk craft and ceramics from Japan (particularly from the Muromachi and Edo periods), China and Korea. **Hida Folk Archaeological Museum** (Hida Minzoku Kōkō-kan; ☎ 32-1980; 82 San-no-Machi; adult/high & junior high school student/child ¥500/300/200; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mar-Nov, 9am-4.30pm Dec-Feb) is a former samurai house boasting interesting secret passageways and an old well in the courtyard.

### YOU CAN'T KEEP A GOOD ONSEN DOWN

Between Gifu and Takayama is **Gero**, an *onsen* town that's a favourite among Japanese even if its name is an unfortunate homonym for 'vomit'. Gero's concrete sprawl dampens its appeal, but the waters, beneficial for rheumatism, athletic injuries and the complexion, are excellent for a stopover.

Pick up the ¥1200 **Yumeguri Tegata**, a wooden plaque on a rope (and a nice souvenir) that allows one-time access to three among a selection of Gero's *onsen*. It's available at the **tourist information office** (☎ 25-4711; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm), outside the train station, where staff can tell you which *onsen* are operating that day. You can walk nearly anywhere in Gero within 20 minutes from the train station.

*Tokkyū* trains serve Gero from Gifu (¥3080, 67 minutes), Takayama (¥1990, 40 minutes) and Nagoya (¥4300, 1½ hours).



Another merchant's house, dating from the turn of the 20th century, **Hirata Folk Art Museum** (Hirata Kinen-kan; ☎ 33-1354; 39 Ni-no-Machi; adult/child ¥300/150; 🕒 9am-5pm) displays items from everyday rural Japanese life.

**Takayama Museum of Local History** (☎ 32-1205; 75 Ichi-no-Machi; adult/child ¥300/150; 🕒 8.30am-5pm Mar-Nov, 9am-4.30pm Tue-Sun Dec-Feb) is devoted to the crafts and traditions of the region, with images carved by Enkū, a woodcarving priest who wandered the region in the 17th century. There are also several small but nicely maintained gardens.

#### TAKAYAMA-JINYA 高山陣屋

These sprawling grounds south of the Sanmachi district house the only remaining

prefectural office building of the Tokugawa shōgunate. **Takayama-jinya** (Historical Government House; ☎ 32-0643; 1-5 Hachiken-machi; adult/child ¥420/free; 🕒 8.45am-5pm Mar-Oct, 8.45am-4.30pm Nov-Feb) was originally built in 1615 as the administrative centre for the Kanamori clan but was later taken over by the *bakufu*. The main gate was once reserved for high officials. The present main building dates back to 1816 and it was used as a local government office until 1969.

As well as government offices, a rice granary and a garden, there's a torture chamber with explanatory detail. Free guided tours in English are available upon request. Takayama-jinya is a 15-minute walk east of the train station.

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#### MERCHANT HOUSES

吉島家, 日下部民芸館

North of Sanmachi are two excellent examples of Edo-period merchants' homes, with the living quarters in one section and the commercial/warehouse areas in another. Design buffs shouldn't miss **Yoshijima-ke** (Yoshijima house; ☎ 32-0038; 1-5 Ōshinmachi; adult/child ¥500/300; 🕒 9am-5pm Mar-Nov, 9am-4.30pm Wed-Sun Dec-Feb), well covered in architectural publications. Its lack of ornamentation allows you to focus on the spare lines, soaring roof and skylight.

Down the block, **Kusakabe Mingeikan** (Kusakabe Folk Art Museum; ☎ 32-0072; 1-52 Ōshinmachi; adult/child ¥500/300; 🕒 9am-4.30pm Mar-Nov, 8.30am-4pm Wed-Mon Dec-Feb), built during the 1890s, showcases the striking craftsmanship of traditional Takayama carpenters' skills. Inside is a collection of folk art.

#### TAKAYAMA YATAI KAIKAN 高山屋台会館

A rotating selection of four of the 23 multi-tiered *yatai* (floats) used in the Takayama Matsuri can be seen at the **Takayama Yatai Kaikan** (Festival Floats Exhibition Hall; ☎ 32-5100; 178 Sakura-machi; adult/high school student/child ¥820/520/410;

🕒 8.30am-5pm Mar-Nov, 9am-4.30pm Dec-Feb). These spectacular creations, some dating from the 17th century, are prized for their flamboyant carvings, metalwork and lacquerwork. A famous feature of some floats is the *karakuri* that perform amazing tricks and acrobatics courtesy of eight accomplished puppeteers using 36 strings. A video gives a sense of the festival.

Your ticket also admits you to the **Sakurayama Nikkō-kan** next door, with intricate models of the famous shrines at Nikkō. Lighting takes you from dawn to dusk and back again, allowing you to witness these sites in different kinds of light.

You might pass some unusual slender garages around town with three-storey doors; these house the *yatai* that are not in the museum.

#### SHISHI KAIKAN 獅子会館

Just south of the Yatai Kaikan is the **Shishi Kaikan** (Lion Mask Exhibition Hall; ☎ 32-0881; 53-1 Sakuramachi; adult/child ¥600/400; 🕒 8.30am-5.30pm late Apr-late Oct, 9am-5pm late Oct-late Apr). It has a display of over 800 lion masks and musical instruments

connected with the lion dances that are commonly performed at festivals in central and northern Japan. Admission includes twice-hourly demonstrations of *karakuri* – a good opportunity to view these marvellous puppets in action.

**SHUNKEI KAIKAN** 飛騨高山春慶会館  
Shunkei lacquerware was introduced from Kyoto several centuries ago but has become Takayama's signature style, used to produce boxes, trays and flower vases. West of the Festival Floats Exhibition Hall and across the river, this **exhibition hall** (☎ 32-3373; 1-88 Kando-chō; adult/child ¥300/200; 🕒 8am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 9am-5pm Nov-Mar) has more than 1000 pieces, including some dating from the 17th century. Unlike many other Japanese lacquer styles, shunkei is designed to show off the wood grain. A display shows production techniques, and the shop has occasional specials.

**HIDA KOKUBUN-JI** 飛騨国分寺  
Takayama's oldest **temple** (☎ 32-1295; 1-83 Sōwa-chō; treasure hall adult/child ¥300/250; 🕒 9am-4pm) was originally built in the 8th century and subsequently ravaged by fire; the oldest of the present buildings dates from the 16th century. The temple's treasure hall houses some Important Cultural Properties, and the courtyard boasts a three-storey pagoda and an impressively gnarled ginkgo tree, which is in remarkably good shape considering it's believed to be 1200 years old. The temple is a five-minute walk northeast of the station, on Kokubun-ji-dōri.

**MORNING MARKETS** 朝市  
*Asa-ichi* (morning markets) take place every morning from 7am to noon, starting an hour earlier from April to October. The **Jinya-mae Market** is in front of Takayama-jinya; the **Miya-gawa Market** is larger, along the east bank of the Miya-gawa, between Kaji-bashi and Yayoi-bashi. The markets provide a pleasant way to start the day, with a stroll past gnarled farmers at their vegetable stands and stalls selling crafts, pickles, souvenirs and that all-important steaming cuppa joe.

**TERAMACHI & SHIROYAMA-KŌEN**  
寺町・城山公園  
The hilly districts in the east side of town are linked by a walking trail, particularly enjoyable in the early morning or late after-

noon. Teramachi has over a dozen temples (one houses the youth hostel) and shrines that you can wander around before taking in the greenery of the park, Shiroyama-kōen. Various trails lead through the park and up the mountainside to the ruins of the castle, **Takayama-jō**. As you descend, you can take a look at the temple, **Shōren-ji**, which was transferred to this site from the Shōkawa Valley when a dam was built there in 1960.

The walk takes a leisurely two hours and from the temple it's a 10-minute walk back to the centre of town. The tourist information office has descriptions of the temples and a simple map, or the *Hida Takayama* pamphlet has a more detailed map.

**HIDA-NO-SATO** 飛騨の里  
This large open-air **museum** (Hida Folk Village; ☎ 34-4711; 1-590 Okamoto-chō; adult/child ¥700/200; 🕒 8.30am-5pm) is highly recommended for its dozens of traditional houses, dismantled at their original sites throughout the region and rebuilt here. During clear weather, there are good views across the town to the peaks of the Japan Alps.

Hido-no-Sato is in two sections. The western section features 12 old houses and a complex of five traditional buildings with artisans (see opposite). Displays are well presented and offer an excellent chance to see what rural life was like in previous centuries.

The eastern section of the village is centred around the Omoide Taikenkan, where you can try making candles, *sembei* (rice crackers) etc. Other buildings include the Go-kura Storehouse (used for storage of rice as payment of taxes) and the Museum of Mountain Life. Allow at least three hours to explore the whole place on foot.

Hida-no-Sato is a 30-minute walk west from Takayama station, but the route is not enjoyable. Either hire a bicycle in town (p262), or take the Hida-no-Sato bus (¥200, 10 minutes) from stop 6 at the bus station. A discount ticket 'Hida-no-Sato setto ken' combines return fare and admission to the park for ¥900. Be sure to check return times for the bus.

**SŪKYŌ MAHIKARI MAIN WORLD SHRINE**  
真光教  
Dominating Takayama's western skyline is the golden roof of the **Main World Shrine** (☎ 34-7008; admission free; 🕒 9.30am-4pm, except during religious

## GASSHŌ-ZUKURI ARCHITECTURE

Winter in the Hida region can be fierce, and inhabitants faced snow and cold long before the advent of propane heaters and 4WD vehicles. One of the most visible symbols of that adaptability is *gasshō-zukuri* architecture, seen in the steeply slanted straw-roofed homes that still dot the landscape around the region.

The sharply angled roofs were designed to prevent heavy snow accumulation, a serious concern in a region where nearly all mountain roads close from December to April. The name *gasshō* comes from the Japanese word for praying, because the shape of the roofs was thought to resemble two hands clasped in prayer. *Gasshō* buildings often featured pillars crafted from stout cedars to lend extra support. The attic areas were ideal for silk cultivation.

Larger *gasshō* buildings were inhabited by wealthy families, up to 30 people under one roof. Peasant families lived in huts of the size that are now used as tool sheds.

The *gasshō-zukuri* building has become an endangered species. Most examples have been gathered and preserved in folk villages, including Hida-no-Sato in Takayama (opposite) and in Shirakawa-gō (p264) and Gokayama (p266). So two homes that are now neighbours were once separated by several days or weeks of travel on foot or sled. But local authorities have worked hard to re-create their natural surroundings, making it possible to imagine what life in the Hida hills might have looked like hundreds of years ago.

observances) of Sūkyō Mahikari, a new religion whose teachings are said to include healing via training courses and amulets that transmit divine light rays. Guided tours are available (call in advance for an English-speaking guide).

## Festivals & Events

Takayama's famed festival is in two parts. On 14 and 15 April is the **Sannō Matsuri**; a dozen *yatai*, decorated with carvings, dolls, colourful curtains and blinds, are paraded through the town. In the evening the floats are decked out with lanterns and the procession is accompanied by sacred music. **Hachiman Matsuri**, on 9 and 10 October, is a slightly smaller version (p257).

From January to March several of the sake breweries in Sanmachi-suji, many dating back to the Edo period, arrange tours and tastings.

## Sleeping

The tourist information office assists with bookings. If visiting Takayama during festival times, book accommodation months in advance and expect to pay a 20% premium. You could also stay elsewhere and commute to Takayama.

## BUDGET

**Hida Takayama Temple Inn Zenkō-ji** (☎ 32-8470; www.geocities.jp/zenkojitakayama; 4-3 Tenman-chō; dm/r per person ¥2500/3000) Although it's in a temple (a branch of Nagano's famous Zenkō-ji), around

a courtyard garden, private-use rooms are generously proportioned and even the dorm-style rooms are handsome. Plus, there's a kitchen for guest use, no curfew and a master who speaks excellent English. If you want, you can practise Jōdō-style meditation in the main hall.

**Hida Takayama Tenshō-ji Youth Hostel** (☎ 32-6345; fax 32-6392; 83 Tensho-ji-machi; dm ¥2940) This peaceful hostel occupies an attractive temple in Teramachi, though some guests gripe about its lights-out (9.45pm curfew) and wake-up schedule. It's a 25-minute walk from the train station, or board the bus for Shin-Hotaka, get off at Betsuin-mae and walk east for about five minutes.

**Hotel Yamaichi** (ホテルやまいち; ☎ 34-6200; www.kbnet.jp/org/11pm/kamaya/hyoshi.html; 181-2 Ishiura-chō; Japanese/Western r per person from ¥4000/5000; 🍷 📺 📺) In an old building 10 minutes by bus south of town (¥230), this inn has simple, decent rooms (Western rooms have private bathrooms). Discounts are available for more than one person per room. The friendly English-speaking owners often pick up guests from the station; if they can't they'll pay half the taxi fare. Check in from 3pm.

## MIDRANGE

**Rickshaw Inn** (☎ 32-2890; fax 32-2469; www.rickshawinn.com; 54 Suehiro-chō; s with/without bathroom ¥6500/4900, tw ¥11,600/9800; 🍷 🍷 📺) Excellent value and a travellers' favourite, with pleasant Japanese- and Western-style rooms, a small kitchen,

laundry facilities and a cosy lounge. The friendly English-speaking owners are founts of information about Takayama. Book well in advance.

**Murasaki Ryokan** (☎ 32-1724; fax 33-7512; 1-56 Nanoka-machi; r per person from ¥4000, incl 2 meals from ¥7500; ♿) The splendid wall of flowers outside this ryokan is the product of decades of work, and inside too it's like a trip back to the mid-20th century: Japanese-style loos, pay TVs and kerosene heaters. There's a lot of heart and a great Japanese breakfast including *hoba miso* (sweet miso paste cooked on a magnolia leaf) and *sansai* (mountain vegetables).

**Ô-Machi** (☎ 32-3251; 38 Ichi-no-Machi; r per person ¥4000; ♿) In Sanmachi-suji near the Takayama Museum of Local History, Ô-Machi offers small but clean tatami rooms and has many foreign fans. Staff speak some English and guests can use the kitchen. It's set back from the main street.

**Minshuku Kuwataniya** (☎ 32-5021; fax 36-3835; www.kuwataniya.com; 1-50-30 Sowa-machi; r per person with/without bathroom ¥6450/4350; ♿) Takayama's longest-running *minshuku* (family-run accommodation; since the 1920s) has both Japanese and Western-style rooms, hot-spring bath and free bicycle use. Dinner (available for ¥2310) features Hida's famed beef (vegetarian options available with advance notice). It's half a block north of Hida Kokubun-ji temple.

**Sôsuke** (☎ 32-0818; fax 33-5570; www.ironi-sosuke.com; 1-64 Okamoto-machi; r per person ¥5040; ♿) West of the train station, across from Takayama Green Hotel, Sôsuke has 13 pleasant tatami rooms and the English-speaking staff prepares excellent dinners (¥2100) including meals for vegetarians. The handsomely reconstructed building dates from the 1800s and retains a traditional style, including an *irori* (hearth), though it is on a busy road.

**Takayama City Hotel Four Seasons** (☎ 36-0088; fax 36-0080; www.f-seasons.co.jp in Japanese; 1-1 Kanda-machi; s/tw from ¥6900/13,100; ♿ ♿ wi-fi) Takayama's Four Seasons has nothing to do with the luxury chain, but it's nicer-than-average business-hotel calibre. Some of the large singles and reasonable-sized doubles have hardwood floors, and there's a communal *onsen* (¥150 charge). It's a 15-minute walk from the station, two blocks west of the river.

**Ryokan Gôto** (☎ /fax 33-0870; San-no-Machi; r per person incl breakfast from ¥8400) Another of this city's lovely traditional inns, Gôto lies in the heart of Sanmachi-suji, positioning you perfectly for

this district's dramatic nightscapes. There's a low door at the entry, eclectic touches throughout and *hoba miso* with your breakfast. No English spoken.

**Best Western Hotel** (☎ 37-2000; fax 37-2005; www.bestwestern.co.jp; 6-6 Hanasato-machi; s/d/tw from ¥9240/12,600/14,700; ♿ ♿) Very popular among overseas guests, this 78-room hotel offers crisp service and spacious, comfortably furnished rooms. Lounge and restaurant on-site. It's a block from the station.

**Sumiyoshi Ryokan** (☎ 32-0228; fax 33-8916; sumiyoshi@beach.ocn.ne.jp; 4-21 Hon-machi; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥11,000; ♿ ♿) This delightfully traditional inn is set in an old merchant's house; some rooms have river views through windows of antique glass. One room has private bath (¥13,000).

#### TOP END

**Asunaro Ryokan** (☎ 33-5551, toll-free 0120-052-536; fax 34-6155; www.yado-asunaro.com; 2-96 Hatsuda-machi; r per person incl 2 meals with/without bathroom from ¥15,750/13,650; ♿ ♿) This excellent ryokan has handsome tatami rooms, a spacious *onsen* bath and decadent dinners and breakfasts. At night, guests can warm themselves by the *irori*. Staff speak some English.

**Tanabe Ryokan** (☎ 32-0529; fax 35-1955; tanabe.rk@jeans.ocn.ne.jp; 58 Aioi-chô; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥15,000; ♿ ♿) Family-run inn in the centre of everything with sweet, welcoming staff. There's art throughout, stone paths line the carpeted hallways, rooms are spacious, and dinner is *kaiseki*-style (Japanese cuisine which obeys very strict rules of etiquette for every detail of the meal, including the setting) Hida cuisine. Some English spoken.

**Hotel Associa Takayama Resort** (ホテルアソシア高山リゾート; ☎ 36-0001; fax 36-0188; www.associa.com/ty; 1134 Echigo-chô; s/tw from ¥15,000/17,000; ♿ ♿) If you find Takayama too historic, the Associa's three towers south of town provide an escape back to the 21st century. There's a pink and lime-green colour palette and rooms are either Western or Japanese style. To include two meals, add approximately ¥6000 per person to room rates. The real showplace is the three-storey, valley-view hot spring. The Associa's about 10 minutes from town, with shuttle bus service.

#### Eating

Takayama's specialities include *soba*, *hoba miso* and *sansai*. Street foods include *mi-*

*tarashi-dango* (skewers of grilled riceballs seasoned with soya sauce), *shio-sembei* (salty rice crackers) and skewers of grilled Hida beef (among the finest grades of meat in Japan, even if less known than its Kobe counterpart).

**Myogaya** (☎ 32-0426; 5-15 Hanasato-chô; mains around ¥1000; ♿ 8-10.30am, 11.30am-3pm & 5-7pm Wed-Mon; ♿ ♿) A longtime favourite a block east of the train station, this tiny restaurant and food shop prepares tasty vegetarian curry with brown rice, samosas, fruit juices, dandelion tea and organic coffees. Reservations requested on Saturdays.

**Suzuya** (☎ 32-2484; 24 Hanakawa-chô; sets ¥1100-3100; ♿ 11am-3pm & 5-8pm Wed-Mon; E) In the centre of town, Suzuya is one of Takayama's longstanding favourites, and it's highly recommended (though often packed) for local specialities like Hida beef, *hoba-miso* and various stews.

**Ebisu-Honten** (☎ 32-0209; 46 Kami-Ni-no-Machi; soba dishes ¥380-1530; ♿ 10am-5pm Wed-Mon; ♿ ♿) A 110-plus-year-old *teuchi* (handmade) *soba* shop and a town classic. The menu explains the *soba*-making process. Go for *zaru* (cold) *soba* for the real flavour of the buckwheat, or try *curry* or *miso-nikomi* (in-miso broth) style.

**Yamatake-Shôten** (☎ 32-0571; 1-70 Sôwa-chô; meals per person from around ¥3500; ♿ lunch & dinner Thu-Tue, closed 3rd Thu of month) Butcher shop with a restaurant upstairs, an excellent place to sample Hida's savoury beef. No English menu, but here's the drill: choose your own cut (pay by weight, from ¥1380 per 100g), which is plated and brought to the table for you to cook on an inset charcoal grill. Vegetables and simple desserts are included, and sides like *kimchi* (Korean pickled cabbage) and *gyu tataki* (marinated raw beef) are also for sale.

**Origin** (☎ 36-4655; 4-108 Hanasato-chô; most dishes ¥315-819; ♿ dinner; E) This wonderful local *izakaya* a minute from the station has the usual *kushiyaki* (grilled, skewered dishes) and tofu steak, plus original dishes like sardines rolled in *yuba* (tofu skin), or big-as-a-beer-can grilled daikon in miso sauce. Or go for broke with Hida beef (¥1575). Look for the bamboo poles out the front.

**Holy Grail** (☎ 35-3393; 4-68 Hanasato-chô; mains ¥730-1250; ♿ lunch Mon & Wed-Sat, dinner Wed-Mon; E) Italian trattoria-style dishes in a hardwood, home-style setting. Crostini, pizzas, pastas, and more, or lunchtime spaghettis from ¥550. Inexpensive house wines are available by the bottle.

**Chapala** (☎ 34-9800; mains ¥600-980; ♿ dinner Mon-Sat; closed 1st Mon of each month; E) Two blocks west of the river, this cosy restaurant serves tasty chilli con carne, burritos, quesadillas, guacamole and chips, and other Tex-Mex favourites. Margaritas and Coronas accompany the proceedings nicely.

**Jingoro Râmen** (☎ 34-5565; mains from ¥600; ♿ lunch & dinner, closed dinner Sun & some Mon; E) Like a roadhouse south of the station, Takayama's most venerable *râmen* restaurant is a simple affair: broth, noodles and pork (or not) – but the savoury results are extremely satisfying.

**La Viennoiserie de Nicolas** (☎ 36-0054; 6-28 Hanasato-chô; pastries from ¥320; ♿ 10am-7pm Fri-Wed) A block from the train station, this tiny pastry shop serves some decadent treats – *pain au chocolat*, cheesecake, rhubarb pie – all lovingly prepared by the French owner.

#### Drinking

**Red Hill Pub** (☎ 33-8139; ♿ 7pm-midnight, closed irregularly) Locals and expats gather at this welcoming bar with snacks like pita bread or *karai râmen* (spicy *râmen*), an excellent selection of domestic and imported brews and an eclectic mix of tunes.

**Bagus** (☎ 36-4341; ♿ 7pm-1am Mon-Sat) This friendly reggae bar has a youthful energy. A 10-minute walk from the train station, good music and potent drinks await. It's on the 2nd floor.

**Tonio** (☎ 34-341; ♿ 6pm-midnight Mon-Sat) This English-style pub lies closer to the river, with Guinness on tap and a startling variety of imported whiskies.

**Café Doppio** (☎ 32-3638; coffee from ¥300; ♿ 9am-6pm) For a pick-me-up, stop by this pleasant café on the edge of the river. Cappuccinos, espressos, macchiatos and waffles.

#### Shopping

Takayama is renowned for crafts. *Ichii ittobori* (woodcarvings) are fashioned from yew and can be seen as intricate components of the *yatai* or as figurines or accessories for the home. Woodworking also extends to furniture (see boxed text, p262) in shops such as **Mori no Kotoba** (Words from the Forest; ☎ 36-7005; ♿ 9am-6pm Thu-Tue).

Takayama is also known for its shunkei lacquerware. Around the exhibition hall Shunkei Kaikan (p258) are shops with outstanding lacquerware and porcelain and, occasionally, good deals.



Local pottery styles include the rustic *Yamada-yaki* and the decorative *Shibukusa-yaki* styles.

Good places to find handicrafts are Sanmachi-suji, the morning markets (p258) and Kokubun-ji-dōri. A ubiquitous souvenir is *saru-bobo* (monkey babies), dolls of red cloth dressed in blue fabric, with pointy limbs and featureless faces, recalling the days when *obaasan* (grandmas) in this once-impoverished town fashioned dolls for kids out of readily available materials.

### Getting There & Away

From Tokyo or Kansai, Takayama is most efficiently reached via Nagoya on the JR Takayama line (Hida *tokkyū*, ¥6070, 2½ hours); the mountainous train ride is gorgeous. The train line connecting Takayama with Toyama, where a trestle bridge was washed out by floods in 2005, should be back up and running by the time you read this; in the meantime, several local train/bus connections per day will get you there (¥1620, 3¾ hours).

**Keiō Highway buses** (☎ 32-1688) connect Takayama and Tokyo's Shinjuku (¥6500, 5½ hours, several daily, reservations are required). Takayama's bus station is adjacent to the train station. Many roads in this region close during winter, so bus schedules vary seasonally and don't run at all in winter on some of the routes. Check with the tourist offices for details.

For trips to the Japan Alps (Chūbu-San-gaku National Park) see p268.

By car, you'll find **Eki Rent-a-Car System** (☎ 33-3522) at the train station, **Mazda Rent-a-Car** (☎ 36-1515) across the street and about 100m south, and **Nippon Rent-a-Car** (☎ 34-5121)

southwest of the train station, near Sōsuke *minshuku*.

### Getting Around

Most sights in Takayama can be covered easily on foot. You can amble from the train station across to Teramachi in 25 minutes.

The only place you may really need to take the bus is to Hida-no-Sato (¥200, 10 minutes, half-hourly).

Takayama is bicycle-friendly. Some lodgings hire out or lend cycles, or you can hire one from the convenience store **Timely** (タイムリー; ☎ 34-1183; per hr/day ¥300/1200; ☎ 10am-5pm) next to the train station; or **Hara Cycle** (☎ 32-1657; per hr/day ¥300/1300) on Kokubun-ji-dōri.

### HIDA-FURUKAWA 飛騨古川

☎ 0577 / pop 18,000

Home of the somewhat mystifying Hadaka Matsuri (Naked Festival), Furukawa (also called Hida-Furukawa to distinguish it from other Furukawas in Japan) is a relaxing riverside town with lovely streetscapes, peaceful temples and interesting museums, all framed against mountains. Just 15 minutes by train from Takayama, Furukawa makes a rewarding day trip: if you are in the region on 19 or 20 April, don't miss the festival.

### Orientation & Information

Hida-Furukawa train and bus stations adjoin each other east of the town centre. Sights are within 10 minutes' walk. There's an **information office** (観光案内所; ☎ 73-3180; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm) at the bus station, dispensing an English pamphlet and Japanese maps, but if you don't speak Japanese you'll be better off getting information in Takayama (p255); staff in either location can book accommodation in Furukawa.

#### HIDA'S TAKUMI WOODWORKERS

Some 1300 years ago there lived in Hida a carpenter named Takumi, said to be so skilled that word of his work spread as far as the capital, Nara.

At that time, the Japanese regions had to pay taxes in rice, which posed a problem for Hida, with little farmland but many forested mountains. So in the year 718, in lieu of taxes, Hida was permitted to send Takumi – and a cadre of carpenters and carvers – to construct the legendary shrines and temples of Kyoto and Nara.

Today, 'Takumi' has become a general term for woodworkers of great skill and precision. Takumi work appears in homes, furniture and statues, and *karakuri* puppets for Hida's famed *yatai*, festival floats that are storeys tall.

Takumi's name has been adopted by woodworking shops nationwide. You can learn more about Takumi-style woodworking at the Takumi-Bunkakan (opposite) in Furukawa.

### Sights

From the train station, walk right (north) two blocks and turn left towards the historic canal district **Setokawa to Shirakabe-dōzō** (瀬戸川と白壁土蔵街), handsome streets filled with white- and darkwood-walled shops, storehouses and private homes. Carp-filled waterways (fish food: ¥50) course through the district.

Here, the **Matsuri Kaikan** (まつり会館; Festival Museum; ☎ 73-3511; adult/high school student/child ¥800/700/400; ☎ 9am-5pm Mar-Nov, 9am-4.30pm Dec-Feb) shows Furukawa's festival in all its glory. You can don 3-D glasses to watch a video of the festivities, see some of the *yatai* that are paraded through the streets, try manipulating *karakuri* like those used on the *yatai*, and watch craftsmen demonstrating *kirie* (paper cut-outs) or *ittobori*.

Across the square, **Takumi-Bunkakan** (匠文化館; Takumi Craft Museum; ☎ 73-3321; adult/child ¥200/100; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Apr-Nov, 9am-4.30pm Tue-Sun Dec-Feb) is a must for woodworkers, craftspeople and design fans. In a hands-on room, you can try assembling blocks of wood cut into different joint patterns – not as easy as it sounds.

Follow the canal street westward for three blocks then turn right to reach the riverside **Honkō-ji** (本光寺), an intricately carved temple showcasing Furukawa's fine craftsmanship. From the temple, instead of retracing your steps, walk back along Ichi-no-Machi, a street sprinkled with craft shops, sake breweries (marked by the large balls of cedar fronds above the entrance) and traditional storehouses. Among them is **Mishima-ya** (三島屋; ☎ 73-4109; ☎ 9am-6pm Thu-Tue), a shop that has made candles for over two centuries; traditional shapes are concave or tapered with the wide end at the top.

### Festivals & Events

The **Furukawa Matsuri**, as the Hadaka Matsuri is formally known, takes place every 19 and 20 April. The highlight is the Okoshi Daiko, when squads of boisterous young men dressed in loincloths parade through town at midnight, competing to place small drums atop a stage bearing a giant drum. OK, it's not *naked-naked*, but we didn't make up the name.

During the **Kitsune-bi Matsuri** (Fox Fire Festival) on 16 October, locals make up as foxes, parade through the town by lantern-light and enact a wedding at the shrine, Okura Inarijinja. The ceremony, deemed to bring good fortune, climaxes with a bonfire at the shrine.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Hida Furukawa Youth Hostel** (飛騨古川ユースホステル; ☎ /fax 75-2979; www.jyh.or.jp/english/toukai/hidafuru/index.html; hidafy@td2.dion.ne.jp; dm ¥3300, incl 2 meals ¥4900; ☎ closed 30 Mar-10 Apr; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) A friendly and attractive hostel amid farmland across from the park, Shinrin-kōen. It's about 6km from the town centre, or 1.2km west of Hida-Hosoe station (two stops north of Hida-Furukawa). In winter the hostel can help guests get set up for telemark skiing. Pick-up from station available after 6pm with advance notice. Japanese- and Western-style rooms available.

**Ryokan Tanbo-no-Yu** (旅館たんぼの湯; ☎ 73-2014; fax 73-6454; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥7000) In the town centre, this charming ryokan has spacious Japanese rooms with shared bathrooms, plus a bath with red-brown waters said to be good for cuts, bruises and rheumatism. Visitors can bathe for ¥500. No English is spoken.

**Kitchen Kyabingu** (キッチンきゃびんぐ; ☎ 73-4706; dishes ¥350-2400; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) This cosy lunch spot in the historic district serves *Hida-gyu* (Hida beef). Order the beef curry with rice (¥800) or the *teishoku*, starring sizzling steak on a hot iron plate (¥2400).

### Getting There & Around

Some 20 daily trains run each way between Takayama and Furukawa. Hida-Furukawa train station is three stops north of Takayama (*futsu*, ¥230, 15 minutes), or you can bus it (¥360, 30 minutes). Central Furukawa is an easy stroll, or hire bikes at the taxi office **Miyagawa** (☎ 73-2321; per hr ¥200), near the station.

### SHIRAKAWA-GŌ & GOKAYAMA

白川郷・五箇山

These remote, dramatically mountainous districts between Takayama and Kanazawa are best known for farmhouses in the thatched, A-frame style called *gasshō-zukuri* ('hands-in-prayer'; see boxed text, p259). They're rustic and lovely, particularly in clear weather or in the snow, and they hold a special place in the Japanese heart.

In the 12th century the region's remoteness and inaccessibility are said to have attracted stragglers from the Taira (Heike) clan, virtually wiped out by the Minamoto (Genji) clan in a brutal battle in 1185. During feudal times Shirakawa-gō, like the rest of Hida, was under direct control of the Kanamori clan, connected to the Tokugawa shōgun, while

Gokayama was a centre for the production of gunpowder for the Kaga region, under the ruling Maeda clan.

Fast-forward to the 1960s: when construction of the gigantic Miboro Dam over the Shōkawa was about to submerge some local villages, many *gasshō* houses were moved to their current sites for safekeeping. Although much of what you'll find has been specially preserved for, and supported by, tourism, it still presents a view of rural life found in few other parts of Japan.

Most of Shirakawa-gō's sights are in the heavily visited community of Ogimachi. In Gokayama (technically not in Hida but in Toyama-ken), the community of Ainokura has the greatest concentration; other sights are spread throughout hamlets over many kilometres along Rte 156. Ogimachi and Ainokura are Unesco World Heritage sites (as is the Gokayama settlement of Saganuma).

Tour buses can diminish the magic of these communities. Get around this by avoiding weekends and holidays. Even better, stay overnight in a *gasshō-zukuri* house that's been turned into an inn. Advance reservations are highly recommended; the Shirakawa-gō tourist office by the parking area in Ogimachi can help with bookings (in Japanese), or Takayama's tourist office can help in English. Don't expect rooms with private facilities, but some inns have *irori* for guests to eat around.

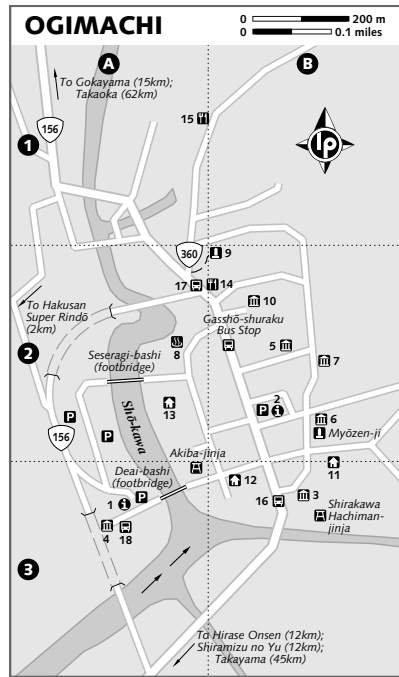
Bus services to and around the region are infrequent and vary seasonally; it's important to check schedules. For maximum flexibility (and perhaps even a cost saving), consider hiring a car. Either way, traffic can be severe on weekends and throughout the peak tourist times of May, August and October. Expect snow, and lots of it, between late December and late March.

### Shirakawa-gō 白川郷

☎ 05769

The region's central settlement, **Ogimachi**, has some 600 residents and over 110 *gasshō-zukuri* buildings and is the most convenient place to orient yourself for tourist information and transport.

Ogimachi's main **tourist office** (Deai no Yakata; ☎ 6-1013; www.shirakawa-go.org; ☎ 9am-5pm) is in the centre of town near the Shirakawa-gō bus stop. There's a free English map of Shirakawa-gō including Ogimachi (more detailed maps for ¥100/300). Limited English is spoken.



There's a smaller tourist office near the Ogimachi car park in the town centre.

### SIGHTS

On the site of the former castle, the observatory **Shiroyama Tenbōdai** provides a lovely overview of the valley. It's a 15-minute walk via the road behind the east side of town. You can climb the path (five minutes) from near the intersection of Rtes 156 and 360, or there's a shuttle bus (¥200 one way) from the Shirakawa-gō bus stop.

**Gasshō-zukuri Minka-en** (合掌造り民家園; ☎ 6-1231; adult/child ¥500/300; ☎ 8am-5:30pm Aug, 8:40am-5pm Apr-Jul & Sep-Nov, 9am-4pm Fri-Wed Dec-Mar) features over two dozen relocated *gasshō-zukuri* buildings, reconstructed in this open-air museum amid seasonal flowers. Several houses are used for demonstrating regional crafts such as woodwork, straw handicrafts and ceramics; many items are for sale.

You can wander away from the houses for a pleasant stroll through the trees further up the mountain. Feel free to take a picnic, but Shirakawa-gō has a rule that you must carry your rubbish out of town.

### INFORMATION

Main Tourist Office	1 A3
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### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Doboroku Matsuri Exhibition Hall どぼろく祭りの館	3 B3
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### SLEEPING

Furusato ふるさと	11 B3
Kōemon 幸工門	12 B3
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### TRANSPORT

Jinja-mae Bus Stop 神社前バス停	16 B3
Ogimachi Bus Stop 荻町バス停	17 A2
Shirakawa-gō Bus Stop 白川郷バス停	18 A3

Hours listed in this section are subject to change, as some of the old houses have been known to close irregularly. Be sure to call ahead to avoid disappointment.

Shirakawa-gō's largest *gasshō* house, **Wada-ke** (☎ 6-1058; admission ¥300; ☎ 9am-5pm) is a designated National Treasure. It once belonged to a wealthy silk-trading family and dates back to the mid-Edo period. You'll find silk-harvesting equipment upstairs, as well as a valuable lacquerware collection.

Of the other *gasshō* houses, **Kanda-ke** (☎ 6-1072; adult/child ¥300/150; ☎ 9am-5pm) is the least cluttered with exhibits, which leaves you to appreciate the architectural details – enjoy a cup of herb tea in the 36-mat living room on the ground floor. **Nagase-ke** (☎ 6-1047; adult/child ¥300/150; ☎ 9am-5pm) was home of the doctors to the Maeda clan; look for displays of herbal medicine equipment. The *butsudan* (Buddhist altar) dates from the Muromachi period. In the attic, you can get an up-close look at the construction of the roof, which took 530 people to rethatch in 2001.

Next door to Ogimachi's small temple, **Myōzen-ji Folk Museum** (☎ 6-1009; adult/child ¥300/150; ☎ 8:30am-5pm Apr-Nov, 9am-4pm Dec-Mar) displays the traditional paraphernalia of daily rural life.

Shirakawa-gō's big festival is held on 14 and 15 October at the shrine Shirakawa Hachiman-

jinja (other festivals continue until the 19th), and features coordinated dancing groups of locals, including the lion dance and much *ni-waka* (improvised buffoonery). The real star is *doboroku*, a very potent unrefined sake. Perhaps the most illustrative part of **Doboroku Matsuri Exhibition Hall** (☎ 6-1655; adult/child ¥300/150; ☎ 9am-4pm Apr-Nov) is the video of the festival (in Japanese).

There are several *onsen* around Shirakawa-gō. In central Ogimachi, **Shirakawa-gō no Yu** (白川郷の湯; ☎ 6-0026; adult/child ¥700/300; ☎ 10am-9:30pm) boasts a sauna, small *rotomburo* and large bath. Visitors staying at lodgings in town get a ¥200 discount. About 13km south of Ogimachi, off Rte 156 in Hirase Onsen, **Shiramizu no Yu** (しらみずの湯; ☎ 5-4126; adult/child ¥600/400; ☎ 10am-9pm Tue-Sun) is a sharp new *onsen* facility with views across the river valley, a treat during the autumn-foliage season; its waters are said to be beneficial for fertility. About another 40km up the Ōshirakawa river (via a mountain road with blind curves and no public transport), **Ōshirakawa Rotemburo** (大白川露天風呂; ☎ 090-2770-2893; admission ¥300; ☎ 8:30am-5pm Oct-Jun, to 6pm Jul & Aug) is much admired for its views of an emerald-green lake set amid the mountains.

### SLEEPING & EATING

Some Japanese is helpful in making reservations at one of Ogimachi's many *gasshō-zukuri* inns. Note that they all close for the festival from 13 to 15 October. All inns include two meals in the rates. The town centre has a few casual restaurants (look for *soba* or *hoba miso*); most open only for lunch.

**Kōemon** (☎ 6-1446; fax 6-1748; r per person ¥8400) In the town centre, Kōemon has atmospheric rooms with heated floors, dark wood panelling and shared bathrooms. The friendly fifth-generation owner speaks English and his love of Shirakawa-gō is infectious. Try to book the room facing the pond.

**Furusato** (☎ 6-1033; r per person ¥8500) This much-photographed place near Myōzen-ji is run by a kindly older innkeeper and has quaint touches among the decent-sized tatami rooms.

**Magoemon** (☎ 6-1167; fax 6-1851; r per person ¥8900) Another friendly place, Magoemon has slightly larger rooms, some with river views. Meals are served around the handsome *irori*. There's a nightly heating surcharge (¥300) during cold weather.

**Toyota Shirakawa-gō Eco-Institute** (トヨタ白川郷自然学校; ☎ 6-1187; fax 6-1287; www.toyota.eco-inst.jp; d per person from ¥12,200) This eco-resort, a five-minute bus ride outside central Ogimachi, offers many opportunities to see and do: bird-watching, climbing Hakusan, and snow activities are just for starters. Organic meals are served. Although it gets school and corporate groups, individual travellers are also welcome. Rates vary widely and include children's discounts.

**Irori** (☎ 6-1737; mains ¥700-1200; ☎ 11am-5pm) On the main road near Wada-ke, Irori serves regional specialties like *hoba miso* and *yaki-dofu* (fried tofu), as well as *sansai* or *tempura soba* to patrons who gather around the warm hearths inside.

**Masu-en Bunsuke** (☎ 6-1268; dishes ¥300-500, teishoku ¥1500-4000; ☎ 9am-9pm) Uphill from the town centre, this attractive restaurant specialises in fresh trout, which are raised in ponds near the restaurant.

### Gokayama District 五箇山 ☎ 0763

Along the Shōkawa, Gokayama is so isolated that road links and electricity didn't arrive until 1925.

Villages with varying numbers of *gasshō-zukuri* buildings are scattered over many kilometres along Rte 156. The following briefly describes some of the communities you'll come across as you travel north from Shirakawa-gō or the Gokayama exit from the Tokai-Hokuriku Expressway; if your time is limited, head straight for Ainokura.

### SUGANUMA 菅沼

This riverside World Heritage site (www.gokayama.jp/english/index.html), 15km north of Ogimachi and down a steep hill, features an attractive group of *gasshō-zukuri* houses worth a stroll. The **Minzoku-kan** (民族館; Folklore Museum; ☎ 67-3652; adult/child ¥300/150; ☎ 9am-4pm May-Nov) consists of two houses, with items from traditional life, and displays illustrating traditional gunpowder production.

About 1km further up Rte 156, **Kuroba Onsen** (くろば温泉; ☎ 67-3741; adult/child ¥600/300; ☎ 10.30am-10pm Wed-Mon Apr-Oct, 11am-9pm Wed-Mon Nov-Mar) is a complex of indoor-outdoor baths overlooking the river, with fine mountain views from its different storeys. Its low-alkaline waters are good for fatigue and sore muscles, among other ailments.

### KAMINASHI 上梨

About 5km beyond Suganuma, the house museum **Murakami-ke** (村上家; ☎ 66-2711; adult/child ¥300/150; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Apr-Nov, 9am-4pm Dec-Mar, closed 2nd & 4th Wed of each month) is one of the oldest in the region (1578). The proud owner shows visitors around and then sits them beside the *irori* and sings local folk songs. An English-language leaflet is available.

Also close by is the shrine **Hakusan-gū**. The main hall dates from 1502 and has been designated an Important Cultural Property. Its **Kokiriko Festival** (25 and 26 September) features costumed dancers performing with rattles that move like snakes. On the second day everyone joins in.

### AINOKURA 相倉

This World Heritage site is the most impressive of Gokayama's villages, with over 20 *gasshō* buildings in an agricultural valley amid splendid mountain views. It's less equipped for visitors than Ogimachi, which can be either a drawback or a selling point. Pick up an English pamphlet at the booth by the central car park.

Stroll through the village to the **Ainokura Museum of Life** (相倉民族館; ☎ 66-2732; admission ¥200; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) with displays of local crafts and paper.

Continue along Rte 156 for several kilometres until **Gokayama Washi-no-Sato** (五箇山和紙の里; Gokayama Japanese Paper Village; ☎ 66-2223; adult/child ¥200/150; ☎ 8.30am-5pm), where you will find displays of *washi* (Japanese handmade paper) art and a chance to make your own (¥500, reservations required). It's inside the *michi-no-eki*, a sort of public rest station.

### Sleeping

Ainokura is a great place for a *gasshō-zukuri* farmhouse stay. Have a Japanese speaker contact the inns directly for reservations, or approach them yourself; all cost about ¥8000 per person, including two meals. Try the welcoming **Yomoshiro** (与茂四郎; ☎ 66-2377; fax 66-2387); **Goyomon** (五ヨ門; ☎ 66-2154; fax 66-2227), with excellent views from the 2nd storey; or **Chōyomon** (長ヨ門民宿; ☎ 66-2755; fax 66-2765), with its atmospheric dark-wood sliding doors. Ainokura also has a **camping ground** (☎ 66-2123; per person ¥500; ☎ mid-Apr-late Oct), closed if there's snow.

### Getting There & Away

Between April and late November, **Nōhi Bus Company** (☎ 0577-32-1688) operates five buses

daily linking Shirakawa-gō with Takayama (¥2400, 1¼ hours). Two buses a day connect Kanazawa with Shirakawa-gō (¥3300, 3½ hours). Schedules vary from December to March and depend largely on the weather.

Just before Ainokura, buses divert from Rte 156 for Rte 304 towards Kanazawa. From the Ainokura-guchi bus stop it's about 400m uphill to Ainokura.

Between Ogimachi and Gokayama, **Kaetsuno Bus** (☎ 0766-22-4888) operates four buses a day, stopping at all the major sights and continuing to Takaoka on the JR Hokuriku line (one hour). If you want to get off at unofficial stops (eg Kuroba Onsen), tell the driver.

By car it's about two hours from Takayama, with interchanges at Gokayama and Shōkawa. From Hakusan, the scenic toll road Hakusan Super-Rindō ends near Ogimachi (cars ¥3150). During colder months, check road conditions in advance with regional tourist offices.

## JAPAN ALPS NATIONAL PARK 中部山岳国立公園

Boasting some of Japan's most dramatic scenery, this mountain-studded park – also called Chūbu-Sangaku National Park – is a favourite of alp-lovers. Highlights include hiking the valleys and peaks of Kamikōchi and Shin Hotaka Onsen, and soaking up the splendour of Shirahone Onsen, a gem of a hot-spring resort. The northern part of the park extends to the Tateyama-Kurobe Alpine Route (p290).

### Orientation & Information

The park straddles the border between Gifu-ken and Nagano-ken, with the Gifu-ken (western) side also known as Oku-Hida Onsen, while the Nagano-ken (eastern) side is Azumi-mura. Thanks to recent changes in Japanese zoning laws, the two halves of the park are now administered by Takayama and Matsumoto respectively. Several maps and pamphlets are published by the Japan National Tourist Organization (JNTO) and by local tourist authorities in English, with more detailed hiking maps in Japanese.

### Getting There & Around

The main gateway cities are Takayama to the west and Matsumoto to the east. Service from

Takayama is by bus, while most travellers from Matsumoto catch the private Matsumoto Dentetsu train to Shim-Shimashima station (¥680, 30 minutes) to transfer to buses – the ride in, along the Azusa-gawa, is breathtaking. Within the park, the main transit hubs are Hirayu Onsen and Kamikōchi.

Bus schedules are known to change annually, and the schedules short-change visits to some areas and *long-change* others. Check schedules before setting out. See boxed text, p268, for fares and travel times.

Hiring a car may save money, time and nerves. However, some popular routes, particularly the road between Naka-no-yu and Kamikōchi, are open only to buses and taxis.

### KAMIKŌCHI 上高地

☎ 0263

Some 50km from Matsumoto and straddling the rushing Azusa-gawa, Kamikōchi is the park's biggest drawcard. It offers some of Japan's most spectacular scenery and a variety of hiking trails from which to see it.

In the late 19th century, foreigners 'discovered' this mountainous region and coined the term 'Japan Alps'. A British missionary, Reverend Walter Weston, toiled from peak to peak and sparked Japanese interest in mountaineering as a sport. He is now honoured with a festival (first Sunday in June, the official opening of the hiking season), and Kamikōchi has become a base for strollers, hikers and climbers. It's a pleasure just to meander Kamikōchi's riverside paths lined with *sasa* grasses.

Kamikōchi is closed from mid-November to late April, and in peak times (late July to late August, and during the foliage season in October) it is busier than Shinjuku station. Arrive early in the day, especially during the foliage season of late September to October. June to mid-July is the rainy season, making outdoor pursuits depressingly soggy. It's perfectly feasible to visit Kamikōchi as a day trip, but you'll miss out on the pleasures of staying in the mountains and taking uncrowded early-morning or late-afternoon walks.

### Orientation

Most visitors arrive at Kamikōchi by bus to the bus station, which is surrounded by visitor facilities. A 10-minute walk from the bus station along the Azusa-gawa takes you

### SAMPLE BUS ROUTES: JAPAN ALPS NATIONAL PARK

Within the park, bus fares and schedules change seasonally and annually; however, the following are fares and travel times on common bus routes in and around the area. Discounted return fares are listed where available, and if you are doing a lot of back-and-forth travel you may also consider the three-day 'Free Coupon' (¥6400) for unlimited bus transport within the park and to Matsumoto and Takayama. You can find current fare and schedule information at tourist offices in Matsumoto and Takayama, or at [www.alpico.co.jp/access/route\\_k/honsen/info\\_e.html](http://www.alpico.co.jp/access/route_k/honsen/info_e.html) or [www.alpico.co.jp/access/express/kamikochi\\_takayama/info\\_e.html](http://www.alpico.co.jp/access/express/kamikochi_takayama/info_e.html).

#### Bus Fares

From	To	Fare (¥; one way or one way/return)	Duration (mins; one way)
Takayama	Hirayu Onsen	1530	55
	Kamikōchi	2000	80
Matsumoto	Shin-Shimajima	680 (train)	30
		750 (bus – infrequent)	30
	Hirayu Onsen	2300/4100	85
	Kamikōchi	2400/4400	100
Shin-Shimajima	Shin-Hotaka	2800	120
	Naka-no-yu	1550	50
	Kamikōchi	1900/3300	70
Kamikōchi	Shirahone Onsen	1400/2300	75
	Naka-no-yu	600	20
	Hirayu Onsen	1050	30
Hirayu Onsen	Shirahone Onsen	1350	40
	Naka-no-yu	540	45

to the bridge Kappa-bashi, named for a water sprite of Japanese legend, where most of the hiking trails start.

### Information

The **Kankō Ryokan Kumiai** (Ryokan Association; ☎ 95-2405; ☎ 9am-5pm late Apr–mid-Nov) at the Kamikōchi bus station is geared to booking accommodation, though non-Japanese speakers may want to book through tourist information offices in Matsumoto (p283) for Kamikōchi and Shirahone Onsen; both have English-speaking staff.

A little bit further along and to the left, the **Kamikōchi Information Centre** (☎ 95-2433; ☎ 8am-5pm late Apr–mid-Nov; E) provides hiking instructions and weather conditions, and also distributes the useful English *Kamikōchi Pocket Guide* with a map of the main walking tracks.

A 10-minute walk from the bus station along the main trail, the spiffy **Kamikōchi Visitor Centre** (☎ 95-2606; ☎ 8am-5pm late Apr–mid-Nov) has displays on Kamikōchi's flora and fauna, and explanations of its geological history.

Serious hikers and climbers might consider **insurance** (*hoken*; ¥1000 per person per day), available from window 3 at the Kamikōchi bus terminal. Weigh the benefits for yourself, but know that the out-of-pocket cost for a rescue 'copter starts at ¥800,000.

### Sights & Activities

#### HIKING & CLIMBING

The river valley offers basically level, short-distance walks. A four-hour round trip starts east of Kappa-bashi along the right-hand side of the river past Myōjin-bashi (one hour) to Tokusawa (another hour) before returning. By Myōjin-bashi is the idyllic pond **Myōjin-ike** (admission ¥300), whose clear waters mark the innermost shrine of the **Hotaka-jinja**. There's also a track on the other side of the river, but it's partly a service road.

West of Kappa-bashi, you can amble along the right-hand side of the river to **Weston Relief** (a monument to Kamikōchi's most famous hiker, Walter Weston; 15 minutes) or keep to the left-hand side of the river and walk to the pond **Taishō-ike** (40 minutes).

The visitor centre offers **ranger-led hikes** (¥300) to Taishō-ike (8.20am) and Myōjin-ike (1pm). **Nature guides** (¥1000-3500) and **climbing guides** (per day ¥30,000) are also on hand. It is always wise to book in advance; some staff members speak English. Other popular hikes include the mountain hut at Dakesawa (2½ hours up) and Yakedake (four hours up, starting about 20 minutes west of the Weston Relief, at Hodaka-bashi). From the peaks, it's possible to see all the way to Mt Fuji in clear weather.

Dozens of long-distance options vary in duration from a couple of days to a week. *Hiking in Japan* by Paul Hunt, Mason Florence et al provides practical advice. Large Japanese-language maps of the area show routes and average hiking times between huts, major peaks and landmarks. Favourite hikes and climbs (which can mean human traffic jams during peak seasons) include Yariga-take (3180m) and Hotaka-dake (3190m) – also known as Oku-Hotaka-dake.

A steep but worthwhile hike connects Kamikōchi and Shin-Hotaka Onsen (p271). The trail from Kappa-bashi crosses the ridge below Nishi Hotaka-dake (2909m) at Nishi Hotaka San-sō (Nishi Hotaka Mountain Cottage; three hours) and continues on to Nishi Hotaka-guchi, which is the top station of the cable car for Shin-Hotaka Onsen. The hike takes nearly four hours (because of a steep ascent). Or you could save an hour of sweat and do the hike in the opposite direction. To reach the cable car, take a bus from

Takayama or Hirayu Onsen to Shin-Hotaka Onsen-guchi.

Other more distant hiking destinations include Nakabusa Onsen (allow three days) and Murodō (allow five days), which is on the Tateyama-Kurobe Alpine Route (p78). This allows you to indulge in a soak en route in Takama-ga-hara Onsen, one of the finest in all Japan.

For long-distance hikes there are mountain huts available; enquire at the tourist office for details. Hikers and climbers should be well prepared. Even during summer, temperatures can plummet, or the whole area can be covered in sleeting rain or blinding fog, and in thunderstorms there is no refuge on the peaks.

### ONSEN

On cold or drizzly days, the hot baths at the **Kamikōchi Onsen Hotel** (☎ 95-2311; admission ¥600; ☎ 7-9am & 12.30-3.30pm) are a refreshing respite.

The area's most unusual *onsen* is **Bokuden-no-yu** (☎ 95-2341; admission ¥700; ☎ 7am-5.30pm), a tiny cave bath dripping with minerals. It's at the intersection at Naka-no-yu, just before the bus-only tunnel towards Kamikōchi proper. Enter the small shop next to the Naka-no-yu bus stop, pay and get the key to the little mountain hut housing the *onsen*. It is yours privately for up to 30 minutes.

### INFORMATION

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Kamikōchi Onsen Hotel 上高地温泉ホテル	6 A2
Myōjin-ike 明神池	7 B1
Weston Relief ウェストン像	8 A1

### SLEEPING

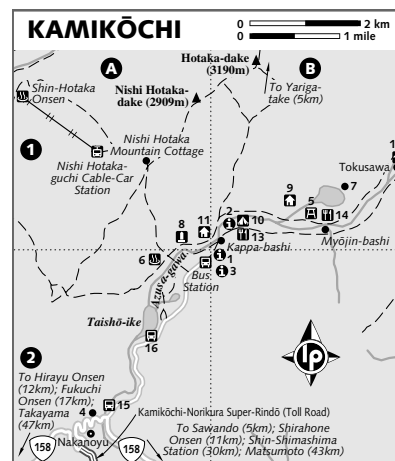
Kamikōchi Gosenjaku Lodge 上高地五千尺ロッジ	9 B1
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Taishō-ike bus stop 大正池バス停	16 A2



## Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation in Kamikōchi is pricey and advance reservations are essential. Lodging rates quoted here include two meals, and some lodgings shut down their electricity generators in the middle of the night (emergency lighting stays on).

**Kamikōchi Konashidaira Kyampu-jō** (☎ 95-2321; camp sites per person from ¥700, tents/bungalows from ¥2000/6000; ☎ office 7am-7pm) About 200m past the visitors centre, this camping ground can get packed with tents. Rental tents (in July and August) and bungalows are available, and there's a small shop and restaurant open until 6pm.

**Kamikōchi Nishiitoya San-sō** (☎ 95-2206; fax 95-2208; www.nishiitoya.com; bunk beds ¥7700, d per person ¥10,550; E) Recently refurbished, this friendly lodge with a cosy lounge dates from the early 20th century. Rooms are a mix of Japanese and Western styles, all with toilet and shared bath: a large *onsen* facing the Hotake mountains. It's just west of Kappa-bashi.

**Tokusawa-en** (徳沢園; ☎ 95-2508; camp sites per person ¥500, Japanese dm per person ¥9000, r per person from ¥13,000) A marvellously secluded place, in a wooded dell about 3km northeast of Kappa-bashi. It's both a camping ground and a lodge and with Japanese-style rooms (shared facilities) and hearty meals served in a busy dining hall.

**Kamikōchi Gosenjaku Lodge** (上高地五千尺ロッジ; ☎ 95-2221; fax 95-2511; www.gosenjaku.co.jp; per person 'skier's bed' ¥10,000, d/tr/q ¥17,850/16,800/15,000) This is a polished little place. Its 34 rooms are mostly Japanese-style plus some 'skier's beds', basically curtained-off bunk beds. Rooms all have sink and toilet, but baths are shared. Buffet-style meals are Japanese, Chinese and Western.

Dotted along the trails and around the mountains are dozens of spartan *yama-goya* (mountain huts), which provide two meals and a futon from around ¥8000 per person; some also serve simple lunches. Enquire before setting out to make sure there's one on your intended route.

Kamikōchi's signature dish is actually a signature skewer: *iwana* (river trout) grilled over an *irori*. Some trail huts serve it (along with the usual noodles and curry rice), but **Kamonjigoya** (☎ 95-2418; dishes ¥600-2000, lunch set ¥1500; ☎ 8.30am-4pm; E) is worth seeking out. The *iwana* set is ¥1500, or there's *oden* (fish cake stew), *soba* and *koru-sake* (dried *iwana* in

sake) served in a lovely ceramic bowl. It's near Myōjin-bashi bridge, just outside the entrance to Myōjin-ike pond.

There's a shop at the bus station with cheap trail snacks or, at the other end of the spectrum **Kamikōchi Gosenjaku Hotel** (☎ 95-2111) has pricey restaurants with French food and fancy cakes like Camembert torte with apples (¥630 per slice).

## Getting Around

Private vehicles are prohibited between Naka-no-yu and Kamikōchi; access is only by bus or taxi, and then only as far as the Kamikōchi bus station. Those with private cars can use car parks en route to Naka-no-yu in the hamlet of Sawando for ¥500 per day; shuttle buses (¥1800 return) run a few times per hour.

Buses run via Naka-no-yu and Taishō-ike to the bus station. Hiking trails commence at the bridge Kappa-bashi, which is a short walk from the bus station.

## SHIRAHONE ONSEN 白骨温泉

☎ 0263

Intimate and dramatic, this hot-spring resort town is easily the most beautiful in the park. Straddling a deep gorge, it's lovely any time of year, but during the autumn foliage season and – especially – in the snow, it is just this side of heaven. All around the gorge are a-dozen-and-a-half traditional inns (some more traditional than others) with open-air baths. Shirahone Onsen could also be a base for trips into Kamikōchi.

Shirahone means 'white bone', and it is said that bathing in the milky-blue hydrogen sulphide waters here for three days ensures three years without a cold; the waters have a wonderful silky feel. The riverside **kōshū rotemburo** (公衆露天風呂; public outdoor bath; admission ¥500; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Apr-Oct) is deep within the gorge, separated by gender; the entrance is by the bus stop. Diagonally opposite, the **tourist information office** (観光案内所; ☎ 93-3251; ☎ 9am-5pm) maintains a list of inns that have opened their baths to the public that day (admission from ¥600).

Budget travellers may wish to take a dip and move on; nightly rates start at ¥9000 with two meals, and advance reservations are highly recommended. **Tsuruya Ryokan** (つるや旅館; ☎ 93-2331; fax 93-2029; www.tsuruya-ryokan.jp in Japanese; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥10,650) has both contemporary and traditional touches and

great indoor and outdoor baths, and each of its 28 rooms has fine views of the gorge; rooms with private toilet and sink available for extra charge.

**our pick** **Awanoyu Ryokan** (泡の湯旅館; ☎ 92-2101; fax 93-2339; www.awanoyu-ryokan.com in Japanese; r incl 2 meals from ¥26,950) may be what you have in mind when you think *onsen ryokan*. Up the hill from most of Shirahone, it's been an inn since 1912 (current building from 1940). It has private facilities in each room as well as single-sex common baths. There's also *konyoku* (mixed bathing), but not to worry: the waters are so milky that you can't see below the surface anyway.

Note: many visitors find the bus ride up along the narrow cliff-side roads from the Sawando junction either a thrill ride or a reason to take their happy pills.

## HIRAYU ONSEN 平湯温泉

☎ 0578

This hot-spring resort is a busy hub for bus transport on the Takayama side of the park. It has a cluster of *onsen* lodgings and an excellent modern hot-spring complex, and even the bus terminal has a **rotemburo** (admission ¥600; ☎ 8am-5pm). The **information office** (☎ 89-3030; ☎ 9am-5pm), opposite the bus station, has leaflets and maps and can book accommodation. No English is spoken.

The hot-spring complex **Hirayu-no-mori** (ひらゆの森; ☎ 89-3338; admission ¥500; ☎ 10am-9pm), uphill from the bus station, boasts one indoor and six outdoor baths. It's great either for a quick dip between buses, or as part of a day excursion from Takayama.

Although Hirayu is not remote and relaxing in the way other Chūbu-Sangaku villages are, there are some nice inns. **Ryosō Tsuyukusa** (旅荘つゆくさ; ☎ 89-2620; fax 89-3581; r per person incl 2 meals ¥7500) is a friendly spot with decent tatami rooms and a cosy wooden *rotemburo* with mountain views. Turn left out of the bus station and left at the first T-junction. It's on the left before the road curves. The **Eitarō** (栄太郎; ☎ 89-2540; fax 89-3526; r per person incl 2 meals ¥10,650) ryokan offers more nicely outfitted rooms and a pleasant *rotemburo*. Turn left out of the bus station, walk about six minutes and it's on the left.

The elegant **Hirayu-kan** (平湯館; ☎ 89-3111; fax 89-3113; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥13,000) has both Japanese- and Western-style rooms, a splendid garden, and indoor and outdoor baths.

From the bus station, turn left, stay on the main road, go through one T-junction and it will soon be on your right.

To reach the small **Hirayu Camping Ground** (平湯キャンプ場; ☎ 89-2610; fax 89-2130; camp sites per adult/child ¥600/400, parking ¥1500), turn right out of the station, go about 700m and it's on the left-hand side.

For drivers, the 4km-plus Abō tunnel from Hirayu Onsen eastward into the park costs ¥600 each way.

## FUKUCHI ONSEN 福地温泉

☎ 0578

This relatively untouristed hot spring, a short ride north of Hirayu Onsen, has rural charm, a morning market and two outstanding baths.

**our pick** Follow the long, rustic covered walkway to one of Central Honshū's finest *onsen ryokan*, **Yumoto Chōza** (湯元長座; ☎ 89-2146; fax 89-2010; www.cyouza.com in Japanese; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥21,150). Exquisite mountain cuisine is served at *irori* and you're surrounded by elegant traditional architecture and five indoor and two outdoor pools. Half of the 32 rooms have en-suite *irori*. Reservations are essential. By bus, get off at Fukuchi-Onsen-shimo.

A restaurant-cum-hot-spring, **Mukashibashi-no-sato** (昔ばなしの里; ☎ 89-2793; bath ¥500; ☎ 8am-5pm) is set back from the street in a traditional farmhouse with fine indoor and outdoor baths, free on the 26th of each month. Out the front, there's an **asa-ichi** (☎ 6-10.30am daily Apr-Nov, Sat & Sun Dec-Mar). By bus, get off at Fukuchi-Onsen-kami bus stop.

## SHIN-HOTAKA ONSEN 新徳高温泉

☎ 0578

North of Fukuchi Onsen, Shin-Hotaka Onsen may have lots of hot springs underground, but above ground the main reason to visit is for the cable car known as the Shin-Hotaka Ropeway. It is reportedly the longest of its kind in Asia, whisking you up close to the peak of Nishi Hotaka-dake (2909m) for a superb mountain panorama. The entrance to the two-stage **Shin-Hotaka Ropeway** (新徳高ロープウェイ; ☎ 9-2252; www.okuhi.jp/Rop/FRTop.html; one way/return ¥1500/2800; ☎ 6am-5.15pm 1 Aug-last Sun in Aug, 8.30am-4.45pm late Aug-Jul) is near the Shin-Hotaka Onsen bus station. Additional hours are offered at peak seasons.

If you are fit, properly equipped and have ample time, there's a variety of hiking options



from Nishi Hotaka-guchi (the top cable-car station). One of the most popular is over to **Kamikōchi** (p267), which takes about three hours; it's *much* easier than going the other way.

Adjacent to the bus terminal is a rather spartan **public onsen** (新穂高温泉アルペン浴場; ☎ 9-2361; admission free; ♿ 9am-4pm). During summer it gets crowded with tourists, but in the off-season your only company is likely to be a few weary shift workers from the electric plant across the river.

Information is available at the **Oku-Hida Spa Tourist Information Centre** (奥飛騨温泉郷観光案内所; ☎ 9-2458; ♿ 10am-5pm) across from the bus terminal. Staff can book lodging in Shin-Hotaka Onsen, although lodgings here are not particularly appealing in terms of the price/quality ratio; visitors are better off heading to Kamikōchi, Fukuchi Onsen or Hirayu Onsen instead.

The best access for Shin-Hotaka Onsen is via bus from Takayama or Hirayu Onsen. See boxed text, p268, for details of buses within the park.

## NAGANO-KEN 長野県

Known as Shinshū in earlier days, Nagano-ken is one of Japan's most enjoyable visits, not only for the beauty of its mountainous terrain (it claims the title 'the Roof of Japan'), but also for its traditional architecture, rich culture and unique foods.

Nagano-ken's cities, notably Nagano and Matsumoto, are well worth a stay and, apart from the sections of the prefecture in the Japan Alps National Park, there are several quasi-national parks that attract large numbers of skiers, campers, hikers, mountaineers and hot-spring aficionados.

### NAGANO 長野

☎ 026 / pop 384,000

Nagano was front-and-centre on the world stage when it hosted the 1998 Winter Olympics, but this mountain-ringed prefectural capital has been around since the Kamakura period. Back then it was a temple town centred around the magnificent Zenkō-ji. The temple is still Nagano's main attraction, drawing more than four million visitors every year.

Since its brief flirtation with international fame, Nagano has reverted to its friendly small-

town self, though it's just a bit more worldly. It is also an important transport hub. Not surprisingly, the mountains surrounding the city offer superb recreational opportunities: skiing, hiking, soaking in *onsen* and exploring the region's many mountain shrines.

### Orientation

As a temple city, Nagano is laid out on a grid, with Zenkō-ji occupying a prominent position overlooking the city centre from the north. Chūō-dōri leads south from the temple, doing a quick dogleg before hitting JR Nagano station, 1.8km away; it is said that street-planners considered Zenkō-ji so holy that it should not be approached directly. Bus stops and the private Nagano Dentetsu ('Nagaden') train line are just outside JR Nagoya station's Zenkō-ji exit. Buses to various points in the city and surrounds depart from both the Zenkō-ji exit and the opposite east exit.

### Information

The website [www.nagano-cvb.or.jp](http://www.nagano-cvb.or.jp) has information about sightseeing, transportation, accommodation listings (with websites where available) and annual festivals.

There's a post office and an international ATM in the West Plaza Nagano building opposite the station's Zenkō-ji exit. Another post office is within the Zenkō-ji precincts, just inside the Niō-mon gate.

**ANPIE** (Association of Nagano Prefecture for Promoting International Exchange; ☎ 235-7186; [www.anpie.or.jp](http://www.anpie.or.jp); 692-2 Habashita; ♿ 8.30am-5.15pm Mon-Fri) Provides tourist information and assistance to speakers of English and other languages. From Nagano station, take any bus to the Kenchō (prefectural office) and go to the Kenchō-Higashikan (east building).

**Boo Foo Woo** (☎ 226-0850; 2nd fl, Daita Bldg, Chūō-dōri; per hr ¥390; ♿ 24hr) Internet access; six minutes' walk from the station, just off Chūō-dōri.

**Café Planet** (☎ 228-5433; B1 fl, 1375 Ishidōchō; per hr ¥400; ♿ 24hr) Internet access; across from the station, beneath the large Chinese restaurant Kinryū Hanten.

**Heiandō bookshop** (☎ 224-4545; West Plaza Nagano; ♿ 10am-10pm) Facing the station, Nagano's largest bookshop carries English-language books and magazines (4th floor).

**Nagano City Hall International Relations Section** (長野市役所国際課; ☎ 224-5447; 1613 Midori-chō; ♿ 8.30am-5.15pm Mon-Fri) This office has English speakers available to give tourist info. Take a right out of the station, walk for 10 minutes, and turn right on busy Shōwa-dōri. It's three blocks further, on the right.





**Nagano Tourist Information Centre** (☎ 226-5626; ☹ 9am-6pm) Inside JR Nagano station, this friendly outfit has good English-language colour maps and guides to both Nagano and the surrounding areas. Staff can also book accommodation in the city centre.

## Sights & Activities

### ZENKŌ-JI 善光寺

This temple (☎ 186-026-234-3591; 491 Motoyoshi-chō; admission free; ☹ 4.30am-4.30pm summer, 6am-4pm winter, sliding hr rest of year) is believed to have been founded in the 7th century and is the home of the Ikkō-Sanzon, allegedly the first Buddhist image to arrive in Japan (in AD 552, from Korea). The image has quite a history; it's been the subject of disputes, lost, recovered and, finally, installed again. Don't expect to

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see it, however; it is said that 37 generations of emperors have not seen the image, though visitors may view a copy every seven years (see opposite).

Zenkō-ji's immense popularity stems partly from its liberal welcoming of believers from all Buddhist sects, including women; its chief officiants are both a priest and a priestess.

The original site was south of the current temple, off what's now the busy shopping street Nakamise-dōri; however, in that location it was destroyed 11 times by fires originating in neighbouring homes and businesses – and rebuilt each time with donations from believers throughout Japan. Finally, the

Tokugawa shōgunate decreed that the temple be moved to its present, safer location. The current building dates from 1707 and is a National Treasure.

Visitors ascend to the temple via Nakamise-dōri and the impressive gates **Niō-mon** and **Sanmon** (under restoration at time of writing). In the Hondō (main hall), the Ikkō-Sanzon image is in an ark left of the central altar, behind a dragon-embroidered curtain. To the right of the altar, visitors may descend a staircase to the Okaidan, a pitch-black tunnel that symbolises death and rebirth and provides the closest access to the hidden image; taller visitors: watch your head! As you navigate the twisting tunnel, dangle your arm along the right-hand wall until you feel something heavy, moveable and metallic – said to be the key to salvation (a bargain for the ¥500 admission).

It's worth getting to the temple shortly after it opens to witness the morning service and the *ojuzu chodai*, in which the priest or priestess touches the Buddhist holy beads to the heads of all who line up and kneel. Check with the tourist information centre or the Zenkō-ji office for the times of the service.

Any bus from bus stop 1 in front of Nagano station's Zenkō-ji exit will get you to the temple (¥100).

### M-WAVE SKATING ARENA M ウェーブ

One of the star attractions during the 1998 Olympics, the state-of-the-art **speed-skating arena** (☎ 222-3300; www.nagano-mwave.co.jp; adult/child ¥700/350; ☹ museum 10am-4pm Wed-Mon) today houses an Olympic memorial museum with exhibits relating to the games. Photos, medals, the original torch and uniforms are on display. Visitors can also watch footage from other Olympics and ride a rather amusing bobsled simulator. Skating, while pricey (and hours vary), is perhaps the best way to experience **M-Wave** (admission ¥1500, skate rental ¥600). Take a Yashima-bound bus from stop 1 from Nagano station's east exit and get off at M-Wave (¥260, 20 minutes).

## Festivals & Events

**Gokaichō Matsuri** Five million pilgrims come to Zenkō-ji every seven years from early April to mid-May, to view a copy of Zenkō-ji's sacred Buddha image – the only time it can be seen. Next festival: 2010.

**Enka Taikai** Fireworks festival with street foods on 23 November.

## Sleeping

Perhaps the most Nagano way to stay is in a *shukubō* (temple lodging) at one of Zenkō-ji's subtemples. Contact **Zenkō-ji** (☎ 186-026-234-3591) to book, at least one day in advance. Be sure to dial the '186' to permit caller ID, without which staff might not pick up the phone. Expect to pay ¥7000 to ¥10,000 per person with two meals.

Near Zenkō-ji are several traditional and very old ryokan. The station area is mostly uninspiring business hotels; we've picked out some good station-area options.

**Zenkō-ji Kyōju-in Youth Hostel** (☎ 232-2768; fax 232-2767; 479 Motoyoshi-chō; dm member/nonmember ¥3360/4360) This atmospheric hostel is housed in a 100-plus-year-old subtemple of Zenkō-ji. Detractors would prefer no curfew and not to have to share a room, but it remains popular nonetheless. Be sure to book. No meals are served.

**Oyado Kinenkan** (☎ 234-2043; fax 234-6888; 550 Nishimachi; r per person from ¥4200) Old-shoe comfy and exceedingly friendly, this building has been an inn for 100 of its 200 years. Rooms have no private facilities and parts are, shall we say, showing their history; many fans wouldn't have it any other way. Add ¥1300 for breakfast or ¥4600 for two meals. English and French spoken. Take the bus to Daimon Minami, and the inn is one block west – look for the huge inverted owl on the façade (it's the nose from an early *shinkansen*).

**Shimizuya Ryokan** (☎ 232-2580; fax 234-5911; 49 Daimon-chō; r per person from ¥4500) On Chūō-dōri, a few blocks south of Zenkō-ji, this friendly, family-run ryokan offers good value, with a smoky dark-wood interior; spotless tatami rooms (no private facilities), laundry machines and lots of ins, outs, ups, downs, nooks and crannies. It's been in the family for 130 years. No meals served.

**Comfort Hotel Nagano** (☎ 268-1611; fax 268-1621; www.choice-hotels.com; 1-12-4 Minami-Chitose; s/d/tw from ¥4820/7350/9870; ☹ ☺ ☺ ☺) Of the many business hotels near the station, this one has the best combination of value and welcome. Rooms are teeny tiny, but rates include a simple breakfast and internet access in the lobby. From the station, head northeast along Nagano Ōdōri, and the hotel is just before Mitsukoshi department store.

**Matsuya Ryokan** (☎ 232-2811; fax 233-2047; Zenkō-ji Kannai; r per person from ¥4500, incl meals from ¥9000; ☺ ☺) Six generations of the Suzuki family have run

## ZENKŌ-JI LEGENDS

Few Japanese temples have the fascination of Zenkō-ji, thanks in part to the legends related to it. These are just some:

- **Ikkō-Sanzon** This image, containing three statues of the Amida Buddha, was brought to Japan from Korea in the 6th century and remains the temple's *raison d'être*. It's wrapped like a mummy and kept in an ark behind the main altar, and it's said that nobody has seen it for 1000 years. However, in 1702, to quell rumours that the ark was empty, the shōgunate ordered a priest to confirm its existence and take measurements. That priest remains the last confirmed person to have viewed it.
- **Following an Ox to Zenkō-ji** Long ago, an impious old woman was washing her kimono when an ox appeared, caught a piece of the cloth on his horn and ran away with it. The woman was as stingy as she was impious, and she gave chase for hours. Finally, the ox led her to Zenkō-ji, and she fell asleep under its eaves. The ox came to her in a dream, revealed himself to be the image of the Amida Buddha and disappeared. The woman saw this as a miracle and became a pious believer. Today, people in Kantō say, 'I followed an ox to Zenkō-ji', to mean that something good happened unexpectedly.
- **The Doves of Sanmon** Zenkō-ji's pigeon population is renowned, making the rattan *hattoguruma* (wheeled pigeon) a favourite Nagano souvenir. Locals claim the birds forecast bad weather by roosting on the Sanmon gate. Many visitors claim to also see five white doves in the plaque above the central portal; the five short strokes in the characters for Zenkō-ji do look remarkably dove-like. See if you can spot them too. In the upper character (善, zen) they're the two uppermost strokes; in the middle character (光, kō) the strokes on either side of the top; and in the 'ji' (寺) it's the short stroke on the bottom left.
- **Binzuru** A follower of Buddha, Binzuru trained in healing. He was due to become a Bosatsu (Bodhisattva, enlightened one) and go to the land of the immortals, but the Buddha instructed him to remain on earth and continue to do good works. At most temples with images of Binzuru he's outside the main hall, but at Zenkō-ji you'll find his statue just inside, worn down where visitors have touched it to help heal ailments of the corresponding parts of their own bodies; you can see the lines where the face was once replaced.

this traditional inn just inside the Niō-mon of Zenkō-ji. Even if the communal baths are a bit aged, the rest of the ryokan is exceedingly well maintained. Meals are seasonal *kaiseki*. Add ¥1000 per person for rooms with private facilities. It's next to the statue of the Enmei Jizō.

**Hotel Sunroute Nagano Higashi-guchi** (☎ 264-7700; fax 264-6611; www.sunroute.jp; 995-1 Kurita; s/d/tw from ¥8085/14,385/15,435; ♿ ♿) Business hotel with clean, modern rooms and smart wood touches. Rooms ending in 17 are corner rooms with extra space and good views. Check for internet specials. It's across from the station, outside the east exit.

**Hotel Saihokukan** (☎ 235-3333; www.saihokukan.com; 528-1 Kenchō; s/d/tw from ¥6825/14,700/15,750) Dating from 1890 (though facilities are recent), this Western hotel has elegant flourishes in its fine rooms, plus stylish restaurants and bars. Less expensive rooms are a bit small; suites are favoured by the imperial family.

From the station's Zenkō-ji exit; head north along Chūō-dōri and turn left after Hachijuni Bank.

**Hotel Metropolitan Nagano** (☎ 291-7000; fax 291-7007; www.metro-n.co.jp; 1346 Minami-Ishido-chō; s/d/tw from ¥9240/19,635/18,480) An excellent choice next to the station. The modern, elegant Metropolitan features airy, comfortable rooms, with a café, restaurant and top-floor lounge with broad views. Japan Rail Pass holders get a 20% discount. It's just outside the station's Zenkō-ji exit; if you're sensitive to noise, reserve a room facing away from the tracks.

## Eating

**Tofu Café Gorokutei** (☎ 233-0356; 125-1 Higashi-machi; mains ¥600-1200; ♿ lunch & dinner; ♿) From the pancakes to the parfaits, just about everything here is made with Japan's favourite protein (although the 'tofu hamburger' also has a little ground chicken). It's in Patio Daimon, an open-air collection of small buildings built

like *kura* (storehouses), by the Daimon and Daimon Minami bus stops. Picture menu available.

**Gohonjin Fujiya** (Fujiya Gohonjin; ☎ 232-1241; 80 Daimon-chō; mains ¥1000-2400; ♿ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner nightly; E) Until recently, this was Nagano's most venerable hotel (since 1648), but it quit the hotel business and is now the city's most venerable Western restaurant. Try potato gnocchi with gorgonzola sauce or *wagyu* sirloin Florentine. The imposing 1923 building mixes Japanese and Art Deco motifs.

**Gomeikan** (☎ 232-1221; 515 Daimon-chō; mains from ¥1200; ♿ 11am-8pm Thu-Tue; ♿) E) This longtime Nagano favourite serves delicious *tonkatsu* (deep-fried breaded pork cutlet), vegetarian Indian curry, beefsteak, and coffee and cake in an old renovated building next to the post office on Chūō-dōri.

**Chō Bali Bali** (☎ 243-2891; 1366 Suehiro-chō; mains from ¥600; ♿ noon-2.30pm & 6pm-midnight Tue-Sun; ♿) E) This stylish space gathers a festive crowd most nights and serves eclectic dishes from Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam with a touch of Italian for good measure; *yam-un-sen* is a spicy Thai salad with vermicelli. Highly recommended.

**Marusei** (☎ 232-5776; 486 Motoyoshi-chō; dishes ¥600-1300; ♿ 11am-4pm Thu-Tue; E) A stone's throw from the temple on Nakamise-dōri, tiny unassuming Marusei serves *soba* and a well-liked *tonkatsu*; the Marusei *bentō* (boxed lunch; ¥1300) lets you try both.

**Munch** (☎ 228-7080; 1-16-1 Minami-Chitose; dishes ¥300-580; ♿ 6.30pm-midnight Mon-Sat) Japanese reggae is the soundtrack at this youthful contemporary *izakaya*. Order small plates like *agedashi-dofu* (fried tofu), *basashi* (horsemeat sashimi) or *niku-jaga* (meat and potatoes), washed down with *ichigo* (strawberry) or *mikan* (mandarin orange) sake. Or say how much you want to spend and let the chef surprise you. From the Zenkō-ji exit of the station, turn right through the alley and it's just past the car park.

**Sukitei** (すき亭; ☎ 234-1123; lunch sets ¥1150-2950; sukiyaki from ¥2500; ♿ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Tops in town for splendid sukiyaki. Set menus include *udon*, *gyusashi* (beef sashimi) and more. The price of the top-grade beef is sky-high, but if you try it you may never go back to the cheaper stuff.

Some spots for a quick bite:  
**Oyaki Kōbō** (☎ 223-4537; oyaki each around ¥140; ♿ 8.30am-7.30pm; ♿) *Oyaki* (filled wheat buns) with tasty flavours like pumpkin, mushroom and eggplant.

**Kashin Miwa** (☎ 238-3041; ice cream ¥250; ♿ 9am-5pm) Has ice cream made with *soba* (only in Nagano) near Zenkō-ji's Niō-mon

**Bakery's Street Café** (☎ 232-0269; 1283 Toigoshō; mains from ¥480; ♿ 7.30am-7pm; ♿) Dozens of bakeries from around Shinshū take turns supplying the wares. On Chūō-dōri, en route to Zenkō-ji, 12 minutes' walk from the station.

## Drinking

**Groovy** (☎ 227-0480; http://nagano.cool.ne.jp/jazzgroovy; 1398 Kita-ishidō-machi; cover ¥1000-3500) This music spot is popular with local jazz lovers for its live shows; check the website for schedule info. It's on Chūō-dōri, a six-minute walk from the train station.

**Liberty** (☎ 235-2870; 1602 Midori-chō; ♿ 11.30am-2pm & 6pm-1am) Nagano's most popular *gaijin* pub has Guinness on tap, decent pub food and a friendly crowd. From the west exit of JR Nagano, take a right on busy Nagano-Odōri and another right (at the second stoplight) on Showa-dōri.

## Getting There &amp; Away

Nagano *shinkansen* trains run twice hourly from Tokyo station (Asama, ¥8170, 1½ hours). The JR Shinonoi line connects Nagano with Matsumoto (*tokkyū*, ¥2970, 50 minutes) and Nagoya (*tokkyū*, ¥7330, three hours).

## TOGAKUSHI 戸隠

☎ 026 / pop 5200

This mountainous, forested region is northwest of Nagano and makes an excellent day trip. Hikers enjoy the refreshing alpine scenery from late spring to autumn, while winter belongs to the skiers. Togakushi has been famed for *soba* for centuries.

Three **subshrines** (Hōkōsha 宝幸社, Chūsha 中社 and Okusha 奥社), each separated by several kilometres, make up the Togakushi Shrine. The greatest concentration of sights and accommodation is in the community of Chūsha, near the Chūsha-Miyamae bus stop, including the wooded Chūsha; one tree here is said to be 800 years old. It's a good skiing base in the winter. You can hike a meandering 90-minute trail to Okusha, at the foot of Mt Togakushi, passing by **Kagami-ike Pond** (鏡池) and the **Togakushi Botanic Garden** (森林植物園). At the edge of the botanic garden you'll meet up with the long, cedar-lined path (*suginamiki*; 杉並木) to Okusha. Pick up Japanese maps from the Nagano tourist information centre.

From Okusha avid alpinists can make the strenuous climb to the top of 1911m-high Mt Togakushi. In winter, Okusha is inaccessible except for hearty snowshoers.

Across from the turn-off to Okusha is **Togakushi Minzoku-kan** (戸隠民俗館; ☎ 254-2395; adult/child ¥500/350; ☎ 9am-5pm), a collection of buildings that attest to the ninja-training school that was once here. A museum displays photos, clothing and weaponry used by the ninja (practitioner of the art of stealth) there. Next door, you can bungle your way through the popular Ninja House, which is full of trick doors, false staircases and curious mazes.

Near Chūsha, **Togakushi Snow World** (戸隠スノーワールド; ☎ 254-2106; 1-day pass ¥4000) has a local following for its decent runs (the longest is 3000m) and fewer crowds than other nearby resorts. Opening hours vary.

In Chūsha, **Togakushi Kōgen Yokokura Youth Hostel** (戸隠高原横倉ユースホステル; ☎ 254-2030; dm ¥3050, incl 2 meals ¥4725) is in an early Meiji-era building (Japanese toilets only), near the entrance to the ski area. Ryokan-quality private rooms are available from ¥7000 per person, with two meals. Prices at other ryokan start at around ¥8000 per person. To savour local *soba*, grab lunch at well-known **Uzuraya Soba** (うずら家そば; ☎ 254-2219; dishes ¥800-1700; ☎ lunch), which serves handmade *soba* noodles until they run out. It's also in Chūsha, directly across from the steps to the shrine.

Closer to Okusha (400m before the shrine), **Soba Nomi** (そばの美; ☎ 254-2102; dishes from ¥840; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm) is another fine choice, with delicious *soba* and large windows overlooking the forest.

Buses via the scenic Togakushi Birdline Highway depart from Nagano approximately hourly (7am to 7pm) and arrive at Chūsha-Miyamae bus stop in about an hour (one-way/return ¥1160) – do not get off at Chūsha bus stop. To Okusha the one-way/return fare is ¥1280/2300. If you plan to take many buses, look into the Togakushi Kōgen Free Kippu pass (¥2500 for three days), available from **Kawanakajima Bus Co** (☎ 229-6200), by stop 7 in front of Nagano station.

## OBUSE 小布施

☎ 026 / pop 12,000

This little town northeast of Nagano occupies a big place in Japanese art history. The famed *ukiyo-e* (wood-block print) artist Hokusai (1760–1849) worked here during his last years.

The town is also noted for its *kuri* (chestnuts), which you can sample steamed with rice or in ice cream or sweets. Pick up a map of the town from the Nagano tourist information centre before setting out.

The first stop should be the excellent **Hokusai-kan** (北斎館; ☎ 247-5206; adult/high school student/child ¥500/300/free; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Sep, 9am-5pm Oct-Mar), displaying some 30 of Hokusai's inspiring prints at any one time as well as several colourful floats decorated with his imaginative ceiling panels. From the train station, cross the street and walk down the road perpendicular to the station; take the second right then look for signs to the museum. It's a 10-minute walk from the station.

A block away, Hokusai's patron, Takai Kōzan, is commemorated in the **Takai Kōzan Kinenkan** (高井鴻山記念館; ☎ 249-4049; admission ¥300; ☎ 9am-5pm). This businessman was also an accomplished artist, albeit of more classical forms than Hokusai's; look for elegant Chinese-style landscapes.

A few blocks east stands the **Taikon Bonsai Museum** (盆栽美術館大観; ☎ 247-3000; adult/child ¥500/300; ☎ 9am-5pm), whose displays of rare species change daily. It's in five sections, to represent different Japanese landscapes including Hokkaidō, the ancient capital and right here in Shinshū.

Nine other museums in Obuse showcase everything from Japanese lamps to antique pottery.

To reach Obuse, take the Nagano Dentetsu (Nagaden) line from Nagano (*tokkyū*, ¥750, 22 minutes; *futsū*, ¥650, 35 minutes). You can obtain maps and info and hire bikes (¥400 per half-day) at the **Obuse Guide Centre** (おぶせガイドセンター; ☎ 247-5050; ☎ 9am-5pm), which you'll pass en route to the museums from the station.

## YUDANAKA 湯田中

☎ 0269

This hot spring village is famous as the home of Japan's famous 'snow monkeys', a troop of some 200 Japanese macaques who occasionally climb into the hot-spring baths here. The monkeys and their mountain hot tub can be found at **Jigokudani Yaen-kōen** (地獄谷野猿公苑; Wild Monkey Park; ☎ 33-4379; www.jigokudani-yaenken.co.jp; adult/child ¥500/250; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, 9am-4pm Nov-Mar). The park has been operating since 1964, so the monkeys can no longer be described as truly wild, and they're often found

into the tub to gather food that's been placed there. However, it's a unique chance to see Japanese monkeys in a semi-wild setting. It's a popular day trip from Nagano, and in winter it can be combined with a ski excursion to nearby Shiga Kōgen (below).

Across the river from Jigokudani, **Kōraku-kan** (後楽館; ☎ 33-4376; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥10,545; onsen only adult/child ¥500/250; ☎ 8am-10am & noon-3.30pm) is a simple *onsen* hotel. Accommodation is basic, with small but clean-swept tatami rooms. Aside from the mountain vegetable tempura for overnight visitors, the highlight is indoor and concrete riverside outdoor *onsen*. Bathe outdoors, and uninvited guests – of the decidedly hairy variety – may join you.

**Uotoshi Ryokan** (魚歳旅館; ☎ 33-1215; fax 33-0074; www.avis.ne.jp/~miyasaka/s/d/tr/q ¥4300/7980/11,970/15,960; ☎) In peaceful central Yudanaka, Uotoshi is nothing fancy but commendably hospitable. The English-speaking owner will demonstrate *kyūdō* (Japanese archery), pick you up at Yudanaka station, or drop you off near the start of the Monkey Park trail on request. Dinner (from ¥2520) and breakfast (from ¥530) are available. If you're walking from the station (seven minutes), turn left and follow the road over the river; when the road ends turn right. It's 20m further on.

From Nagano, take the Nagano Dentetsu (Nagaden) line to the Yudanaka terminus (*tokkyū*, ¥1230, 45 minutes; *futsū*, ¥1130, 1¼ hours); note that not all trains go all the way to Yudanaka. For the monkey park, take the bus for Kanbayashi Onsen Guchi and get off at Kanbayashi Onsen (¥220, 15 minutes, eight daily), walk uphill along the road about 400m, and you'll see a sign reading 'Monkey Park' at the start of a tree-lined 1.6km walk.

## SHIGA KŌGEN 志賀高原

☎ 0269

**Shiga Kōgen** (☎ 34-2404; www.shigakogen.gr.jp/english/; 1-day lift ticket ¥4800; ☎ 9am-9pm Dec-Apr), the site of several events in the 1998 Nagano Olympics, is Japan's largest ski resort and one of the largest in the world: 21 linked areas covering 80 runs. One lift ticket gives access to all areas and the shuttle bus between the various base lodges. There is a huge variety of terrain for all skill levels, as well as ski-only areas. **Shiga Kōgen Tourist Office** (志賀高原観光協会; ☎ 34-2323; ☎ 9am-5pm) has English speakers who can help you navigate the slopes and

can book accommodation. It's in front of the Shiga Kōgen ropeway station.

Due to its sprawling size, skiers will need to plan carefully or spend their first day at the resort making a full reconnaissance, spending following days at their favourite spots. If you've got limited time, base yourself somewhere central like the Ichinose Family Ski Area, with a central location and wide variety of accommodation and restaurants. You could also start at the Yakebitai area and work your way gradually down the entire resort, taking the bus back up when you're done.

The Nishitateyama area has good wide runs and generally ungroomed terrain. The Terakoya area is a little hard to get to but it is generally uncrowded and has good short runs and a nice atmosphere. Skiers who don't mix well with snowboarders will be happiest at the Kumanoyu area.

During the rest of the year, the mountains' lakes, ponds and overlooks make an excellent destination for hikers.

Hotels are scattered the length of Shiga-kōgen, clustered at the bases of the different areas. It makes sense to choose one near the base of your favourite area. **Hotel Shirakabaso** (ホテル白樺荘; ☎ 34-3311; fax 34-3036; www.shirakaba.co.jp/english/index.html; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥11,000; wi-fi), close to the cable car base station and the Sun Valley ski area, is a pleasant little hotel with a variety of rooms and its own indoor and outdoor *onsen* baths. Near the base of the Kumanoyu ski area, the large **Hotel Heights Shiga Kōgen** (ホテルハイツ志賀高原; ☎ 34-3030; fax 34-2523; www.shigakogen.jp/heights/english/index.htm; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥12,600) boasts clean Japanese- and Western-style rooms and its own *onsen*. Staff are used to foreign guests and make some concessions to foreign palates in the dining room (upon request).

Direct buses run between Nagano station and Shiga-kōgen, with frequent departures in ski season (¥1500, 80 minutes). You can also take a train from Nagano to Yudanaka (opposite) and continue to Shiga-kōgen by bus – take a Hase-ike-bound bus and get off at the last stop (¥700, 30 minutes).

## NOZAWA ONSEN 野沢温泉

☎ 0269 / pop 4264

A compact town that is tucked into a corner of the eastern Japan Alps, Nozawa Onsen is the quintessential Japanese *onsen*/ski resort. It's dominated by the **Nozawa Onsen Ski Resort**



(野沢温泉スキー場; ☎ 85-3155; www.nozawaski.com/e/; 1-day lift ticket ¥4600; ☎ Dec-Apr), one of Honshū's best for a day on the slopes followed by an evening in the tubs. Nozawa feels like a Swiss ski resort, and you may wonder where you are – until you see a sign written entirely in kanji.

Although Nozawa is worth visiting any time of year, skiing is the main attraction for foreign visitors. The ski area here is more compact than, say, nearby Shiga-kōgen, and it's relatively easy to navigate and enjoy. The main base area is right around the Higake gondola station. There is a good variety of terrain at all levels, and snowboarders should try the Karasawa terrain park or the halfpipe at Uenotaira. Advanced skiers will enjoy the steep and often mogulled Schneider Course, while beginners and families will enjoy the Higake Course.

For on-slope refreshments, try the rest house at Uenotaira gondola station, which has a standard-issue restaurant and snack bar. There's another restaurant at the top of the Nagasaka gondola.

There are ski hire places near the base of both gondolas, and boots of up to 31cm are available.

After skiing or hiking, check out the 13 free **onsen** (☎ 6am-11pm) dotted about the town. Our favourite is O-yu, with its fine wooden building, followed by the scalding-hot Shin-yu, recently renovated, and the atmospheric old Kuma-no-tearai (Bear's Bathroom). If you plan on making a full circuit of all the *onsen*, leave valuables in your room and wear easy-on/easy-off clothes like a *yukata* (light summer cotton kimono) and slip-on shoes or sandals.

The **Minshuku Information Office** (野沢温泉民宿組合事務所; ☎ 85-2068; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm), in the centre of town, can help with accommodation. **Lodge Nagano** (ロッジながの; ☎ 090-8670-9597; www.lodgenagano.com/index.html; r per person from ¥4000) is a popular foreign-run guesthouse that attracts a lot of Aussie skiers and makes them feel right at home with Vegemite in the dining room. It's a friendly, fun place with both bunk and private rooms.

On the slopes near the Higake gondola base, the European-style **Pension Schnee** (ペンションシュネー; ☎ 85-2012; fax 85-3281; pensionschnee@ybb.ne.jp; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥7000) enjoys the best location in town. It's a ski-in/ski-out place with comfortable pension-style rooms and a woody dining room.

**Lodge Matsuya** (ロッジ まつや; ☎ 85-2082; fax 85-3694; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥8000) in the centre of town is a large, friendly place with both Western-style and Japanese-style rooms (though some smell a little of cigarette smoke). In the centre of the village, **Haus St Anton** (サンアントンの家; ☎ 85-3597; fax 85-3963; http://nozawa.com/stanton/; r per person incl 2 meals with/without bathroom from ¥13,125/8925) is a comfortable inn with an Austrian theme, attractive Western-style bedrooms and a good kitchen.

There are direct buses between Nagano station east exit and Nozawa Onsen (¥1300, 85 minutes, six buses per day). Alternatively, take a JR Iiyama-line train between Nagano and Togari Nozawa Onsen station (¥740, 1½ hours). Regular buses connect Togari Nozawa Onsen station and Nozawa Onsen (¥300, 15 minutes, nine per day).

## HAKUBA 白馬

☎ 0261

At the base of one of the highest sections of the northern Japan Alps, Hakuba is one of Japan's main ski and hiking centres. In winter, skiers from all over Japan and increasingly from overseas flock to Hakuba's seven ski resorts. In summer, the region is crowded with hikers drawn by easy access to the high peaks. There are several *onsen* in and around Hakuba-mura, the main village, and a long soak after a day of skiing or hiking is the perfect way to ease your muscles.

For information, maps and lodging assistance, visit the **Hakuba Shukuhaku Jōhō Centre** (白馬宿泊情報センター; ☎ 72-6900; www.hakuba1.com in Japanese; ☎ 7am-6pm), to the right of the Hakuba train/bus station, or **Hakuba-mura Kankō Kyōkai Annai-ji** (白馬村観光協会案内所; ☎ 72-2279; ☎ 8.30am-5.15pm), just outside the station to the right (look for the 'i' symbol). Online, visit www.vill.hakuba.nagano.jp/e/index.htm.

## Sights & Activities

### HAPPŌ-ONE SKI RESORT 八方尾根

Host of the men's and women's downhill races at the 1998 Winter Olympics, **Happō-One** (☎ 72-3066; www.hakuba-happo.or.jp/ in Japanese; 1-day lift ticket ¥4600; ☎ Dec-Apr) is one of Japan's best ski areas. The mountain views here are superb – the entire Hakuba massif looks close enough to touch with your ski poles. Beginner, intermediate and advanced runs cater to skiers and snowboarders.

Most runs go right down the face of the mountain, with several good burners descending from Usagidaira 109, the mountain's centre-point. Above this, two chairlifts run to the top, worth visiting for the views alone. On busy days, you can usually avoid lift-line bottlenecks by heading to areas like the Skyline 2.

The rest house at Usagidaira 109 is the largest eating establishment. There's a *rāmen* restaurant, a McDonald's and the usual curry rice-type selections. The modern Virgin Café Hakuba has upscale ambience, decent food, wait service, cappuccino etc. Café Kurobishi has excellent mountain views to the north and cafeteria-style seating.

There are plenty of hire places in the streets around the base of the mountain, some with boots up to 31cm.

From Hakuba station, a five-minute bus ride (¥260) takes you into the middle of Hakuba-mura; from there it's a 10-minute walk to the base of Happō-One and the main 'Adam' gondola base station. In winter, a shuttle bus makes the rounds of the village, lodges and ski base.

## HAKUBA 47/GORYŪ SKI RESORT

HAKUBA47 ウィンタースポーツパーク/白馬五竜

These two ski-interlinked **ski areas** (☎ 75-4747 Hakuba 47, 75-2636; www.hakubagoryu.com in Japanese, www.hakuba47.co.jp; 1-day lift ticket ¥4500; ☎ Dec-Apr) form the second major ski resort in the Hakuba area. There's a good variety of terrain at both areas, but you'll have to be at least an intermediate skier to ski the runs linking the two. Like Happō-One, this area boasts fantastic mountain views; the restaurant Alps 360 is the place to enjoy them. The Genki Go shuttle bus from Hakuba-mura and Hakuba-eki provides easiest access.

## SUMMER ACTIVITIES

In summer, take the gondola and the two upper chairlifts, and then hike along a trail for an hour or so to the pond Happō-ike on a ridge below Karamatsu-dake. From here, follow a trail for an hour up to Maru-yama, continue for 1½ hours to the Karamatsu-dake San-sō (mountain hut) and then climb to the peak of **Karamatsu-dake** (2695m) in about 30 minutes. The return fare is ¥2260 if purchased at the Hakuba tourist office, ¥2600 otherwise.

Other popular hikes include the four-hour ascent of **Shirouma-dake** (白馬岳; 2932m), with spectacular views on clear days. Mountain huts provide meals and basic accommodation, about one hour out from and near the summit (around ¥9000 per person with two meals). **Yari Onsen** (鑓温泉; ☎ 72-2002; onsen ¥300; r per person incl 2 meals ¥8900) is another popular hike for Japan's highest *rotemburo* (2100m) and more breathtaking views.

Buses leave Hakuba station for the trailhead at Sarukura (¥980, 30 minutes, between late May and September). From here you can hike west to Shirouma-dake in about six hours. A track southwest of Sarukura leads uphill for three hours to Yari Onsen.

Ask at tourist offices for information about **Tsugaike National Park** (榑池自然園), renowned for its alpine flora, and **Nishina San-ko** (仁科三湖), three lakes with some short walks.

**Evergreen Outdoor Centre** (www.evergreen-hakuba.com) offers an array of half-day adventures with English-speaking guides from about ¥5000 year-round, including canyoning and mountain biking, as well as snowshoeing and backcountry treks in the winter.

## Sleeping & Eating

The village of Hakuba-mura has a huge selection of accommodation. The Hakuba Shukuhaku Jōhō Centre (opposite) can help arrange accommodation if you arrive without reservations.

**Snowbeds** (スノーベッズ; ☎ 72-5242; www.snowbedsjapan.com; r per person from ¥3000) One of Hakuba's cheapest, with fairly cramped bunk rooms and a nice communal area with a wood stove. It's foreign-run, so communication is no problem and it's close to some good night-life options.

**Hotel Viola** (ホテルヴィオラ; ☎ toll-free 0120-898193; www.hotel-viola.com; d per person incl 2 meals from ¥8000) About 15 minutes' walk from the gondola, this friendly place is a favourite of Aussie skiers and has clean, well-maintained rooms, English-speaking staff and a friendly atmosphere.

**Hakuba Highland Hotel** (白馬ハイランドホテル; ☎ 72-3450; fax 72-3067; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥8400) Located at the base of the Hakuba Highland ski area, a five-minute drive from Hakuba-mura, this family-friendly hotel boasts a sensational view over the Hakuba range; clean, fairly spacious rooms and a great indoor-outdoor *onsen*.



## Getting There & Away

Hakuba is connected with Matsumoto by the JR Ōito line (*tokkyū*, ¥2770, 59 minutes; *futsū*, ¥1110, 99 minutes). Continuing north, change trains at Minami Otari to meet the JR Hokuriku Honsen line at Itoigawa, with connections to Niigata, Toyama and Kanazawa. From Nagano, buses leave from Nagano station (¥1400, one hour). There are also buses between Shinjuku Nishi-guchi, in Tokyo, and Hakuba (¥4700, 4½ hours).

## BESSHO ONSEN 別所温泉

☎ 0268 / pop 1800

This intimate, mountain-ringed hot-spring town is known as a 'Little Kamakura' for its dramatic temples and the fact that it served as an administrative centre during the Kamakura period (1185–1333). It was also mentioned in *The Pillow Book* by the Heian-era poetess Sei Shōnagon and was later a retreat for writers including Kawabata Yasunari. Today some of the inns are tall enough to have lifts, but it's still a relaxing place, bisected by a gentle stream.

Bessho's excellent waters, reputed to cure diabetes and constipation while beautifying your complexion, bring in tourists aplenty, but overall it feels underserved. Web information is available at [www.bessho-spa.jp](http://www.bessho-spa.jp).

**Bessho Onsen Ryokan Association** (別所温泉旅館組合; ☎ 38-2020; fax 38-8887) is the local tourist office – at the train station – but English speakers will be better off enquiring at the **tourist office** (☎ 26-5001; ☎ 9am–6pm) in Ueda station en route to Bessho; staff can book same-day accommodation in Bessho.

The national treasure temple **Anraku-ji** (安楽寺; ☎ 38-2062; adult/child ¥300/100; ☎ sunrise-sunset), renowned for its octagonal pagoda, is 10 minutes on foot from Bessho Onsen station. The Tendai temple **Kitamuki Kannon** (北向観音; ☎ 38-2023; admission free; ☎ 24hr) is a few minutes' walk away, with some prodigiously old trees, sweeping views across the valley and a pavilion on stilts like a tiny version of Kyoto's Kiyomizu Temple; its name comes from the fact that this Kannon image faces north, a counterpart to the south-facing image at Zenkō-ji in Nagano. About a 5km hike away are the very enjoyable temples **Chūzen-ji** (☎ 38-4538; admission ¥100; ☎ 9am–4pm) and **Zenji-ji** (☎ 38-2855; adult/child ¥100/30; ☎ 9am–5pm).

There are three central **public baths** (admission ¥150; ☎ 6am–10pm): Ō-yu (大湯) has a small *ro-*

*tembu*, Ishi-yu (石湯) is famed for its stone bath and Daishi-yu (大師湯), most frequented by the locals, is known for being relatively cool.

The traditional **Ryokan Hanaya** (旅館花屋; ☎ 38-3131; fax 38-7923; p per person incl 2 meals from ¥20,000) is among lovely, manicured gardens. Spacious tatami rooms open onto the scenery. Some rooms have private hot-springs baths attached; guests without enjoy pleasant indoor and outdoor baths. Book far in advance.

**Uematsu-ya** (上松屋; ☎ 38-2300; fax 38-8501; [www.uematsuya.com](http://www.uematsuya.com) in Japanese; p per person incl 2 meals from ¥10,500) is neither historical nor traditional but kindly, well kept and good value. Its 33 rooms (Japanese and Western) are up nine storeys. There's an all-you-can-drink plan (males: ¥3150, females: ¥2100), plus indoor and outdoor baths. Some English is spoken. The 13-bed **Mahoroba Youth Hostel** (上田まほろぼユースホステル; ☎ 38-5229; fax 38-1714; dm ¥3040, incl 2 meals ¥4720) is comfortable and secluded, surrounded by lush scenery. It's eight minutes' walk south from the train station (no *onsen*).

Access to Bessho Onsen is via Ueda, on the JR Nagano *shinkansen* (from Tokyo ¥6490, 1½ hours; from Nagano ¥1410, 13 minutes) or the private Shinano Tetsudō line from Nagano (¥660, about 40 minutes). At Ueda, you need to change to the private Ueda Kōtsū line to Bessho Onsen (¥570, 27 minutes, about hourly).

## MATSUMOTO 松本

☎ 0263 / pop 289,000

From the moment you step off the train and hear the piped-in voice singing 'Ma-*tsu-mo-toooh*', you sense you're somewhere different. Matsumoto has a superb castle, some pretty streets and an atmosphere that's both laid-back and surprisingly cosmopolitan.

Nagano-ken's second-largest city has been around since at least the 8th century. Formerly known as Fukashi, it was the castle town of the Ogasawara clan during the 14th and 15th centuries, and it continued to prosper through the Edo period. Today Matsumoto's street aesthetic combines the black-and-white of its castle with *namako-kabe* (lattice-pattern walled) *kura* and 21st-century Japanese architecture; plus, views of the Japan Alps are never much further than around the corner. Parts of the city centre have a more contemporary feel, and the areas by the Metoba-gawa and the Nakamachi district boast smart galler-

ies, comfortable cafés and reasonably priced, high-quality accommodation.

Asama Onsen and Utsukushi-ga-hara are day trips, while Hotaka can be either a day trip or the start of a hiking route. Matsumoto is also a regional transit hub to the Japan Alps National Park, among other destinations.

## Orientation & Information

For a castle town, Matsumoto is relatively easy to get around. Although small streets radiate somewhat confusingly from the train station, soon you're on a grid. Any place on the Matsumoto map is within 20 minutes' walk of the train station.

The main post office is located on Honmachi-dōri. For web information, visit [www.city.matsumoto.nagano.jp](http://www.city.matsumoto.nagano.jp).

**Fureai International Information Centre** (☎ 48-7000; 4010-27 Isemachi-dōri; ☎ 9am–10pm Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm Sat & Sun) Offers free internet use, a lending library and a lounge with news broadcasts in English. It's in the M-Wing building, the entrance marked by sphere in the shape of a *temari* (balls embroidered in geometric patterns; see p286).

**Tourist information office** (☎ 32-2814; 1-1-1 Fukashi; ☎ 9.30am–6pm Apr–Oct, 9.30am–5.30pm Nov–Mar) Inside Matsumoto Station. English-speaking staff have English-language pamphlets and maps and can book accommodation.

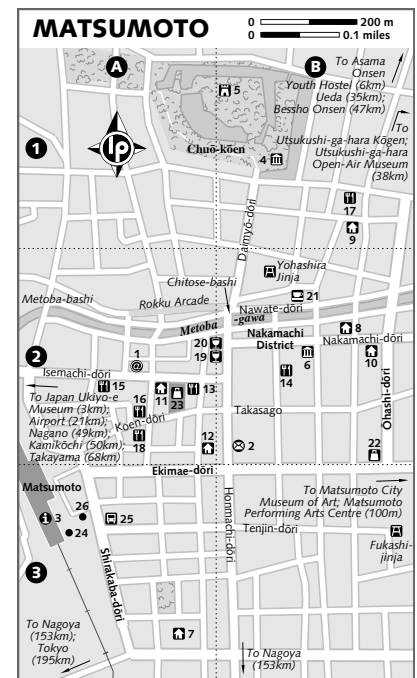
## Sights & Activities

### MATSUMOTO-JŌ 松本城

Even if you spend only a couple of hours in Matsumoto, be sure to make a visit to this **castle** (☎ 32-2902; 4-1 Marunōchi; adult/child Mar–Nov ¥600/300, Dec–Feb ¥400/200; ☎ 8.30am–5pm early Sep–early Jul, to 6pm rest of Jul, to 7pm Aug & rest of Sep), Japan's oldest wooden castle and one of four castles

designated National Treasures – the others are Hikone (p369), Himeji (p398) and Inuyama (p250).

The magnificent three-turreted donjon was built c 1595, in contrasting black-and-white, leading to the nickname Karasu-jō (Crow Castle). Steep steps lead up six storeys, with impressive views from each level. Lower floors display guns, bombs and gadgets with which to storm castles, and a delightful



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*tsukimi yagura* (moon-viewing pavilion). It has a tranquil moat full of carp, with the occasional swan gliding beneath the red bridges. The basics are explained over loudspeakers in English and Japanese. You can also ask at the entrance about a free tour in English; or call the **Goodwill Guide Group** (☎ 32-7140; ☎ 8am-noon), which gives free one-hour tours by advance notice.

The castle grounds (and your admission ticket) also include the **Matsumoto City Museum/Japan Folklore Museum** (☎ 32-0133; 4-1 Marunōchi; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm), with small displays relating to the region's history and folklore, including *tanabata* dolls (p286) and the wooden phalluses that play a prominent role in the September Dōsojin festival (opposite).

#### NAKAMACHI 中町

The narrow streets of this former merchant district make a fine setting for a stroll, as most of its storehouses have been transformed into galleries, craft shops and cafés. **Nakamachi Kura-Chic-Kan** (Classic-kan; ☎ 36-3053; 2-9-15 Chūō; ☎ 9am-10pm) is just one option, showcasing locally produced arts and crafts, with a relaxing coffee house next door.

#### MATSUMOTO PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE

まつもと市民芸術館

Architect Itō Toyō has broken all the rules with this 2004 building, and we love it. Its undulating exterior walls are punctuated with frosted glass cut-outs that look like rocks – very impressive at night. Among other performances, the **Performing Arts Centre** (☎ 33-3800; 3-10-1 Fukashi) is the key venue for the Saitō Kinen festival (opposite). Heading east on Eki-mae-dōri from the city centre, it's just off the map on the right.

#### MATSUMOTO CITY MUSEUM OF ART

松本市美術館

This sleek **museum** (☎ 39-7400; 4-2-22 Chūō; adult/high school & college student/child ¥400/200/free; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) has a good collection of Japanese artists, many who hail from Matsumoto or depict scenes of the surrounding countryside. Highlights include the striking avant-garde works of Kusama Yayoi (look for the 'Infinity Mirrored Room'), the finely crafted landscapes of Tamura Kazuo, the calligraphy of Kamijo Shinzan and temporary exhibitions. The striking contemporary building (2002) borrows motifs (black façade, stone walls,

impressive greenery and mini-moat) from the castle. It's about 100m past the Performing Arts Centre, across the street.

#### JAPAN UKIYO-E MUSEUM

日本浮世絵美術館

This **museum** (☎ 47-4440; 2206-1 Koshiba, Shimadachi; adult/child ¥1000/500; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is a must for *ukiyo-e* lovers. Several generations of the Sakai family have collected more than 100,000 prints, paintings, screens and old books – the largest private collection in the world. English signage is minimal, however an explanatory leaflet in English is provided.

The museum is approximately 3km from Matsumoto station or 15 minutes' walk from Ōniwa station on the Matsumoto Dentetsu line (¥170, six minutes), or about ¥2000 by taxi.

#### ASAMA ONSEN 浅間温泉

This hot-spring resort northeast of town isn't rustic, but its history is said to reach back to the 10th century and include writers and poets. The waters are also said to be good for gastrointestinal and skin troubles, and women's disorders. Among dozens of baths and inns (and the youth hostel), **Hot Plaza Asama** (ホットプラザ浅間; ☎ 46-6278; adult/child ¥840/420; ☎ 10am-8pm Wed-Mon) has many pools in a traditional building. Buses from Matsumoto station take about 20 minutes (¥350).

**UTSUKUSHI-GA-HARA-KŌGEN** 美ヶ原高原 This alpine plateau (1990m) is a popular warm-weather excursion from Matsumoto for pleasant walks and the opportunity to see cows in pasture (a constant source of fascination to the Japanese).

**Utsukushi-ga-hara-Kōgen Bijutsukan** (美ヶ原高原美術館; Utsukushi-ga-hara Open-Air Museum; ☎ 86-2331; adult/student/child ¥1000/800/700; ☎ 9am-4.30pm late Apr-mid Nov), in the same vein (with the same owner) as the Hakone Open-Air Museum (p209), is a large sculpture garden (some 450 pieces) with fine views of the surrounding mountains.

Most Japanese visitors reach the museum by car. Buses (¥1300, 80 minutes) run several times daily in midsummer with spotty-to-nonexistent service the rest of the season; check before you go. Taxis to the museum start at a cool ¥10,700 (yes, one way). See p286 for information on car hire.

#### Festivals & Events

**Matsumoto-jō Sakura Matsuri** Cherry-blossom time (late April) coincides with mood lighting at the castle.

**Teijin Matsuri** The festival at Fukashi-jinja on 23–24 July features elaborately decorated *dashi* (floats) and a fireworks display. The second day is livelier.

**Takigi Nō Matsuri** The atmospheric festival during August features nō (classical Japanese dance-drama) by torchlight, performed outdoors on a stage in the park below the castle.

**Saitō Kinen Festival** About a dozen classical music concerts in memory of revered Japanese conductor and music educator Saitō Hideo (1902–72) held in mid-August to mid-September. Ozawa Seiji, conductor emeritus of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, is festival director.

**Dōsojin Matsuri** On the fourth Saturday in September phallic merriment is to be had at the festival held in honour of *dōsojin* (roadside guardians) at Utsukushi-ga-hara Onsen.

**Yohashira Jinja Matsuri** This festival (aka Shintōsai) occurs around the beginning of October, featuring fireworks and large dolls.

**Asama Hi-Matsuri** Around the start of October Asama Onsen celebrates the spectacular fire festival with torch-lit parades that are accompanied by drumming.

**Oshiro Matsuri** The Castle Festival, around 3 November, is a cultural jamboree including costume parades, puppet displays and flower shows.

#### Sleeping

In the station area, you'll mostly find cramped, charmless business hotels; more atmospheric ryokan are in the Nakamachi district.

**Asama Onsen Youth Hostel** (浅間温泉ユースホステル; ☎ 46-1335; 1-7-15 Asama Onsen; dm ¥3360) Although plain on the outside, this hostel offers quick access to nearby *onsen* and significant discounts to Hot Plaza Asama (opposite). Doors close at 9pm. From Matsumoto bus station, take bus 6 to Shita-Asama (¥300) or bus 7 to Dai-Ichi Kōkō-mae (¥240). Either takes 20 minutes, and the hostel is then five minutes on foot heading south.

**Nunoya** (☎ /fax 32-0545; 3-5-7 Chūō; r per person ¥5250) Few inns have more heart than this pleasantly traditional charmer in Nakamachi, with shiny wood floors and quality tatami rooms with shared bathrooms. No meals served.

**Marumo** (☎ 32-0115; fax 35-2251; 3-3-10 Chūō; r per person ¥5250, incl breakfast ¥6300) In the Nakamachi district, this beautiful ryokan dates from 1868 and has lots of traditional charm, including its own bamboo garden and a lovely coffee shop. Although rooms aren't huge and don't have private facilities, it's quite popular, so book

ahead. It's on a side street between Nakamachi-dōri and the rushing Metoba-gawa.

**Tōyoko Inn Matsumoto Ekimae Honmachi** (☎ 36-1045; www.toyoko-inn.com; 2-1-23 Chūō; s/d or tw ¥5460/8190; ☎ ☎ ☎) New business hotel in the centre of everything (across the square from the Parco department store). Rooms are functional, spotless and business-hotel cramped, but there are loads of freebies and a simple Japanese breakfast.

**Matsumoto Hotel Kagetsu** (☎ 32-0114; www.mcci.or.jp/www/kagetsu; 4-8-9 Ōte; r per person from ¥6825; ☎ ☎ ☎) Southeast of the castle, this polished, old-line hotel has nice-sized Japanese- or Western-style rooms with full facilities, plus generous communal baths with water from the Japan Alps and a cosy, historic coffee shop. Rooms in the newer building cost a bit more (¥7350 per person) but are smarter. Look for internet specials.

**Roynet Hotel** (☎ 37-5000; fax 37-5505; www.roynet.jp; 1-10-7 Chūō; s/d from ¥7300/9800; ☎ ☎ ☎) Central and crisp, this new-ish business hotel offers decent-sized rooms and a minimum of fuss. Rates are for Roynet *kai-in* (members); to become one, fill out a form and pay a one-time ¥500 charge at check-in. Even cheaper rates are often available online.

**Hotel Buena Vista** (☎ 37-0111; fax 37-0666; www.buena-vista.co.jp; 1-2-1 Honjō; s/tw from ¥9240/19,645; ☎ ☎ ☎) Long Matsumoto's sharpest Western hotel, the Buena Vista has been given a chic Barcelona-style makeover: dark woods, stone, mood lighting and world beats in the lobby. Rooms were being renovated as we went to press. The Salon de Fuego lounge on the top (14th) floor has the city's best views. Frequent internet specials.

#### Eating & Drinking

Matsumoto is renowned for *Shinshū-soba*, eaten either hot (*kake-soba*; in broth) or cold (*zaru-soba*; with wasabi and soya-based sauce). Other regional specialities include *basashi* (raw horsemeat), *hachimoko* (bee larvae) and *inago* (crickets). Tamer are *oyaki*, little wheat buns filled with various vegetables.

**Nomugi** (☎ 36-3753; 2-9-11 Chūō; soba ¥1000; ☎ lunch Thu-Mon) In Nakamachi, this is one of central Japan's finest *soba* shops. Its owner used to run a French restaurant in Tokyo before returning to his home town. There's one dish: *zaru-soba* in a handcrafted wicker basket; in mid-November to mid-April there's also hot *kake-soba* (¥1300).

**Ramen Kameya** (☎ 32-7515; 1-8-1 Chūō; rāmen ¥550-800; 🍽️ dinner Tue-Sun) Nothing fancy here, just *rāmen* served in traditional Chinese style (*chūka*; ¥550), with Shinshū miso or even *kimchi* (¥800). It's popular with the late-night after-drinking crowd, with all that entails. Look for the chalkboard on the wall across from the hotel car park.

**Kura** (☎ 33-6444; 2-2-15 Chūō; dishes from ¥300, teishoku ¥900-2000; 🍽️ lunch & dinner Thu-Tue; E) Located near Nakamachi, Kura serves nicely prepared Japanese dishes for lunch and dinner in a stylish former warehouse. The tempura is exceptional, as is the sashimi and *soba*. For the daring: topnotch *basashi*.

**Shizuka** (☎ 32-0547; 4-10-8 Ōte; dishes ¥25-1365; 🍽️ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; E) Friendly, traditional place east of the castle serving Matsumoto specialities like *basashi* (¥1575) alongside *izakaya* favourites like *oden* and *yakitori* (chicken on skewers). *Inago* (¥735) and *zazamushi* (caddis fly larvae; ¥1575) don't appear on the English menu. We wonder why...

**Robata Shōya** (☎ 37-1000; 11-1 Chūō; dishes ¥300-980; 🍽️ dinner; E) On a corner in the town centre, is this classic, lively *yakitori-ya* (restaurant specialising in *yakitori*) with a large selection of grills, seasonal specials and a (sort of) English menu.

**Vamonos** (☎ 36-4878; 1-4-13 Chūō; mains ¥650-900; 🍽️ lunch & dinner; E) Two blocks east of the train station, this sweet little Mexican restaurant serves enchiladas, burritos, nachos, large salads and dainty but potent margaritas. Look for the sign in Spanish on the 2nd floor.

**Old Rock** (☎ 38-0069; 2-30-20 Chūō; mains from ¥750; 🍽️ lunch & dinner) A block south of the river and across the street from Nakamachi, this popular *gaijin* pub attracts a lively crowd on weekend nights. Good lunch specials and a wide selection of beers.

**Coat** (☎ 34-7133; 2-3-24 Chūō; 🍽️ 11am-4pm & 5pm-midnight) This sophisticated little bar is home to Matsumoto's most famous bartender. Hayashi-san's inventive '*otomenadeshiko*' cocktail won first prize at the Japan Bartenders Association competition early this decade.

And if you're looking for a quick coffee and cake, cafés line the banks of the Metoba-gawa and Nawate-dōri. **Sweet** (☎ 32-5300; 4-8-9 Ōtemachi; pastries from ¥170; 🍽️ 7am-7pm) is typical.

## Shopping

Matsumoto is synonymous with *temari* and doll-making. You can find both at **Berami** (Belle

Amie; ☎ 33-1314; 3-7-23 Chūō; 🍽️ 10am-5pm Thu-Tue) on Ōhashi-dōri. Doll styles include *tanabata* (flat wood or cardboard cut-outs dressed in paper) and *oshie-bina* (dressed in fine cloth). Takasago street, which is situated one block south from Nakamachi, also has several doll shops.

The Nakamachi district teems with shops selling crafts from textiles to ceramics, and Nawate-dōri north of the river is a colourful place for souvenirs and cafés. The Parco department store has pride of place in the city centre.

## Getting There & Away

For information about reaching Japan Alps National Park, see p267.

## AIR

Shinshū Matsumoto airport has flights to Fukuoka, Osaka and Sapporo.

## BUS

**Alpico/Matsumoto Dentetsu** (☎ 35-7400) runs buses between Matsumoto and Shinjuku in Tokyo (¥3400, 3¼ hours, 18 daily), Osaka (¥5710, 5¼ hours, two daily), Nagoya (¥3460, 3¼ hours, six daily), Centrair Airport (¥4500, 3¼ hours, five daily) and Takayama (¥3100, 2½ hours, four daily). All departures are from Matsumoto bus station, in the basement of the Espa building across from the train station (reservations advised).

## CAR

Hiring a car is often the best way to do side trips. **Nippon Rent-A-Car** (☎ 33-1324; 1-1 Fukashi) has the best deals (from about ¥5000 a day), just outside the train station. **Eki Rent-a-Car** (☎ 32-4690; 1-1 Fukashi) is a few doors down.

## TRAIN

Matsumoto is connected with Tokyo's Shinjuku station (*Super Azusa*, *Azusa*, ¥6510, 2½ hours, hourly), Nagoya (Shinano *tokkyū*, ¥5670, two hours) and Naganō (Shinano *tokkyū*, ¥2570, 50 minutes; *jutsū*, ¥1110, 70 minutes). On the JR Ōito line, trains serve Hotaka (¥320, 30 minutes) and Hakuba (*Azusa tokkyū*, ¥2570, 55 minutes; *jutsū*, ¥1110, 1½ hours).

## Getting Around

The castle and the city centre are easily covered on foot, or free bicycles are available for

loan. Enquire at the tourist office for locations. Three 'town sneaker' bus routes loop through the centre between 9am and 6pm April to November (to 5.30pm December to March) for ¥100/300 per ride/day; the blue and orange routes cover the castle and Nakamachi.

An airport shuttle bus connects Shinshū Matsumoto airport with the city centre (¥540, 25 minutes). Buses are timed to flights. A taxi costs around ¥4500.

## HOTAKA 穂高

☎ 0263

Not to be confused with Shin-Hotaka in Japan Alps National Park, Hotaka is home to Japan's largest wasabi (Japanese horseradish) farm. It is an easy day trip from Matsumoto and a popular starting point for mountain hikes.

The **tourist office** (☎ 82-9363; 🍽️ 9am-5pm Apr-Nov, 10am-4pm Dec-Mar) and **bicycle hire** (per hr ¥200), the recommended way to get around, are outside the Hotaka station exit. Both have basic maps, and the tourist office has English-speaking staff.

## Sights & Activities

**DAI-Ō WASABI-NOJO** 大王わさび農場

A visit to the **Dai-ō Wasabi Farm** (☎ 82-2118; admission free; 🍽️ 8.30am-5.30pm Jul & Aug, shorter hr rest of year) is *de rigueur* for wasabi lovers, and even wasabi haters may have fun. An English map guides you among wasabi plants (wasabi is grown in flooded fields), restaurants, shops and workspaces, all set amid rolling hills. There are lots of free sampling opportunities; wasabi finds its way into everything from wine to rice crackers, ice cream to chocolate. 'Wasabi juice' (¥400) is a kind of milk shake.

The farm is about 15 minutes' bike ride from Hotaka station. There are also some calmer municipal wasabi fields.

**ROKUZAN BIJUTSUKAN** 礪山美術館

Ten minutes' walk from the station, the **Rokuzan Art Museum** (☎ 82-2094; adult/student/child ¥700/300/150; 🍽️ 9am-5.10pm Mar-Oct, to 4.10pm Nov-Feb, closed Mon Nov-Apr) showcases the work of Meiji-era sculptor Rokuzan Ogiwara (whom the Japanese have labelled the 'Rodin of the Orient') and his Japanese contemporaries. Strolling through the four buildings and garden, you may be struck by how much cross-cultural flow there was between East and West.

**NAKABUSA ONSEN** 中房温泉

Seasonal buses (late April to mid-November) from Hotaka station (¥1610, 50 minutes) serve these remote **hot springs**. If no bus is available, taxis start at about ¥6500. From Nakabusa Onsen, there are several extended mountain hikes, served by seasonal inns.

**JŌNEN-DAKE** 常念岳

From Hotaka station, it takes about 30 minutes by taxi to reach Ichi-no-sawa, from where experienced hikers can climb Jōnen-dake (2857m); the ascent takes about 5½ hours. There are many options for mountain hikes extending over several days in the region, but you must be properly prepared. Hiking maps and information are available at regional tourist offices, although the more detailed maps are in Japanese.

## Sleeping & Eating

Most people visit Hotaka as a day trip from Matsumoto, but some accommodation is available. Enquire at Hotaka's tourist office for other Nakabusa options.

**Azumino Pastoral Youth Hostel** (安曇野パストラルユースホステル; ☎ 83-6170; pastoral@po.nct.ne.jp; dm ¥3360) Amid farmland, 4km west of Hotaka station (a one-hour walk), this pleasant hostel has plenty of rustic charm and rooms sleeping three to five people. Meals are available (breakfast ¥630, dinner ¥1050). Book ahead, as it occasionally closes during the off season (typically in winter).

Nestled up near Nakabusa Onsen, **Ariake-Ō Kokuminshukusha** (有明荘国民宿舎; ☎ 090-2321-9991; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥9500; 🍽️ late Apr-late Nov) is a seasonal 95-person lodge with basic rooms and nourishing *onsen* (day use ¥600).

## Getting There & Away

Hotaka is about 30 minutes (¥320) from Matsumoto on the JR Ōito line.

**KISO VALLEY REGION** 木曾

☎ 0264

Thickly forested and alpine, southwest Nagano-ken is traversed by the twisting, craggy former post road, the Nakasendō (p189). Like the more famous Tōkaidō, the Nakasendō connected Edo (present-day Tokyo) with Kyoto, enriching the towns along the way. Today, several small towns feature carefully preserved architecture of those days, making this a highly recommended visit.

It was not always so. Kiso *hinoki* (cypress) was so prized that it was used in the construction of the Edo and Nagoya castles; it is still used for the reconstruction of Ise Jingū (p435), Shintō's holiest shrine, every 20 years. To protect this asset, the region was placed under control of the Tokugawa shōgunate, and locals could be put to death for cutting down even their own trees; restrictions remained in effect well after the Meiji Restoration. The resulting lack of maintenance left many local buildings beyond repair or unreconstructed after fires. Further economic decline came with the introduction of new roads and commercial centres to the north; the construction of the Chūō train line effectively cut the region off.

However, the 1960s saw a move to preserve the post towns' architecture, and tourism has become a major source of income. Even if most of the remaining buildings are technically Meiji- and Taishō-era reconstructions, the streetscapes are pure Edo and the effect is dramatic.

### Tsumago & Magome 妻籠 馬籠

These are two of the most attractive Nakasendō towns. Both close their main streets to vehicular traffic and they're connected by an agreeable hike.

Tsumago feels like an open-air museum, about 15 minutes' walk from end to end. It was designated by the government as a protected area for the preservation of traditional buildings so no modern developments such as telephone poles are allowed to mar the scene. The darkwood glory of its lattice-fronted houses and gently sloping tile roofs is particularly beautiful in early morning mist. Many films and TV shows have been shot on its main street.

Tsumago's **tourist information office** (観光案内館; ☎ 57-3123; fax 57-4036; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) is in the centre of town, by the antique phone booth. Some English is spoken and there's English-language literature.

Down the street and across, **Waki-honjin** (脇本陣; ☎ 57-3322; adult/child ¥600/300; ☎ 9am-5pm) is a former rest stop for retainers of *daimyō* on the Nakasendō. Reconstructed in 1877 under special dispensation from the emperor Meiji, it contains a lovely moss garden and a special toilet built in case Meiji happened to show up (apparently he never did). If some elements remind you of Japanese castles, that's because

the Waki-honjin was built by a former castle builder, out of work due to Meiji's antifeudal policies. The **Shiryōkan** (資料館; local history museum) here houses elegant exhibitions about Kiso and the Nakasendō, with some English signage.

Across from the Shiryōkan, **Tsumago Honjin** (妻籠本陣; ☎ 57-3322; adult/child ¥300/150; ☎ 9am-5pm) is where the *daimyō* themselves spent the night, though this building is more noteworthy for its architecture than its exhibits. A combined ticket (¥700/350) gives you admission to the Waki-honjin and Shiryōkan as well.

**Kisoji-kan** (木曾路館; ☎ 58-2046; baths ¥700; ☎ 10am-8pm), a few hilly kilometres above Tsumago, is a tourist facility with a raging souvenir shop. The real reason to visit is the *rotemburo* with panoramic mountain vistas. Some Tsumago lodgings offer discount tickets, and there's a free shuttle bus to/from Tsumago's car park No 1 (10 minutes, at least hourly) and Nagiso (opposite).

On 23 November, the **Fuzoku Emaki Parade** is held along the Nakasendō in Tsumago, featuring townsfolk in Edo-period costume.

**Magome**, the next post town south, is more modern, with houses, restaurants, inns (and souvenir shops) lining a steep, cobblestone pedestrian road. Even if only some structures are Edo-style, Magome is undeniably pretty and has broad views. At the **tourist information office** (観光案内館; ☎ 59-2336; fax 59-2653; ☎ 8.30am-5pm), about halfway up the hill on the right, you can pick up maps and staff will book accommodation.

Magome was the birthplace of the author Shimazaki Tōson (1872–1943). His masterpiece, *Ie* (The Family), records the decline of two provincial Kiso families. A **museum** (藤村記念館; ☎ 59-2047; admission ¥500; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, 8.30am-4.30pm Nov-Mar, closed 2nd Tue, Wed & Thu Dec) is devoted to his life and times, though it's pretty impenetrable for non-Japanese speakers.

Good gifts from both towns include toys, crafts and household implements made from Kiso *hinoki*.

The 7.8km **hike** connecting Tsumago and Magome peaks at the top of the steep pass, Magome-tōge (elevation 801m). From there, the trail to/from Tsumago passes waterfalls, forest and farmland, while the Magome approach is largely on paved road. It takes around 2½ hours to hike between these towns. It's easier from Magome (elevation 600m) to Tsumago

(elevation 420m) than the other way. There are English signs along the way and you'll have the opportunity to stop off at several small waterfalls en route. The Magome–Tsumago bus (¥640, 30 minutes, at least three daily in each direction) also stops at the pass.

If you're hiking between Magome and Tsumago, the towns offer a handy **baggage-forwarding service** (per bag ¥500; ☎ Mon-Sun late Jul-Aug, Sat, Sun & holidays late Mar-late Nov) from either tourist office to the other. Deposit your bags between 8.30am and 11.30am for delivery by 1pm.

### SLEEPING & EATING

It's worth a stay in these towns, particularly Tsumago, to have them to yourself once the day-trippers clear out. Both tourist information offices can help book accommodation at numerous ryokan (from around ¥9000 per person) and *minshuku* (from around ¥7000); prices include two meals. Don't expect ensuite bath or toilet, but you will get heaps of atmosphere. For street foods, look for *goheimo*, skewered rice dumplings coated with sesame-walnut sauce, and in autumn you can't miss *kuri-kinton* (chestnut dumplings).

**Minshuku Daikichi** (大吉旅館; ☎ 57-2595; fax 57-2203; r per person ¥8400) Popular with foreign visitors, this place feels very traditional – with handsome tatami rooms and fine wood features – despite its 1970s construction. All rooms have a view. At the edge of Tsumago (take the right-hand fork uphill from the centre).

**Matsushiro-ya** (松代屋旅館; ☎ 57-3022; fax 57-3386; r per person ¥10,500; ☎ Thu-Tue) One of Tsumago's most historic lodgings (parts date from 1804), Matsushiro-ya sits on the village's most picturesque street and offers large tatami rooms.

**our pick Fujioto** (藤乙; ☎ 57-3009; fax 57-2239; Tsumago; r per person ¥10,500; E) Another much-photographed, excellent ryokan, this place has impressive rooms and a graceful garden. It also serves lovely garden-view lunches, like Kiso valley trout (set menu ¥1500). It's a few doors down from the Waki-Honjin.

**Minshuku Kameyama** (民宿かめやま; ☎/fax 57-3187; r per person with/without 2 meals ¥7500/6000) For a rustic Nakasendō stay, this 19-bed option is about 20 minutes on foot from Tsumago towards Magome in the hamlet of Ōtsunago; it's known for its meals including *sansai*.

**Magome-Chaya** (馬籠茶屋; ☎ 59-2038; fax 59-2648; www.magomechaya.com; s/d ¥5250/8190) In Magome, this is a friendly, well-kept place

in the centre of everything, near the water wheel. Meals (breakfast ¥1050, dinner ¥3150) are served across the street in its restaurant; dinners are quite large.

Stalls throughout Tsumago sell street foods, and there are a few little *shokudō* (all-round eateries) near the path to the car park **Yoshimura-ya** (吉村屋; ☎ 57-3265; dishes ¥700-1500; ☎ lunch; E) is typical; its speciality is handmade *soba* – try it with tempura.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Nakatsugawa and Nagiso stations on the JR Chūō line serve Magome and Tsumago, respectively, though both are still at some distance. Nakatsugawa is connected with Nagoya (Shinano *tokkyū*, ¥2740, 47 minutes) and Matsumoto (Shinano *tokkyū*, ¥3980, 70 minutes). A few *tokkyū* daily stop in Nagiso; otherwise it's about 20 minutes from Nakatsugawa by *futsū* (¥320).

Buses leave hourly from Nakatsugawa station for Magome (¥540, 30 minutes). There's also an infrequent bus service between Magome and Tsumago (¥640, 30 minutes).

From Tsumago, catch the bus to Nagiso station (¥270, 10 minutes, eight per day) or walk there in one hour.

Highway buses operate between Magome and Nagoya's Meitetsu Bus Centre (¥1810, 1½ hours), as well as Tokyo's Shinjuku station (¥4500, 4½ hours). Some of these buses leave from the nearby highway interchange, and not from Magome's own bus terminal.

### Kiso-Fukushima 木曾福島

North of Tsumago and Magome and considerably more developed, Kiso-Fukushima's historical significance makes it a worthy side trip en route to these towns or from Matsumoto. It was an important checkpoint on the Nakasendō, and the town centre boasts a picturesque district of old residences.

From the station, cross the street and pick up an English map at the simple **tourist office** (Kisomachi Kanō Kyōkai; 木曾町観光協会; ☎ 22-4000; ☎ 9am-5pm), and head down the hill towards the town centre. Sights are well-signposted. To your right, between the Kiso-gawa and the train tracks, is **Ue-no-dan** (上の段), the old historic district full of atmospheric houses, many of which now serve as shops, cafés and galleries.

Another several minutes' walk leads you to the **Fukushima Sekisho-ato** (福島関所跡; Fukushima

Checkpoint Site: ☎ 23-2595; adult/child ¥300/150; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 8.30am-4.30pm Nov-Mar), a reconstruction of one of the most significant checkpoints on the Edo-period trunk roads (p189). From its perch above the river valley, it's easy to see the barrier's strategic importance. Displays inside show the implements used to maintain order, including weaponry and *tegata* (wooden travel passes), as well as the special treatment women travellers received.

**Kurumaya Honten** (くるまや本店; ☎ 22-2200; mains ¥577-1575; ☎ 10am-5pm Thu-Tue) is one of Japan's most renowned *soba* shops. The classic presentation is cold *mori* (plain) or *zaru* (with strips of nori seaweed) with a sweetish dipping sauce, or try it hot with *daikon orishi* (grated daikon radish) or *jidori* (free-range chicken). It's just before the first bridge at the bottom of the hill from the station – look for the gears above the doorway.

In Ue-no-dan, **Bistro Matsushima-tei** (ピストロ松島体; ☎ 23-3625; lunch sets from ¥1000; ☎ lunch & dinner) serves a changing selection of handmade pizzas and pastas in a chichi-atmospheric setting befitting the building's history. Or stop in for coffee and cake.

Kiso-Fukushima is a stop on the JR Chūō line (Shinano *tokkyū*), easily reached from Matsumoto (¥2810, 35 minutes), Nakat-sugawa (near Magome; ¥2810, 35 minutes), Nagoya (¥4700, 80 minutes) and Nagano (¥4380, 85 minutes).

Two daily buses travel each way (¥4500, 4½ hours) travel between Kiso-Fukushima and Tokyo's Shinjuku station (west exit).

## TOYAMA-KEN 富山県

### TOYAMA 富山

☎ 076 / pop 419,000

This heavily industrialised city has few tourist attractions, but you might pass through en route to the northern Japan Alps or the Sea of Japan coast.

If you have time, **Chōkei-ji** (長慶寺; ☎ 441-5451; admission free; ☎ 24hr) is famed for 500-plus statues of *rakan* (Buddha's disciples) draped in colourful sashes; and the **Toyama Folkcraft Village** (富山市民俗民芸村; ☎ 433-8270; adult/child ¥630/320; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) exhibits a range of traditional crafts: folk art, ceramics, a tea-ceremony house.

The **information office** (観光案内所; ☎ 432-9751; ☎ 8.30am-8pm), outside Toyama station's

south exit, stocks maps and pamphlets on the Tateyama-Kurobe Alpine Route (below) and Gokayama (p266). Staff speak English. JNTO issues a leaflet entitled *Tateyama, Kurobe & Toyama*, which has details on transport links and accommodation.

There are many lodgings within a few minutes' walk of the train station's south exit. **Toyama Excel Hotel Tōkyū** (富山エクセルホテル東急; ☎ 441-0109; www.tokyuhotels.co.jp; s/d from ¥9817/17,325; ☎ ☎ ☎ wi-fi) has large, comfortable rooms and is conveniently located in a tower above the CIC shopping centre, facing the train station. There are some fine restaurants. **Relax Inn** (リラックスイン; ☎ 444-1010; www.relax-inn.co.jp; s/d from ¥4600/8800; ☎ wi-fi) is a fairly new business hotel with small but nicely maintained rooms and cheap breakfast (from ¥380). Go straight out of the station and up Ichiban-machi, keeping CIC on your right. It's two blocks up on the left.

One of Toyama's unique offerings, **Yakuto** (薬都; ☎ 425-1873; courses from ¥2100; ☎ noon-7pm Thu-Tue) serves *yakuzen-ryōri*, cuisine made from medicinal herbs. Book in advance. It's by the Nishi-chō tram stop, 10 minutes' ride from the station (¥200).

For a quick bite inside Toyama station, try *oshi-zushi* (fish pressed down onto rice; from ¥130) from *bentō* merchants, or irresistible cinnamon cream puffs at **Maple House** (☎ 441-1193; cream puffs ¥130).

Daily flights operate between Toyama and major Japanese cities. There are less-frequent flights to Seoul and Vladivostok.

The JR Hokuriku line runs west to Kanazawa (*tokkyū*, ¥2610, 35 minutes; *futsū*, ¥950, 70 minutes), Kyoto (Thunderbird *tokkyū*, ¥7760, three hours) and Osaka (¥8490, 3½ hours). The same line runs northeast to Naoetsu (¥4180, 1¼ hours) and Niigata (¥7130, three hours).

The train line connecting Takayama with Toyama, where a trestle bridge was washed out by floods in 2005, should be back up and running by the time you read this.

### TATEYAMA-KUROBE ALPINE ROUTE

立山黒部アルペンルート

This seasonal, 90km route, popular with tourists, connects Toyama with Shinano-ōmachi in Nagano-ken via a sacred mountain, a deep gorge, boiling-hot spring and glory-hallelujah mountain scenery. It is divided into nine sections with different modes of transport: train,

ropeway, cable car, bus, trolley bus and your own two feet.

The fare for the entire route is ¥10,560/17,730 one way/return; individual tickets are available. The route can be completed in under six hours one way, although you'll probably want to stop en route; some visitors find that a trip as far as Murodō, the route's highest point, is sufficient (¥6530 return). The route is open from mid-April to mid-November. Precise dates vary, so check with a tourist office. During peak season (August to October), transport and accommodation reservations are strongly advised.

Travel is possible in either direction; instructions here are from Toyama. The website www.alpen-route.com/english/index.html has details.

From Toyama station take the chug-a-lug regional Chitetsu line (¥1170, one hour) through rural scenery to **Tateyama** (立山; 475m). There are plenty of ryokan in Tateyama if you make an early start or late finish.

From Tateyama, take the cable car (¥700, seven minutes) to **Bijodaira** (美女平) and then the bus (¥1660, 50 minutes) via the spectacular alpine plateau of Midagahara Kōgen to **Murodō** (室堂; altitude 2450m). You can break the trip at Midagahara and do the 15-minute walk to see **Tateyama caldera** (立山カルデラ), the largest non-active crater in Japan. The upper part of the plateau is often covered with deep snow until late into the summer; the road is kept clear by piling up the snow to form a virtual tunnel (great fun to drive through).

Murodō's beauty has been somewhat spoiled by a monstrous bus station, but short hikes take you back to nature. Just 10 minutes' walk north is the pond **Mikuri-ga-ike** (みくりが池). Twenty minutes further on is **Jigokudani Onsen** (Hell Valley Hot Springs): no bathing here; the waters are boiling! To the east, you can hike for about two hours – including a very steep final section – to the peak of **O-yama** (推山; 3003m) for an astounding panorama. Keen long-distance hikers with several days or a week to spare can continue south to Kamikōchi (p267).

Continuing on the route from Murodō, there's a bus ride (¥2100, 10 minutes) via a tunnel dug through Tateyama to **Daikanbō** (大観峰), where you can pause to admire the view before taking the cable car (¥1260, seven minutes) to Kurobe-daira, where another cable car whisks you down (¥840, five minutes)

to Kurobeko beside the vast **Kurobe Dam** (黒部ダム).

There's a 15-minute walk from Kurobeko to the dam, where you can descend to the water for a cruise, or climb up to a lookout point, before taking the trolley bus to **Ogizawa** (扇沢; ¥1260, 16 minutes). From here, a bus ride (¥1330, 40 minutes) takes you down to Shinano-ōmachi station (altitude 712m). From here there are frequent trains to Matsumoto (one hour), from where you can connect with trains for Tokyo, Nagoya and Nagano.

## ISHIKAWA-KEN 石川県

This prefecture, made up of the former Kaga and Noto fiefs, offers a blend of cultural and historical sights and natural beauty. Kanazawa, the Kaga capital and power base of the feudal Maeda clan, boasts traditional architecture and one of Japan's most famous gardens. To the north, the peninsula, Notohantō, has sweeping seascapes, rolling hills and quiet fishing villages. Hakusan National Park, near the southern tip of the prefecture, offers some great hiking, though it can be tough to reach even during peak season.

You can find an overview at www.hot-ishikawa.jp.

### KANAZAWA 金沢

☎ 076 / pop 455,000

Blessed with a number of cultural attractions, Kanazawa is a highlight for visitors to Hokuriku. It is most famed for Kenrokuen, the fine former castle garden that dates from the 17th century. The experience is rounded out by handsome streetscapes of the former geisha and samurai districts, attractive temples and a great number of museums for a city of its size.

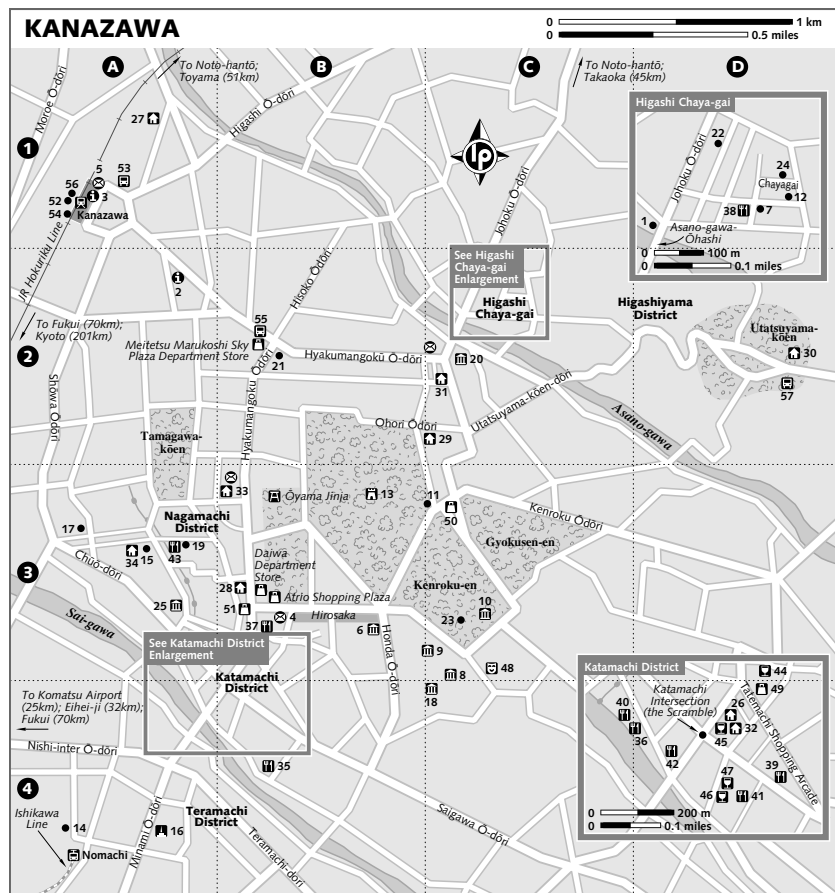
The city's main sights can be seen in a leisurely two days, and side trips to Notohantō and Eihei-ji in Fukui-ken are highly recommended.

### History

'Kanazawa' means 'golden marsh', which is appropriate given its history. During the 15th century, Kanazawa was under the control of an autonomous Buddhist government, which was ousted in 1583 by Maeda Toshiie, head of the powerful Maeda clan of retainers to the shōgun.

Then the fun started.





Three centuries of bountiful rice production made the Kaga region Japan's wealthiest; it was known as Kaga-Hyaku-Man-Goku for the one million *koku* (about five million bushels) of rice produced annually. Wealth allowed the Maedas to patronise cultural and artistic pursuits (see boxed text, p295), and today Kanazawa is one of Japan's key cultural centres. During WWII, the absence of military targets spared Kanazawa from destruction, preserving its historical and cultural sites, although it is an undeniably modern city with its share of functional (and some fanciful) contemporary architecture.

### Orientation

Kanazawa's labyrinthine layout befits its castle-town past, but bus service makes it easy to get

from the train station to the main sightseeing districts, which can then be covered on foot.

The site of Kanazawa-jō (Kanazawa Castle) and its gardens including Kenroku-en occupy the centre of town, and the Katamachi district, just to the south, is the commercial and business hub; its busiest intersection is known as the Katamachi Scramble. Another useful orientation point here is the Kōrinbō 109 department store. The Nagamachi samurai district is a short walk west from Kōrinbō 109. Northeast of the castle, across the Asanogawa, is the picturesque Higashi Chaya-gai (geisha district); the hills of Higashiyama to its east offer walks and city views. Just south of Katamachi, across the Sai-gawa, is the Teramachi temple district.

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### Information

A good source of information is [www.city.kanazawa.ishikawa.jp](http://www.city.kanazawa.ishikawa.jp). The **Ishikawa Foundation for International Exchange** (☎ 262-5931; [www.ife.or.jp](http://www.ife.or.jp); 1-5-3 Honmachi; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun) has reams of information, foreign periodicals and satellite TV news, as well as free internet access. It's on the 3rd floor of the Rifare building, a few minutes' walk southeast of the train station.

There are post offices in Katamachi (close to Kōrinbō 109) and in Kanazawa station, and several coin-operated laundries, including in Higashi Chaya-gai and Katamachi. Free internet access is available at Apres (p298).

**Kanazawa Goodwill Guide Network** (☎ 10am-6pm) At the station Tourist Information Office. Two weeks' notice is requested for free guiding in English.

**Kanazawa Tourist Information Office** (☎ 232-3933; 1 Hiro-oka-machi; ☎ 9am-7pm) Friendly office inside Kanazawa station. Pick up the bilingual map *Kanazawa Japan* (with details of sights, crafts and local specialties) and make hotel bookings. Some staff speak English.

**Kikuya bookshop** (☎ 220-5055; 2-1 Kōrinbō; ☎ 10am-10pm) Small selection of English-language titles; beneath Kōrinbō 109.

**Libro Books** (☎ 232-62502; 1-5-3 Honmachi; ☎ 10am-8pm) English-language books and magazines; it's in the Rifare building.

### Sights & Activities

This information is arranged in geographical order, to be used as a walking tour. If time is limited, must-sees are Kenroku-en, the 21st Century Museum, the Nagamachi and Higashi Chaya-gai districts and Ōmichō Market.

### NAGAMACHI DISTRICT 長町

Once inhabited by samurai, this attractive, well-preserved district (Nagamachi Buke Yashiki) framed by two canals features winding streets lined with tile-roofed mud walls. **Nomura Samurai House** (☎ 221-3553; 1-3-32 Nagamachi; adult/student/child ¥500/400/250; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 4.30pm Oct-Mar), though partly transplanted from outside Kanazawa, is worth a visit for its decorative garden.

Towards the Sai-gawa, **Shinise Kinenkan** (☎ 220-2524; 2-2-45 Nagamachi; adult/child ¥100/free; 🕒 9.30am-5pm) offers a peek at a former pharmacy and, upstairs, a moderate assortment of local traditional products. If the flowering tree made entirely of candy gives you a sweet tooth, slake it at **Murakami** (☎ 264-4223), a handsome *wagashi* (Japanese candy) shop next to the Nomura Samurai House.

In a nontraditional building at the edge of the district, the **Nagamachi Yūzen-kan** (Yūzen Silk Centre; ☎ 264-2811; admission ¥350; 🕒 9am-noon & 1-4.30pm Fri-Wed) allows you to watch the process of *Kaga yūzen* kimono-dyeing (see boxed text, opposite). Enquire about trying the silk-dyeing process yourself (¥400).

### 21ST CENTURY MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART 金沢 21 世紀 美術館

Designed by the critically acclaimed Tokyo architecture firm SANAA, this ultra-modern museum (☎ 220-2800; www.kanazawa21.jp; 1-2-1 Hirosaka; permanent collection adult/university student & senior/high school student & child ¥350/280/free; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Thu & Sun, 10am-8pm Fri & Sat) opened in late 2004 and instantly became an 'it' building. A low-slung glass cylinder forms the perimeter, inside of which the galleries, auditoria and more are arranged like boxes on a tray.

Oh yes, there's art too, by leading contemporary artists from Japan and abroad, plus music and dance performances. Check the website for upcoming events; the admission price may change during special exhibitions.

### KENROKU-EN 兼六園

Kanazawa's star attraction, **Kenroku-en** (☎ 234-3800; 1-1 Marunouchi; adult/child/senior ¥300/100/free; 🕒 7am-6pm Mar-15 Oct, 8am-4.30pm 16 Oct-Feb) is ranked as one of Japan's three top gardens (the other two are Kairaku-en in Mito, p196, and Kōraku-en in Okayama, p443).

The name (*kenroku* means 'combined six') refers to a renowned garden from Sung dynasty China that required six attributes for perfection: seclusion, spaciousness, artificiality, antiquity, abundant water and broad views (on clear days to the Sea of Japan). Originally Kenroku-en formed the outer garden of Kanazawa-jō, but from the 17th century it was enlarged, reaching completion in the early 19th century; the garden opened to the public in 1871. In winter the branches of Kenroku-en's trees are famously suspended with rope via a post at each tree's centre, form-

ing elegant conical shapes that protect the trees from breaking under Kanazawa's heavy snows. In spring, irises turn Kenroku-en's waterways into rivers of purple.

Kenroku-en is certainly attractive, but enormous crowds can diminish its intimacy. Visit at opening time and you'll have the place to yourself.

### KANAZAWA CASTLE PARK 金沢城公園

Originally built in 1580, **Kanazawa-jō** (Kanazawa Castle; ☎ 234-3800; 1-1 Marunouchi; grounds admission free, buildings admission ¥300; 🕒 grounds 5am-6pm Mar-15 Oct, 6am-4.30pm 16 Oct-Feb, castle 9am-4.30pm) housed the Maeda clan for 14 generations; this massive structure was called the castle of 1000 tatami. That castle was destroyed by fire, but some reconstruction has taken place inside its moated walls, now rechristened Kanazawa Castle Park (Kanazawa-jo Kōen). The elegant gate **Ishikawa-mon**, rebuilt in 1788, provides a dramatic entry from Kenroku-en; holes in its turret were designed for *ishi-otoshi*, hurling rocks at invaders. Two additional buildings, the **Hishi-yagura** (diamond-shaped turret) and **Gojikken-Nagaya** (armoury) were reconstructed in 2001, offering a glimpse of the castle's unique wood-frame construction.

### SEISON-KAKU VILLA

Back in Kenroku-en is this stylish retirement villa (☎ 221-0580; 2-1 Dewa-machi; adult/student/elementary school student ¥600/300/250; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm Thu-Tue), built by a Maeda lord for his mother in 1863. It's worth a visit for the elegant chambers and furnishings. A detailed English-language pamphlet is provided.

### ISHIKAWA PREFECTURAL MUSEUM FOR TRADITIONAL PRODUCTS & CRAFTS

石川県立伝統産業工芸館

Behind Seison-kaku, this museum (☎ 262-2020; 2-1 Dewa-machi; adult/senior/child ¥250/200/100; 🕒 9am-5pm, closed 3rd Thu Apr-Nov, closed Thu Dec-Mar) is not flashy but offers fine displays of over 20 regional crafts. Be sure to pick up the free English-language headphone guide. If you come across a must-buy, the museum has an English-language map to shops on nearby Hirosaka street.

### ISHIKAWA PREFECTURAL ART MUSEUM

石川県立美術館

This museum (☎ 231-7580; 2-1 Dewa-machi; adult/university student/child ¥350/280/free; 🕒 9.30am-5pm) spe-

### GET LACQUERED, GO TO POT, DYE & BE GILDED

Much as the Medici family was the patron of some of the great artists of the Italian Renaissance, during the Edo period Kanazawa's ruling Maeda family fuelled the growth of important crafts. Many of these crafts are still practised today.

### Kanazawa & Wajima Lacquerware

This luminous black lacquerware starts with hard, durable wood, such as *keyaki* (zelkova), or Japanese chestnut, finely carved with any defects removed or filled. Many layers of undercoating and middle coating are applied, each rubbed down with *washi* (Japanese paper) before the next application. Before the final topcoat, decoration is applied through *maki-e* (painting) or gilding. With the last coat of lacquer, artists must take great care that dust does not settle on the final product.

### Ōhi Pottery

An aesthetic central to tea ceremony is *wabi-sabi*: introspective, humble and understated, yet profound and prepared with great thought. Ōhi pottery seems its ceramic equivalent, with deliberately simple, almost primitive designs, rough surfaces, irregular shapes and monochromatic glazes, typically in black or amber. Little surprise, then, that Ōhi ware has long been favoured by tea practitioners; the same family, with the professional name Chōzaemon, has been keeper of the Ōhi tradition since the early Edo period.

### Kutani Porcelain

Known for elegant shapes and bold hues of red, blue, yellow, purple and green, this underglaze ware could hardly be more different from Ōhi pottery. It is said to date back to the early Edo period, and shares design characteristics with Chinese porcelain and Japanese Imari ware. Typical motifs include birds, flowers, trees and landscapes.

### Kaga Yūzen Silk Dyeing

This kimono-dyeing technique is characterised by sharp colours (red, ochre, green, indigo and purple) and realistic depictions of nature, such as flower petals that have begun to brown around the edges.

It's highly specialised, labour-intensive work. A pattern is drawn on the fabric with grey-blue ink from spiderwort flowers and the lines are traced over with rice paste using a cone like a fine pastry tube; this keeps the dyes from running as they are painted onto the silk. The colours are filled in and coated with more rice paste, and then the entire sheet of silk is dyed with the kimono's background colour.

Only then is the fabric rinsed clean (traditionally in a river) and steamed to fix the colours. White lines between the elements, where the initial spiderwort ink has washed away, are a characteristic of *Kaga yūzen*. To dye the fabric for one kimono takes about three months.

### Gold Leaf

It starts with a lump of pure gold the size of a ¥10 coin, which is rolled to the size of a tatami mat, as little as 0.0001mm thick. The gold leaf is cut into squares of 10.9cm – the size used for mounting on walls, murals or paintings – or then cut again for gilding on lacquerware or pottery. Tiny particles find their way into tea, sweets and hand lotion. Kanazawa makes over 98% of Japan's gold leaf.

cialises in antique exhibitions of traditional arts, with special emphasis on colourful Kutani-yaki porcelain, Japanese painting, and *Kaga yūzen* (silk-dyed) fabrics and costumes. Admission prices are more for any special exhibitions.

### NAKAMURA MEMORIAL MUSEUM

中村記念美術館

Rotating exhibitions from the 600-piece collection of this museum (☎ 221-0751; 3-2-29 Honda-machi; adult/senior/child ¥300/200/free; 🕒 9.30am-5pm) usually include *chanoyu* (tea ceremony) utensils,

calligraphy and traditional crafts from the collection of a wealthy sake brewer, Nakamura Eishun. You can enjoy a bowl of powdered tea for ¥100. Reached via a narrow flight of steps below the Ishikawa Prefectural Art Museum.

#### HONDA MUSEUM 本多蔵品館

The Honda family were chief retainers to the Maeda clan, and this **museum** (☎ 261-0500; 3-1 Dewa-machi; admission ¥500; ☎ 9am-5pm daily Mar-Dec, Fri-Wed Nov-Feb) exhibits the family collection of armour, household utensils and works of art. The bulletproof coat and the family vase are particularly interesting, and there's a detailed catalogue in English.

#### GYOKUSEN-EN 玉泉園

For more intimacy and fewer crowds than Kenroku-en, this Edo-period **garden** (☎ 221-0181; 1-1 Marunouchi; adult/child ¥500/350; ☎ 9am-4pm Mar-mid-Nov) rises up a steep slope. Enjoy a cup of tea here for an additional ¥700, while contemplating the tranquil setting.

#### ŌHI POTTERY MUSEUM 大樋美術館

This **museum** (☎ 221-2397; Hashiba-chō; admission ¥700; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) was established by the Chōzaemon family, now in its 10th generation. The first Chōzaemon developed this style in nearby Ōhi village, using a special slow-fired amber glaze, specifically for use in *chanoyu*. See boxed text (p295) for further information.

#### HIGASHI CHAYA-GAI 東茶屋街

North of the Ōhi Pottery Museum and across Asano-gawa, the **Higashi Geisha District** is an enclave of narrow streets that was established early in the 19th century as a centre for geisha to entertain wealthy patrons. The slatted wooden façades of the geisha houses of Higashi Chaya-gai (east teahouse street) are romantically preserved.

One famous, traditional former geisha house is **Shima** (☎ 252-5675; 1-13-21 Higashiyama; adult/child ¥400/300; ☎ 9am-6pm); note the case of elaborate combs and *shamisen* (three-stringed traditional instrument) picks; it dates from 1820. Across the street, **Kaikarō** (☎ 253-0591; 1-14-8 Higashiyama; admission ¥700; ☎ 9am-5pm) is an early-19th-century geisha house refinished with contemporary fittings and art including a red lacquered staircase.

The **Sakuda Gold Leaf Company** (☎ 251-6777; 1-3-27 Higashiyama; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm) is a good place to observe the *kinpaku* (gold leaf) process and

pick up gilded souvenirs (including pottery, lacquerware and, er, golf balls). The tea served here contains flecks of gold leaf, meant to be good for rheumatism. Even the walls of the loos are lined with gold and platinum.

On most nights you can visit the local *sentō*, **Higashi-yu** (☎ 252-5410; 1-13-2 Higashiyama; admission ¥370; ☎ 2pm-12.30am Mon & Wed-Sat, 1pm-12.30am Sun).

#### TERAMACHI DISTRICT 寺町

Across Sai-gawa, southwest of the centre, this old neighbourhood was established as a first line of defence and still contains dozens of temples. Its narrow backstreets are a good place for a peaceful stroll, even if it's not as picturesque as Kanazawa's other historic districts.

The temple **Myōryū-ji** (Ninja-dera; ☎ 241-0888; 1-2-12 Nomachi; admission ¥800; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mar-Nov, 9am-4pm Dec-Feb, reservations required) is a five-minute walk from the river. Completed in 1643, it was designed as a hideout in case of attack, and contains hidden stairways, escape routes, secret chambers, concealed tunnels and trick doors. The popular name refers to the temple's connection with ninja. Admission is by tour only – it's in Japanese but visual enough. To reach the temple, take Minami Ō-dōri across the river, take a left at the first major intersection, then the first right.

Nearby, **Kutani Kosen Gama Kiln** (☎ 241-0902; 5-3-3 Nomachi; admission free; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) is a must for pottery lovers. Short tours give a glimpse of the process and history of this fine craft. You can decorate porcelain yourself (¥1050).

#### ŌMICHŌ MARKET 近江町市場

A warren of several hundred shops, many of which specialise in seafood, this **market** (35 Ōmichō; ☎ 9am-5pm) bustles all day and is a great place for a break from sightseeing and watch everyday people in action. It's between Katamachi district and Kanazawa station; the most convenient bus stop is Musashi-ga-tsuji.

#### Courses

Japanese-language classes are offered through the **Ishikawa Foundation for International Exchange** (☎ 262-5931; 1-5-3 Honmachi).

#### Festivals & Events

**Kagatobi Dezomeshiki** In early January scantily clad firemen brave the cold, imbibe sake and demonstrate ancient fire-fighting skills on ladders.

**Asano-gawa Enyūkai** Performances of traditional Japanese dance and music are held on the banks of the Asano-gawa during the second weekend of April.

**Hyakumangoku Matsuri** On the second Saturday in June Kanazawa's main annual festival commemorates the first time the region's rice production hit 1,000,000 *koku* (around 150,000 tonnes). There's a parade of townsfolk in 16th century costumes, *takigi nō* (torch-lit performances of *nō* drama), *tōrō nagashi* (lanterns floated down the river at dusk) and a special *chanoyu*; at Kenroku-en.

#### Sleeping

The Kanazawa Tourist Information Office can help with reservations.

#### BUDGET

**Kanazawa Youth Hostel** (☎ 252-3414; fax 252-8590; www.yjh.or.jp; 37 Suehiro-machi; dm ¥3150; ☎ closed early-mid-Feb) Commanding a superb position in the hills to the east of the city, this strict, 80-bed hostel has Japanese- and Western-style rooms, with some private rooms available (extra charge). Unfortunately, bus services are infrequent. From the station, take bus 90 for Utatsuyama-kōen and get off after about 25 minutes at the Yūsu-Hosteru-mae bus stop.

**Yamadaya** (☎ /fax 261-0065; 2-3-28 Nagamachi; r per person ¥4000; ☎ ☎ ☎) This friendly place offers decent tatami rooms in a former samurai house in Nagamachi. No English spoken. It's on a side street just west of the Nomura Samurai House.

**Murataya Ryokan** (☎ 263-0455; fax 263-0456; murataya@spacelan.ne.jp; 1-5-2 Katamachi; s/tw ¥4700/9000; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Well-kept rooms with friendly hosts await at this travellers' favourite in Katamachi. It's a convenient base for exploring the area's restaurants and nightlife; there's an English-language map of local establishments.

#### MIDRANGE

**APA Hotel Kanazawa Chūō** (☎ 235-2111; fax 235-2112; www.apahotel.com; 1-5-24 Katamachi; s/d/tw from ¥8000/11,000/15,000; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Towering above Katamachi, this well-located business hotel offers nicely appointed rooms (though singles are cramped). Guests also have use of indoor and outdoor baths on the 14th floor. Pick up an origami crane.

**Hotel Dormy Inn Kanazawa** (☎ 263-9888; fax 263-9312; www.hotespa.net in Japanese; 2-25 Horikawa-shinmachi; s/d/tw ¥8500/12,000/15,000; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This brand-new hotel steps from the station is filled with futuristic art. Most of its 304 rooms are singles and have an inner door to keep out extraneous

noise. There's an *onsen rotemburo* on the top floor, and a coin laundry.

#### TOP END

**New Grand Hotel** (☎ 233-1311; fax 233-1591; www.new-grand.co.jp in Japanese; 1-50 Takaoka-machi; s/d or tw from ¥9817/18,480; ☎ ☎ ☎) Near both Nagamachi and Katamachi, this business hotel has several restaurants and a 12th-floor bar with views. Nice-sized rooms are spread among its two buildings; the New Grand Annex is newer and more polished; request when booking.

**Kanazawa Excel Hotel Tokyū** (☎ 231-2411; fax 263-0154; www.tokyuhotels.co.jp; 2-1-1 Kōrinbo; s/d/tw from ¥11,896/19,635/17,902; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ wi-fi) The city's most upmarket hotel has sleek and stylish rooms with plenty of amenities. It's also a winner for its central location in the heart of Katamachi.

**Kanazawa Hakuchōrō Hotel** (☎ 222-1212; fax 222-1120; www.hakuchoro.com in Japanese; 6-3 Marunouchi; s/tw from ¥17,000/26,000; ☎ ☎ ☎) East meets west with room design (and dimensions) that could be from France or Germany and only-in-Japan touches like sashes across the beds and display cases of local crafts. Its out-of-the-way location means lots of quiet. Common hot-spring baths also available. Enquire about special rates; some include breakfast.

**Matsumoto** (☎ 221-0302; fax 221-0303; 1-7-2 Ōwari-chō; r per person incl 2 meals ¥25,000; ☎ ☎) This upscale inn bills itself as a *ryōri* (cuisine) ryokan; expect a culinary treat of local specialities. Huge rooms have private bath. It's near the intersection of Hyakumangoku-ō-dōri and Jūhoku-dōri, down a narrow street across from the post office. No English spoken.

#### Eating

Kanazawa's *Kaga ryōri* (Kaga cuisine) is characterised by seafood; even the most humble train-station *bentō* nearly all feature some type of fish. *Oshi-zushi*, a thin layer of fish pressed atop vinegared rice and cut into pieces, is said by some to be the precursor to modern sushi. Another favourite is *jibun*, flour-coated duck or chicken that's stewed with shiitake mushrooms and green vegetables. The Katamachi district is the best place to browse, packed with Japanese and international restaurants.

For delicious and relatively cheap sushi, try one of the tiny restaurants in Ōmichō Market (opposite). Not many have English menus, but you should be able to make yourself understood. Another speciality is seafood

*domburi* (seafood served atop a deep bowl of rice). *Teishoku* cost ¥800 to ¥1200. Omichō's restaurants close around 7pm or 8pm.

**Janome-sushi** (☎ 231-0093; 1-1-12 Kōrinbō; sets from ¥2500; 🍽️ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Near Kōrinbō 109, this highly regarded restaurant serves plenty of fresh sashimi and Kaga cuisine. One of our Japanese friends says that when he eats here, he knows he's really in Kanazawa.

**Tamazushi** (☎ 221-2644; 2-14-9 Katamachi; sets ¥1000-3000) Down near Sai-gawa in Katamachi, this minimalist restaurant is one of Kanazawa's best sushi spots. *Teishoku* are displayed in the front window. It's on your right as you enter from the main street.

**Oden Miyuki Honten** (☎ 222-6119; 1-10-3 Katamachi; oden ¥100-400, most other dishes ¥400-600; 🍽️ dinner Mon-Sat) For fish in another form (ground and pressed into cakes and served in broth), *oden* is very satisfying especially on chilly nights. This place has lots of fans, including Ishikawa's most famous son, New York Yankees baseball star Hideki Matsui. Sit at the counter to watch all the action. Some English-speaking staff. It's around the corner to the left of the Washington Hotel.

**Jiyūken** (☎ 252-1996; 1-6-6 Higashiyama; most mains ¥735-2993; 🍽️ lunch & dinner) In the Higashi Chayagai, this simple but welcoming spot has been serving *yō-shoku* (Japanese takes on Western cuisine: beef stew, grilled chicken, omelettes etc) since 1909. The *teishoku* is a steal at ¥924. Plastic models in the window. Look for the stone front and Art Deco design.

**Legian** (☎ 262-6510; 2-31-30 Katamachi; most dishes ¥600-1000; 🍷 E) For popular, authentic Indonesian cuisine head to this tiny spot by the river. Staff make annual trips to Indonesia to bone up on technique, and are happy to make vegetarian versions. Good lunch specials.

**Kōtatsu** (☎ 261-6310; 32-1 Daiku-machi; mains ¥700-900; 🍽️ dinner Mon-Sat; E) More sophisticated than your everyday *okonomiyaki* place (see p95), there's a dark atmosphere and an assortment of sakes and shōchūs, and they'll cook your *okonomiyaki* (cabbage pancakes) for you. Salads are also available. It's near Mister Donut, two doors down from the Takoya *takoyaki* (octopus dumplings) stand.

**Campagne** (☎ 261-2156; 2-31-33 Katamachi; mains ¥650-1950, set menu from ¥2500; 🍽️ dinner Mon-Sat; E) This cosy, quietly fashionable Italian bistro serves lovely set menus including house-made focaccia, salads, pastas, 'plociutto' (sic) and desserts, plus hors-d'oeuvres you can eat with chopsticks. Friendly, professional staff.

**Bistro Yuiga** (☎ 261-0978; 4-1 Mizutamemachi; sets from ¥2575; 🍽️ lunch Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, dinner Thu-Tue; E) There's a gentle jazz soundtrack to accompany elegantly prepared French delicacies in this one-time private home. Set menus include treats like raw ham and – because this is Kanazawa – seafood. It's a short walk off the main street from Katamachi, down the street opposite Kōtatsu.

### Drinking

Most of Kanazawa's bars and clubs are holes-in-the-wall, jam-packed into high-rises in Katamachi. Some are straightforward bars; others are barely disguised girlie clubs. Here are some of the former. Weekdays can be slow, but weekends tend to hop.

**Polé Polé** (☎ 260-1138; 2-31-30 Katamachi; 🍽️ 8pm-5am Mon-Sat) In the same building (and sharing the same owners) as Legian restaurant, this dark, grungy and friendly bar has been an institution for decades for *gaijin* and locals – look for the signatures of foreign exchange students. The narrow floor is littered with peanut shells (proceeds from peanut sales go to charity), and the music (reggae) is loud.

**Apire** (☎ 221-0090; 1-6-12 Kōrinbō; 🍽️ 6pm-1am) A mix of locals and *gaijin* fill this large two-storey bar near Kōrinbō 109. There's free internet, a pool table, plenty of food and beer selections and a lively crowd (at least on weekends).

**Baby Rick** (☎ 263-5063; 1-5-20 Katamachi; 🍽️ 5pm-3am) This classy little shot bar has a billiard table, jazz and whisky (the good kind), and you can get dishes like spaghetti carbonara and homemade pizzas. It's in the basement level beneath Shidax karaoke. If you enter after 10pm there's a ¥500 cover charge.

**Ino Ichiban** (☎ 261-0001; 1-9-20 Katamachi; 🍽️ 6pm-3am Mon-Sat, 6pm-midnight Sun) This slender *izakaya* serves plenty of cocktails and has ambience in spades – so much so that it's almost unrecognisable from the street; look for the wood-panel screen and tiny stand of bamboo.

**Pilsen** (☎ 221-0688; 1-9-20 Katamachi; dishes ¥600-1800) Two blocks from the Katamachi Scramble, this German-style place serves lots of beers and a fascinating hybrid menu: where else can you get a sausage plate and warm tofu-mushroom salad at the same meal?

### Entertainment

Nō theatre is alive and well in Kanazawa, and performances are held once a week during

summer at **Ishikawa Prefectural Nō Theatre** (☎ 264-2598; 3-1 Dewa-machi).

### Shopping

For a quick view or purchase of Kanazawa crafts, you can visit **Kankō Bussankan** (Ishikawa Local Products Shop; ☎ 222-7788). The Hirosaka district, between Kōrinbō 109 and Kenroku-en, has some upmarket shops on its south side for crafts; and shop for local crafts in department stores. At the Sakuda Gold Leaf Company (p296) you can find business card holders, mirrors, chopstick rests and Buddhist prayer bells, among many dozens of objects covered in gold leaf. At the other end of the spectrum, Tatemachi is to Kanazawa what Takeshita-dōri is to Tokyo: young and trendy. The **100 Yen Shop** (Tatemachi) here has an amazing assortment, from housewares to toys.

### Getting There & Away

#### AIR

Komatsu **airport** (KMQ; www.pref.ishikawa.jp/k\_air/index\_e.html), serving Kanazawa, has air connections with Tokyo, Narita, Sapporo, Sendai, Fukuoka and Naha (Okinawa), Seoul and Shanghai.

#### BUS

**Hokutetsu Kankō Bus Company** (☎ 234-0123; 🍽️ reservations 8am-7pm) operates express buses from in front of Kanazawa station's east exit, to Tokyo (¥7840, Ikebukuro seven hours, Shinjuku 7½ hours), Yokohama (¥8250, eight hours), Kyoto (¥4060, 4¼ hours) and Nagoya (¥4060, four hours). See p300 for bus services to Noto-hanto.

#### TRAIN

The JR Hokuriku line links Kanazawa with Fukui (*tokkyū*, ¥3140, 50 minutes; *futsū*, ¥1280, 90 minutes), Kyoto (*tokkyū*, ¥6910, 2¼ hours), Osaka (*tokkyū*, ¥7640, 2¾ hours) and Toyama (*tokkyū*, ¥2810, 35 minutes). From Tokyo take the Jōetsu *shinkansen* and change at Echigo-Yuzawa in Northern Honshū (¥13,010, four hours).

The JR Nanao line connects Kanazawa with Wakura Onsen on Noto-hantō (*tokkyū*, ¥2930, one hour).

### Getting Around

Airport buses (¥1100, 40 minutes) are timed to aeroplane departures and arrivals, leaving from stop 6 in front of Kanazawa station's east

exit. Some buses also stop at Katamachi and Kōrinbō 109 department store but take one hour to reach the airport.

Hire bikes from **JR Kanazawa Station Rent-a-Cycle** (☎ 261-1721; per hr/day ¥200/1200; 🍽️ 8am-8.30pm) – take an immediate left from Kanazawa station's west exit – and **Hokutetsu Bicycle Rental** (☎ 263-0919; per 4hr/day ¥630/1050; 🍽️ 8am-5.30pm) – by stop 4 out the west exit.

Any bus from station stop 7, 8 or 9 will take you to the city centre (¥200, day pass ¥900). The Kanazawa Loop Bus (day pass ¥500, 🍽️ 8.30am to 6pm, every 15 minutes) circles the major tourist attractions in 45 minutes.

Cars can be hired at **Nippon Rent-a-Car** (☎ 263-0919), left of the station's west exit.

### NOTO-HANTŌ 能登半島

With its rugged seascapes, traditional rural life, fresh seafood and a light diet of cultural sights, this peninsula atop Ishikawa-ken is highly recommended.

Although day trips from Kanazawa are offered, they don't do the peninsula justice; buzzing through the sights leaves little time to savour the day-to-day pace as the locals do. Unless you're under your own power, a speedy trip may not be an option anyway: public transport is infrequent. With your own car, the Noto Toll Rd offers a quick, not-too-outrageously expensive compromise.

Noto juts out from Honshū like a boomerang, with few sights dotting its flat west coast; the town of Wajima is the hub of the rugged north, known as Oku-Noto.

Kanazawa **tourist information office** (☎ 076-232-6200) stocks the *Unforgettable Ishikawa* map and guide, which includes the peninsula. JNTO's leaflet *Noto Peninsula* also has concise information. On the peninsula, the best tourist office is at Wajima (p302) on the north coast. Telephone information about Noto can be obtained through the **Noto tourist office** (☎ 0767-53-7767) in the city of Nanao (in Japanese).

Particularly in Oku-Noto, you won't have to look far before you see shops groaning with the main regional craft – lacquerware. A large proportion of Wajima's townsfolk is engaged in producing *Wajima-nuri*, renowned for its durability and rich colours. Other good bets are Suzu-style pottery (named for the Oku-Noto town at the end of the peninsula) and locally harvested sea salt and *iwanoi* seaweed.



## Sleeping

The peninsula has plenty of accommodation, though reservations are advised during the peak months of July and August. A night or two in a Japanese inn will also net you healthy portions of delicious sashimi, grilled fish and shellfish. There are camping grounds tucked away in a few pockets of the peninsula, although most are difficult to reach using public transport. Call ahead to reserve sites, especially in summer.

## Getting There & Around

In the Centre of Oku-Noto, the **Noto airport** (NTQ; ☎ 0768-26-2100) connects the peninsula with Tokyo's Haneda airport. **ANA** (☎ 0120-029-222) offers two return flights daily (one way ¥19,800, 65 minutes). The **Furusato Taxi** (☎ 0768-22-7411) is a van service to locations around the peninsula. Fares start at ¥700 to nearby communities including Wajima.

A stay along Noto's west coast should appeal to cyclists as the terrain is mostly flat. However, on the Noto-kongō coast on the west coast, and anywhere east of Wajima, roads can be quite steep and have blind curves. The tourist information offices have a very good map (in Japanese) called *Noto Hantō Kankō Rōdo Mappu* (能登半島観光ロードマップ), which covers the area on a scale of 1:1,60,000.

**Hokutetsu Kankō bus company** (☎ 076-234-0123) Oku-noto express buses run between Kanazawa and Wajima (¥2200, two hours, 10 daily), with a couple continuing to Sosogi (¥2510). Buses leave from outside Kanazawa station. There are four buses daily between Wakura Onsen and Wajima (¥1200, one hour).

Given the infrequent service, many visitors opt for the daily tour buses from Kanazawa, with one way/return fares from ¥3500 to ¥7200. Depending on the itinerary, the ticket price includes transport, lunch, Japanese-speaking guide and admission fees. Some tours operate all year, others from May to November, and the guide's rapid-fire commentary can be peppered with recorded jungle noises, songs and breaking waves.

Given the lack of bus service, hiring a car has become a popular option. Try **Nippon Rent-a-Car** (☎ 076-263-0919) in Kanazawa. Driving the Noto Toll Rd between Kanazawa and Wajima takes about two hours; the toll road goes only as far as Anamizu: take Rte 1 the rest of the

way. If you're planning to visit sights on the west coast, allow a full day to reach Wajima.

Although there are trains – JR Nanao from Kanazawa to Wakura Onsen (¥1280, 1½ hours) and private Noto Tetsudō line to Anamizu (¥660, 30 minutes) – you still have to reach the sights by road. For the west Noto coast, get off the train at Hakui, Noto's western bus hub. Whatever your plan, check departure and arrival times to avoid long waits.

## West Noto Coast

☎ 0767

### KITA-KE 喜多家

From this sprawling, 300-plus-year-old house (☎ 28-2546; admission ¥700; ☎ 8am-5pm), the Kita family once administered over 100 villages at the pivotal crossroads of the Kaga, Echizen and Noto districts. Inside the house and adjacent museum are displays of weapons, ceramics, farming tools, fine and folk art, and documents. The garden was once called the Moss Temple of Noto.

Kita-ke is about 1km from the Komedashi exit on the Noto Toll Rd; by train, take the JR Nanao line to Menden or Hōdatsu stations; it's about 20 minutes' walk.

### CHIRIHAMA NAGISA DRIVEWAY 千里浜なぎさドライブウェイ

At times the 8km beach, linking the towns of Chirihama and Hakui, resembles a sandy speedway, with droves of buses, motorcycles and cars roaring past the breakers. **Hakui** (羽咋) is both the western transit hub and Japan's UFO-viewing capital, with flying-saucer-shaped snacks on sale everywhere to prove it.

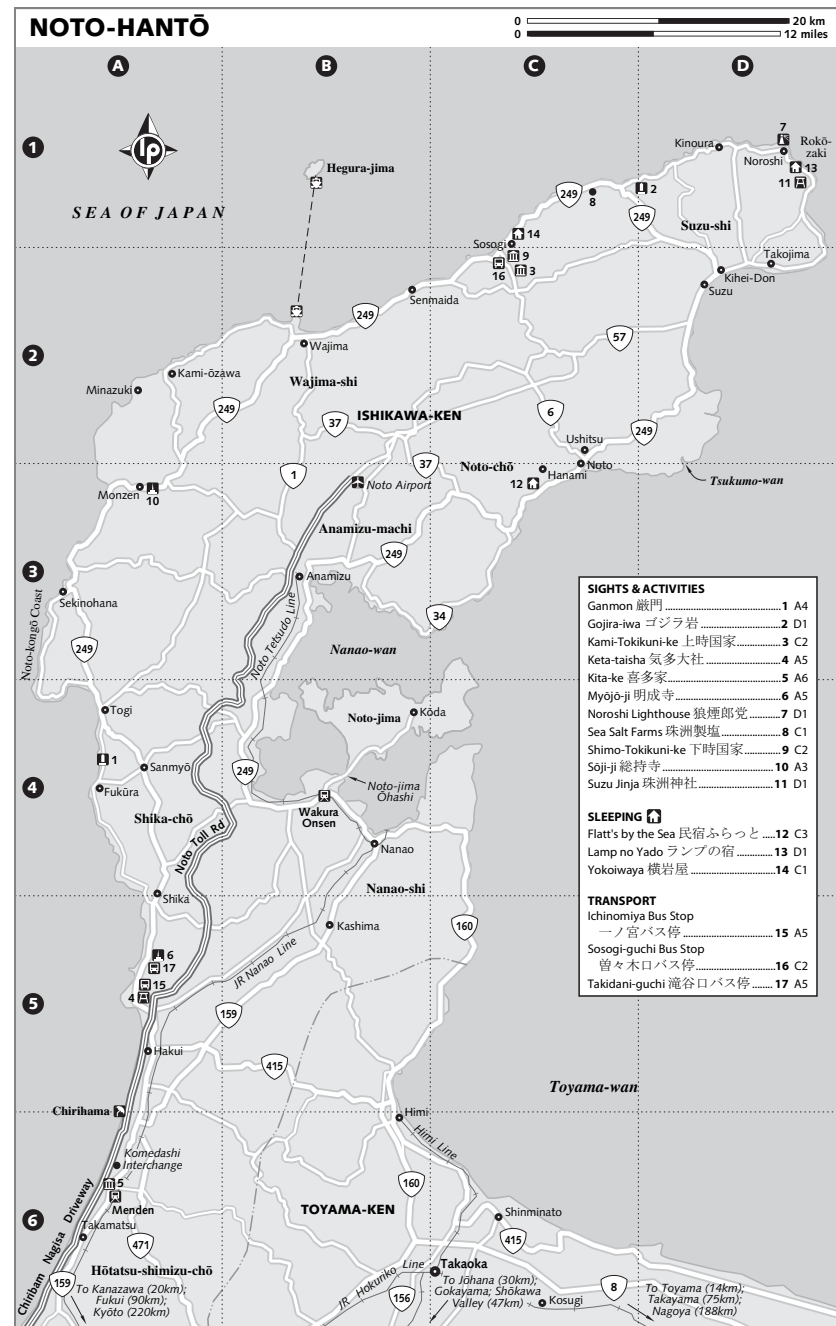
### KETA-TAISHA 気多大社

This **shrine** (☎ 22-0602; admission ¥100; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm), set in a wooded grove with sea views, was allegedly founded in the 1st century BC, but the architectural style of the present building dates from the 17th century.

Take the Togi-bound bus from Hakui to Ichinomiya bus stop (10 minutes, approximately 10 buses daily).

### MYŌJŌ-JI 妙成寺

Founded in 1294 by Nichijō, a disciple of Nichiren, this imposing **temple** (☎ 27-1226; admission ¥500; ☎ 8am-5pm) remains an important temple for the sect. The grounds comprise several buildings, including the strikingly





elegant **Gojū-no-tō** (Five-storeyed Pagoda). An excellent pamphlet available here explains more than you'd ever dreamed of knowing about the religion.

The Togi-bound bus from Hakui station can drop you at Takidani-guchi bus stop (¥390, 18 minutes); from there, it's 15 minutes' walk.

### Noto-kongō Coast 能登金剛

☎ 0768

This rocky, cliff-lined shoreline extends for about 16km between Fukūra and Sekinohana, and is set with dramatic rock formations like the gate-shaped Ganmon. There are pleasant sea views as the road winds along the coast. From Hakui station, take a **Noto Seibu Bus** (☎ 0767-22-0268) to Sanmyō and change for a bus to Ganmon (total ¥1170, one hour).

Monzen, further up the coast, is home to majestic **Sōji-ji** (総持寺; ☎ 42-0005; adult/high school student/child ¥400/300/150; ☎ 8am-5pm), the temple established in 1321 as the head of the Sōtō school of Zen. After a fire severely damaged the buildings in 1898 the temple was restored, but it now functions as a branch temple; the main temple is now in Yokohama. Sōji-ji welcomes visitors to experience *zazen* (seated meditation; ¥700) and serves *shōjin-ryōri* (Buddhist vegetarian cuisine; ¥2500 to ¥3500); both require reservations.

Monzen is also a bus hub with service to Kanazawa (¥2200, 2½ hours), Hakui (¥1510, 1½ hours) and Wajima (¥740, 35 minutes). For the temple, tell the driver 'Sojiji Sanmon-mae'.

### Wajima 輪島

☎ 0768 / pop 34,400

This fishing port, the largest town in Oku-Noto, is a historic centre for the production of *Wajima-nuri* (Wajima lacquerware) and has become a significant, if understated, centre

for tourism. The town centre is nicely refurbished, and the morning market is fun.

The **tourist information office** (☎ 22-1503; ☎ 7am-10pm) at the former Wajima train station (now called the Michi-no-eki, 道の駅, still the bus station) provides English leaflets and maps, and the staff can book accommodation (from 8am to 7pm, in person only).

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

#### Wajima Shikki Shiriyōkan/Shikki Kaikan

輪島漆器会館

The lacquerware hall and museum is in the centre of town next to the bridge, Shin-bashi. The 2nd-floor **museum** (☎ 22-2155; admission ¥200; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) displays lacquerware production techniques and some prodigiously old pieces, including bowls that were being swilled out of when Hideyoshi was struggling to unify Japan 500 years ago. There's a **shop** (admission free) downstairs where you can purchase contemporary works. None is cheap but they are undeniably beautiful.

#### Ishikawa Wajima Urushi Art Museum

石川輪島漆芸美術館

In the southwest corner of the town centre, this stately contemporary **museum** (☎ 22-9788; adult/student/junior high & elementary school student ¥600/300/150; ☎ 9am-5pm) has a large, rotating collection of lacquerware in galleries on two floors; works are both Japanese and foreign, ancient and contemporary. It's about 15 minutes' walk west of the train station. Closes to change exhibitions.

#### Kiriko Kaikan キリコ会館

A selection of the impressive illuminated lacquered floats used in the Wajima Taisai and other regional festivals is on display in this **hall** (☎ 22-7100; adult/high school student/junior high & elementary school student ¥600/450/350; ☎ 8am-6pm mid-Jul-Aug, 8am-5pm Sep-mid-Jul). Some of the floats are up to 15m tall. From Wajima station, it is 20 minutes on foot, or take the bus to Tsukada bus stop (¥150, six minutes).

#### Hegura-jima 船倉島

This island with a lighthouse, several shrines and no traffic is a relaxing day trip. Bird-watchers flock here during the Golden Week holidays (29 April-6 May) and in autumn for the astounding array of birds during the migratory season. If you want to extend your island stay, there are a couple of *minshuku*.

Weather permitting, Hegura Kōro operates a daily **ferry** (☎ 22-4381; one way ¥2200). It's a 1½-hour trip, departing Wajima at 9am and Hegura-jima at 3pm (March to October) or 2pm (November to February), taking a week off in January for maintenance.

### FESTIVALS & EVENTS

**Gojinjō Daikō Nabune Matsuri** This festival on 31 July and 1 August features wild drumming performed by performers wearing demon masks and seaweed headgear.  
**Wajima Taisai** See Wajima's famous, towering, illuminated *kiriko* festival floats (late August).

### SLEEPING & EATING

Wajima has dozens of *minshuku*. This is one town where it's definitely worth going for the meals at the inn, which include copious and delicious seafood. If you're not eating at your inn, there are some lovely restaurants by the harbour, though some close by early evening.

**Sodegahama Camping Ground** (袖が浜キャンプ場; ☎ 22-2211; fax 22-9920; camp sites ¥600; ☎ late Jul & Aug; ☎ office 4pm-9am) About 10 minutes by bus west of town. Take a Monzen-bound bus to Sodegahama or hike for 20 minutes.

**Asunaro** (あすなろ; ☎ /fax 22-0652; r per person ¥4800, incl 2 meals ¥7350) Readers have been coming to this *minshuku* for years. Although it's definitely showing its age and is far from the action (15 minutes on foot), the English-speaking owner is kindly and there's an *onsen* and an *irori*. Take route 249 west from the city centre and ask directions once you cross the river.

**Wajima** (わじま; ☎ 22-4243; fax 22-5969; s/d per person incl 2 meals ¥7875/7350) This 10-room *minshuku* has excellent details in its woodwork, a mineral *onsen* and *Wajima-nuri* bowls and chopsticks for eating your homegrown rice and catch of the day. It's across the bridge Futatsuya-bashi, south of the city centre.

**Fukasan** (深三; ☎ 22-9933; fax 22-9934; www.wajima-minsyuku.com/fukasan in Japanese; r per person incl 2 meals ¥7500) By the harbour, this is a contemporary *minshuku* with mood-lit rustic elegance, dark beams, high ceilings, an *onsen* and waves crashing outside your window. Known for its meals.

**Madara-kan** (まだら館; ☎ 22-3453; sets ¥800-3000) This restaurant serves local specialities, including *zosui* (rice hotpot), *yaki-zakana* (grilled fish) and seasonal seafood; there are pictures in the window. From the traffic

light at Kawai Shō-gakkō-mae, walk north for about 2½ blocks, almost to the end of the street. The restaurant will be on the right.

**Shinpuku** (伸幅; ☎ 22-8133; sushi per piece from ¥150, sets ¥1000-2500; ☎ lunch & dinner) This tiny, assiduously local sushi shop serves fabulously fresh fish and seafood, and delicious *iwanaori* in the miso soup. Sets are a sure bet, and *asa-ichidō* is a selection from the morning market. It's on the main street one block east of the Cosmo petrol station. Picture menu. Closed irregularly but mostly Wednesday.

### SHOPPING

The *asa-ichi* (morning market; ☎ 8am-noon, closed 10th & 25th of month) is highly entertaining, though undeniably touristy. Fishwives ply their wares with plenty of sass and humour that cuts across the language barrier. To find the market, walk north along the river from the Wajima Shikki Shiriyōkan and turn right just before Iroha-bashi. The *yu-ichi* (evening market; ☎ 3.30pm-dusk) is lower key, across the river on the grounds of Sumiyoshi-jinja.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

See p300 for information on reaching Wajima. From Wajima, buses bound for Ushitsu stop in Sosogi (¥740, 40 minutes). Buses to Monzen (¥740, 35 minutes) leave every one to two hours.

### Suzu & Noto-chō 珠洲, 能登町

☎ 0768

Heading east from central Wajima towards the end of the peninsula, you'll pass the famous slivered *dandan-batake* (rice terraces) at **Senmaida** (千枚田) before arriving in the coastal village of **Sosogi** (曾々木), technically still part of Wajima city. After the Taira were defeated in 1185 (see p37) one of the few survivors, Taira Tokitada, was exiled to this region. The Tokikuni family, which claims descent from Tokitada, eventually divided into two parts and established separate family residences here. From Wajima station, the bus ride takes about 40 minutes.

The first residence, **Shimo Tokikuni-ke** (下時国家; Lower Tokikuni Residence; ☎ 32-0075; adult/high school student/junior high school student ¥600/400/300; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm daily Apr-Dec, Sat & Sun Jan-Mar), built in 1590 in the style of the Kamakura period, is a designated National Important Cultural Property and has a *meishō tei-en* (famous garden).

### AND IT WAS THIIIIIS BIG...

Wajima is home to the world's largest lacquerware mural. Called *Umi no Uta* ('song of the sea'), this ocean scene is composed of 15 panels, each 2.6m by 1.2m; gold dust was applied to the wet lacquer to create the patterns. See it in the Wajima-shi Bunka Kaikai (輪島市文化会館; Wajima Culture Hall) behind the former Wajima station.

A few minutes' walk away, **Kami Tokikuni-ke** (上時国家; Upper Tokikuni Residence; ☎ 32-0171; admission ¥500; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Jul-Sep, 8.30am-5pm Oct-Jun), with its impressive thatched roof and elegant interior, was constructed early in the 19th century. Entry to either home includes an English leaflet.

Close by are the rock formation *mado-iwa* (window rock) and several hiking trails. If you visit this part of the coast in winter, look for *nami-no-hana* (flowers of the waves), masses of foam that form when waves gnash the rocky shore.

The road northeast from Sosogi village leads past the **sea salt farms** and **Gojira-iwa** (ゴジラ岩) – Godzilla Rock: guess why – into the town of Suzu and the remote cape Rokō-zaki, the peninsula's furthest point. At the cape, you can amble up to the lighthouse in the village of **Noroshi** (狼煙); a signpost marks the distances to faraway cities (302km to Tokyo, 1598km to Shanghai). A coastal **hiking trail** runs west along the cape. It's rustic scenery, and during the week when the tourist buses run less frequently, Noroshi reverts to its true role as a sleepy fishing village. As you head south, the road circles around the tip of the peninsula towards less dramatic scenery on the eastern coast, and, reluctantly, back towards Kanazawa.

In Sosogi, **Yokoiwaya** (☎ 32-0603; fax 32-0663; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥8340; ♻️) offers comfortable rooms, *onsen* baths and outstanding seafood dinners; in most Japanese cities the dinner alone would easily cost this much. Proprietors will pick you up from Sosogi-guchi bus stop; simple English spoken.

**our pick** In remotest Suzu, **Lamp no Yado** (☎ 86-8000; www.lampnoyado.co.jp; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥18,000; ♻️) is sublime. A 14-room wooden waterside village, far from the main drag, it's been an inn since the 1970s but the building goes back four centuries when people would escape to its curative waters for weeks at a time. Rooms (some two-storey) have private bath and their own *rotomburo*. The pool is almost superfluous. A very worthy splurge; reservations required.

An Australian-Japanese couple runs the seaside inn-restaurant-bakery **Flatt's by the Sea** (Minshuku Flatto; ☎ 62-1900; www.oto.ne.jp/flatt; r per person incl 2 meals ¥7500; ☎ Thu-Tue). It has just a few tables, serving Italian-Japanese cuisine, and the three 10-mat rooms all have bang-on water views across the street. For

nonguests, lunch and dinner is by reservation only, or just stop in at the shop for bakery basics or adventurous creations like chorizo rolls. It's near the inner elbow of Noto, in the town of Hanami.

## HAKUSAN NATIONAL PARK

白山国立公園

☎ 0761

Travellers with a thirst for exercise (and time on their hands) may want to venture into this national park, in the southeast corner of Ishikawa-ken and spilling over into neighbouring Fukui, Toyama and Gifu prefectures. The park has several peaks above 2500m; the tallest is Hakusan (2702m), a sacred mountain that, along with Mt Fuji, has been worshipped since ancient times. In summer, hiking and scrambling uphill to catch mountain sunrises are the main activities, while in winter skiing and *onsen* bathing take over.

For information, you can phone the **Hakusan Visitor Centre** (白山室堂; ☎ 93-1001), which also handles reservations for the Murodō Centre (below), or the **Shiramine Town Hall** (白山市白峰支所; ☎ 98-2011). Japanese language skills are helpful at both places.

The alpine section of the park is crisscrossed with trails, offering hikes of up to 25km. For hikers who are well equipped and in no hurry, there is a 26km trek to Ogemachi (p264) in Shōkawa Valley. However, camping is prohibited in the park except at designated camping grounds, meaning you'll have to hike very fast.

Those looking to hike on and around the peaks are required to stay overnight at either Murodō Centre or Nanryū Mountain Lodge. Getting to either of these requires a hike of 3½ to five hours. That doesn't stop the park from swarming with visitors, however.

The surrounding area of the park is dotted with little villages offering *onsen*, *minshuku* and ryokan accommodation and camping grounds.

### Sleeping

**Murodō Centre** (室堂; ☎ 93-1001; r per person incl 2 meals ¥7700; ☎ 1 May-15 Oct) and **Nanryū Mountain Lodge** (南竜; ☎ 98-2022; camp site per person ¥300, r per person incl 2 meals ¥7300; ☎ Jul-Sep) are your two choices in the alpine area of the park. Both are rather cramped; when the lodges are full, each person gets about one tatami-mat's worth of sleeping space. Murodō can hold up to 750 people in its four lodges. Nanryū is smaller (150 people)

but has private cabins for up to five people for ¥12,000 (meals available for extra). There is also a **camping ground** (tent rental ¥2200) at Nanryū, the only place where camping is permitted. During the July to August peak season book at least one week in advance for either place.

The closest access point is Bettōde-ai. From here it's 6km to Murodō (about 4½ hours' walk) and 5km to Nanryū (3½ hours). You can also access the lodges from trailheads at Ichirino and Chūgū Onsen, but these involve hikes of around 20km.

Ichirino, Chūgū Onsen, Shiramine and Ichinose all have *minshuku* and **ryokan**. Rates per person with two meals start at ¥7000.

There are several camping grounds in the area. **Ichinose Yaejō** (☎ 98-2121; camp sites per person ¥300) has 20 camp sites near Ichinose, which is in turn close to the trailhead at Bettōde-ai. **Midori no Mura Campground** (☎ 98-2716; camp sites per person ¥400, bungalows ¥6000), near Shiramine, has tents and bungalows for rent. There is also a **camping ground** near Chūgū Onsen. Most of the camping grounds open only from June to October, with the exception of the one at Nanryū Sansō Mountain Lodge, which operates year-round.

### Getting There & Away

This is not easily done, even during the peak summer period. The main mode of transport is the **Hokutetsu Kankō** (Hokutetsu; ☎ 076-237-5115) bus from Kanazawa station to Bettōde-ai. From late June to mid-October, up to three buses operate daily (¥2000, two hours).

Hokutetsu also has daily round-trip departures for Ichirino and Chūgū Onsen. Check with the Kanazawa tourist information office or the Hokutetsu bus station by Kanazawa station for the latest schedule.

If you're driving from the Shōkawa Valley, you can take the spectacular toll road, Hakusan Super-Rindō (cars ¥3150).

## FUKUI-KEN 福井県

### FUKUI 福井

☎ 0776 / pop 252,000

Fukui, the prefectural capital, was given quite a drubbing during Allied bombing in 1945, and what was left largely succumbed to a massive earthquake in 1948. It was totally rebuilt and is now a major textile centre. There are no particular attractions in town, but Fukui makes a useful sightseeing base. Between 19

and 21 May, Fukui celebrates the **Mikuni Matsuri** with a parade of giant warrior dolls.

**Fukui City Sightseer Information** (☎ 20-5348; 1-1-1 Chūō; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) is inside Fukui station, and can provide pamphlets in English. Northwest of the station are the business district and the walls of what was once Fukui castle. On the other side of the grounds of the former castle, **Fukui International Activities Plaza** (福井県国際交流会館; ☎ 28-8800; ☎ 9am-6pm, to 8pm Tue & Thu, closed Mon) has lots of English-language information and free internet access.

Opened in early 2007, **Tōyoko Inn Fukui-Ekimae** (東横イン福井駅前; ☎ 29-1045; fax 29-1046; www.toyoko-inn.com; 2-1-1 Ōte; s/d ¥6090/8190; ♻️ ♻️ wi-fi) is a minute's walk from Fukui station. Rooms are business-hotel small, but rates include simple Japanese breakfast, internet access with your own computer, and phone calls from the lobby.

Ten minutes' walk from the station, **Hotel Rivege Akebono** (ホテルリバージュアケボノ; ☎ 22-1000, 0120-291-489; fax 22-8023; s/tw from ¥7161/12,705; ♻️ ♻️ ♻️ wi-fi) is on the bank of the Asuwa-gawa. The smart rooms have private facilities, plus common baths on the top floor 'observation deck' (bathers observe the city, not the other way around). From the main street perpendicular to the station, turn left after Tsuchiya furniture store.

**Miyoshiya** (見吉屋; ☎ 23-3448; oroshi-soba ¥750; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed irregularly) is a much-loved shop serving Fukui-ken's most famous regional speciality, *oroshi soba* (*soba* noodles topped with grated daikon and shaved bonito flakes). It's about five minutes' walk from Fukui station down Chūō-dōri, near the Shiyakusho-mae bus stop.

The ingenious *izakaya Ori-Ori-ya* (織々屋; ☎ 27-4004; skewers ¥100-300, dishes ¥380-980; ☎ dinner) lets you select your own ingredients and grill them yourself at the table. It's near Hotel Rivege Akebono.

The JR Hokuriku line connects Fukui with Kanazawa (*tokkyū*, ¥2940, 50 minutes, *futsū* ¥1280, 1½ hours) and Tsuruga (*tokkyū* ¥2610, 35 minutes; *futsū*, ¥950, 50 minutes); trains also serve Nagoya (¥5550, two hours), Kyoto (¥4810, 1½ hours) and Osaka (¥5870, two hours).

### EIHEI-JI 永平寺

☎ 0776

Founded in 1244 by Dōgen, Eihei-ji is now one of the two head temples of the Sōtō sect

of Zen Buddhism and is ranked among the most influential Zen centres in the world. It is a palpably spiritual place amid mountains, mosses and ancient cedars. At most times some 150 priests and disciples are in residence, and serious students of Zen should consider a retreat here.

The **temple** (☎ 63-3102; www.sotozen-net.or.jp/kokusai/list/eiheiji.htm; adult/child ¥500/200; 🕒 9am-5pm) is geared to huge numbers of visitors who come as sightseers or for rigorous Zen training. Among the approximately 70 buildings, the standard circuit concentrates on seven major ones: San-mon (main gate), *Butsuden* (Buddha Hall), *Hattō* (Dharma Hall), *Sō-dō* (Priests' Hall), plus the *daikuin* (kitchen), *yokushitsu* (bath) and, yes, *tosu* (toilet). You

walk among the buildings on wooden walkways in your stocking feet. The *Shōbōkaku* exhibits many Eihei-ji treasures.

The temple is often closed for periods varying from a week to 10 days. Before you visit, be sure to check ahead with the temple, a nearby tourist office or **Japan Travel-Phone** (☎ 0088-22-4800).

You can attend the temple's four-day, three-night **sanzensha** (religious trainee programme; ☎ 63-3640; fax 63-3631; www.sotozen-net.or.jp/kokusai/list/eiheiji.htm; sanzensha ¥9000), which follows the monks' training schedule, complete with 3.50am prayers, cleaning, *zazen* and ritual meals in which not a grain of rice may be left behind. Japanese ability is not necessary, but it helps to be able to sit in the half-lotus

position. Everyone who has completed this course agrees it is a remarkable experience. A single night's stay, *sanrōsha*, is also possible for ¥8000 (with two meals). Book at least one month in advance. If you'd like to eat a special vegan lunch (¥3000) you must confirm this before your arrival.

To get to Eihei-ji from Fukui, take the Kei-fuku bus (¥720, 35 minutes, four daily) from stop 5, a couple of blocks from Fukui station.

Visitors can take a boat trip (¥1010, 30 minutes) to view the rock formations or travel further up the coast to **O-jima**, a small island with a shrine that is joined to the mainland by a bridge.

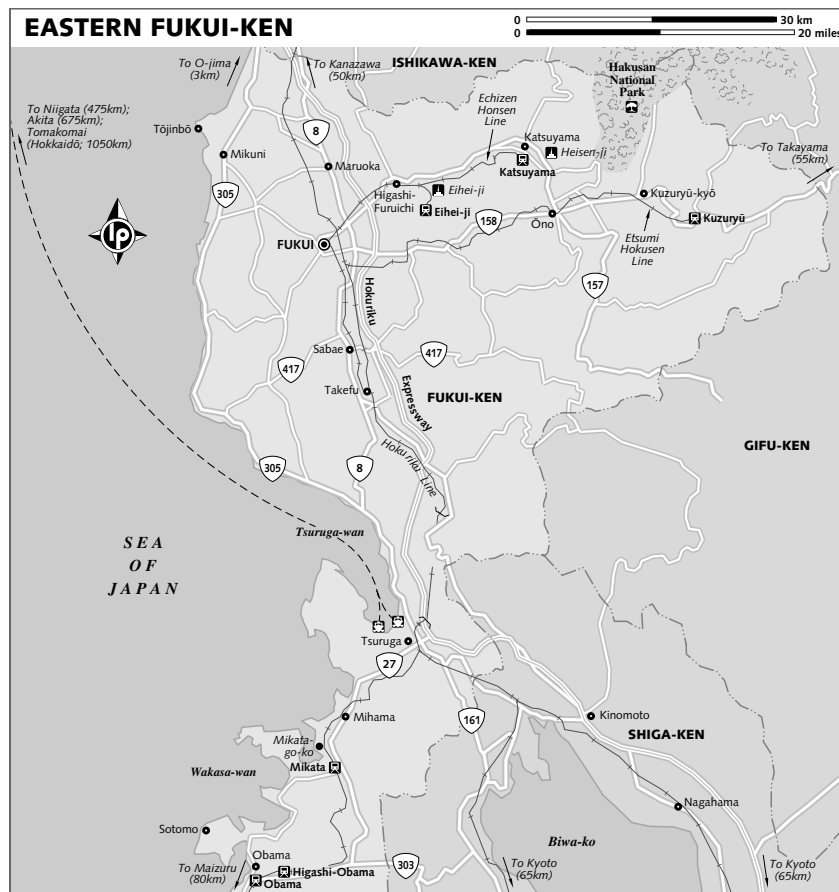
At least three buses serve Tōjinbō daily (¥1110, one hour) from bus stop 7 near Fukui station.

## TSURUGA 敦賀

Tsuruga, south of Fukui and north of Biwa-ko, is a thriving port and major train junction. The **Shin Nihonkai ferry company** (☎ 0770-23-2222; www.snf.co.jp in Japanese) operates 11 sailings a week to Tomakomai, Hokkaidō (2nd class from ¥9600, 19 hours nonstop, 30½ hours with stops). Several of these stop en route at Niigata (¥5100, 9¼ hours) and Akita (¥6700, 18¾ hours). Buses timed to ferry departures serve Tsuruga-kō port from Tsuruga station (¥340, 20 minutes).

## TŌJINBŌ 東尋坊

On the coast about 25km northwest of Fukui are these towering **rock columns** and **cliffs**, a too-popular tourist destination that's also a place of legend: one says that Tōjinbō was an evil Buddhist priest who was cast off the cliff by angry villagers in 1182; the sea surged for 49 days thereafter, a demonstration of the priest's fury from beyond his watery grave.



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