

Made by Myths.
Crafted by Nature.



SAN'IN



Where Japan Begins

A region crafted by myths and nature.

Nature, humans, myths — coexisting in timeless harmony. San'in is a unique region in western Japan, flowing between seas and mountains across Tottori and Shimane Prefectures.

Scenic, peaceful and deeply connected to nature, it's home to ancient sand dunes, legendary shrines, pure springs, hidden temples, wild mountain peaks, healing hot springs and a rich craftsmanship heritage — all tied to millennia of myths.

Nature — and its harmony with the people who live there — is an elemental characteristic of the region, which is about 500km west of Tokyo and easily accessible by plane or train.

Lined by the Sea of Japan on one side and the misty peaks of the Chugoku Mountains on the other, San'in is a region whose existence has long been tethered to the natural world.

This is reflected in its craftsmanship — from earthy *mingei* folk craft ceramics shaped from local soil to more than 1,000 years of powerful fire-blasting iron-making techniques.

The main protagonists, however, are the gods. San'in is the mythical birthplace of countless ancient deities, many connected to the story of Japan's creation.

This connection between humans and storytelling still imbues daily life in San'in, which is home to some of Japan's oldest and most important



shrines and temples, scattered among remote mountains, scenic shores and peaceful towns.

Among them? Izumo Taisha Grand Shrine, an exquisitely crafted (and deeply significant) shrine, long renowned as a place where all the nation's gods travel across the country to gather for a holiday once a year.

Perhaps San'in's biggest charms lie in the depth and diversity of the experiences it offers. Temple stays, visits to local potters, scenic hot spring bathing, mountain hikes to sacred sites, lessons in iron-making, cycling through beech forests, waterfall climbing — all typically with minimal tourist crowds, making it as peaceful as it is adventurous and unique.



Land of Gods

It's the starting point of Japan.

San'in is steeped in stories — with the region long revered as the birthplace of Japan's ancient creation myths and the spiritual heartbeat of the nation.

This legacy of sacred storytelling still infuses daily life. It's felt in the stillness of mountain hikes to ancient temples, the vibrant energy of local festivals, the curves of golden sand dunes beneath blue skies, the earthy beauty of ceramics, the purity of fresh spring water and the serenity of shrine architecture.

Center stage is Izumo, a peaceful nature-wrapped city in Shimane Prefecture. Millennia of myths are rooted in its wild mountains and coastal shores, rice fields and forests, imbuing the landscape with a timeless sacred presence.

Its heartbeat is Izumo Taisha Grand Shrine, one of Japan's most important sites. Crossing the *torii* gate threshold transitions visitors from the secular to the spiritual — and into a world layered with beauty and rituals.

The shrine's architecture, spanning a forested hilltop, with Mount Yakumo as its backdrop, embodies ancient Shinto principles on a majestic scale, with minimalist lines, meticulous craftsmanship and a nature-reflecting palette (wood, straw, clay).

At its heart is the main hall called *Honden*, designed in the ancient architectural style *Taisha-zukuri*, with one of Japan's largest thatched roofs rising 24 meters high. Nearby stands the sacred beauty of *Kaguraden*, with an enormous twisted straw rope, known as *shimenawa*, hanging from vast wooden pillars.

The shrine's significance is mirrored in its rituals. Every year in the tenth lunar month, all of Japan's gods journey to Izumo Taisha Grand Shrine for a divine gathering. The gods arrive by sailboat on the tranquil shores of Inasa-no-hama beach before heading into the shrine complex, where they stay for a month.

During this time, known as *Kamiarizuki*, the shrine bursts to life with centuries-old customs, from the graceful movements of shrine maidens in vivid dress performing traditional dances to altar offerings of food and sake.

The charms of the surrounding town are also tied to its spiritual origins — from the generations-old *wagashi* sweet shops lining its atmospheric main street to the timeless contemporary lines of Shimane Museum of Ancient Izumo, designed by iconic architect Fumihiko Maki, which offers a visual journey through the region's layered history.

Glimpses of Daily Life

Picture peaceful samurai residences, hidden courtyard gardens, a tiered castle, mirror-smooth lakes, networks of canals and misty mountain peaks.

Matsue is a time capsule of Japanese serenity. The small city in Shimane Prefecture has long been celebrated for authentically bridging the past with the present, through its samurai culture, natural landscape and spiritual heritage (it's just 30km east of Izumo Taisha Grand Shrine).

Among its most famous residents was the Greek-Irish writer Lafcadio Hearn, who lived in a former samurai house in Matsue after arriving in Japan in the early 1890s.

His experience of residing here for just over a year left a profound creative imprint on Hearn, shaping much of his writings on Japanese spirituality and cultural observations.

His sensitive perspective of daily life in Matsue was poetically captured in countless books, including *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*. Here, he describes waking to the sound of hands clapping in

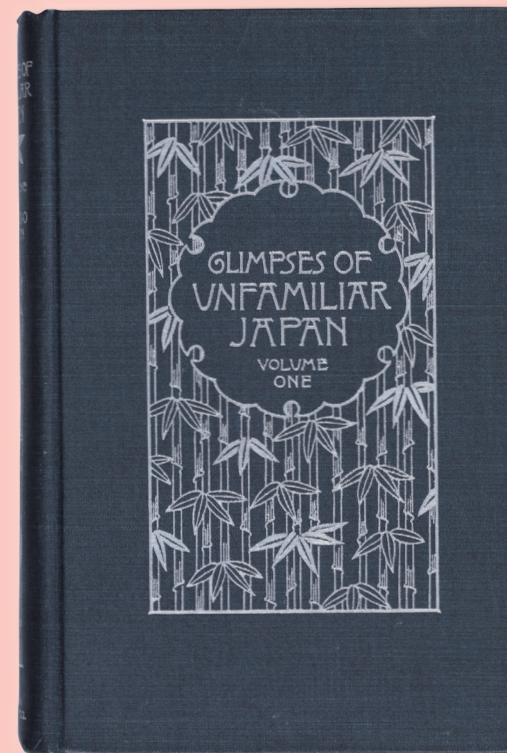
sunrise prayers; wandering through wooden house-lined alleys; the *karakoro* clip-clop of traditional *geta* clogs crossing a bridge; softly luminous sunset reflections on Lake Shinji, as seen from his favourite soba restaurant.

Today, visitors can still view the beauty of Matsue through Hearn's eyes. Strolling through the city, just as Hearn once did, is the best way to explore — from the lush grounds of Matsue's 17th century samurai castle (one of Japan's few surviving original castle structures) and its peaceful moat to expanses of perfectly-preserved samurai-era architecture.

The imprint Hearn left on Matsue is also still visible. Lafcadio Hearn Memorial Museum, which is directed by his great grandson, excavates the life and work of

the writer, through countless words, objects, stories.

Visitors can also explore the former samurai residence where he once lived — complete with serene sweeps of *tatami* floors, walls of windows opening onto Japanese garden views and the custom-made desk where he used to write.



©: Lafcadio Hearn Memorial Museum



Wild Purification

The wooden structure would not look out of place in a fairytale.

It appears to float impossibly on a steep mountainside, its crafted form hovering high above forested treetops, harmonizing with the ancient rocks it has clung to for more than a thousand years.

Nageiredo Hall is one of Japan's most extraordinary — and precariously positioned — architectural wonders. Labelled the most dangerous national treasure in Japan, it forms part of the Sanbutsu-ji temple complex scattered across the wild beauty of Mount Mitoku in Tottori Prefecture.

According to legend, this sacred mountain — a natural cosmos of ancient forests, pure springs, rocky ravines — is home to the gods, attracting centuries of purification-seeking pilgrims, particularly followers of Shugendo, a spiritual practice emphasising physical endurance and connection to nature.

The journey up 900m-high Mount Mitoku is as striking as the floating structure itself. The hike is notoriously rigorous: climbers, dressed in ceremonial sashes, ascend stone steps worn down by centuries of predecessors and cross a bridge marking the threshold between the physical world and the spiritual realm.

The path continues in sacred stillness, winding through peaceful forests, rocky ravines and scenic bamboo groves, with ropes and chains helping climbers up challenging near-vertical pathways.

The ascent symbolizes spiritual devotion, in particular for Shugendo practitioners, who believe it purifies the six roots of human perception — eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind.

And then, vertiginously positioned Nageiredo Hall appears. Walking around the hovering structure offers breathtaking views and close-up inspections of extraordinary craftsmanship which has survived centuries of weathering and natural



disasters.

The nail-free structure is a celebrated example of *kakezukuri*, a traditional style of architecture in which buildings are anchored to sheer rock faces using beams and supports, creating a seamless harmony with nature.

After descending, the journey continues at nearby Misasa Onsen — a scenic rural town known for its *onsen* hot springs, with a stony river lined with cobble streets and *ryokan* inns, encircled in misty mountains.

Misasa means “three mornings,” reflecting the belief that any illness can be cured after three days of bathing. For centuries, pilgrims have soaked in Misasa's mineral-rich waters, believed to heal the five senses as well as *kokoro* — the heart. It's the perfect finale for a journey through the beauty of Tottori's sacred mountain landscape.



Sand Dunes



A golden sweep of sand dunes glints in sunlight beneath blue skies, an ever-shifting expanse of sculpted curves, lines and patterns shaped by the timeless rhythms of nature.

Welcome to the Tottori Sand Dunes, one of Japan's most scenic and unique geological wonders, which span a mesmerizing 16km stretch of coastline along the Sea of Japan.

For more than 100,000 years, these ancient sand dunes have been brought to life by a unique natural interplay of mountain, rivers, seas and wind.

The dunes are formed by sand carried from the nearby Chugoku Mountains down the Sendai River to Tottori's coastal shores.

Winds from the Sea of Japan then sculpt these deposits into vast, shifting sand dunes that continue to move, evolve, shape and reform over time.

The end result is Japan's only large-scale dune formation — and there are countless ways to enjoy them. A spectrum of activities is on offer for visitors:

sandboarding, camel rides, scenic hikes.

Nearby is also The Sand Museum, home to the world's only indoor sand sculpture exhibition. Here, visitors can delve into the possibilities of creative expression through sand, with large-scale sculptures brought to life by global artists.

The inspiration of the sand dunes is also perfectly reflected in the work of iconic Japanese post-war photographer (and Tottori local) Shoji Ueda. Minimalist and monochrome with a touch of surrealism, his works typically juxtaposed the sweeping natural lines of the dunes with human portraits and objects.

Not far from his birthplace in Sakaiminato city is The Shoji Ueda Museum of Photography. Here, in the serene contemporary confines of concrete and glass architecture, visitors can journey through the simplicity and beauty of his distinctive photographic works, in particular his images of the Tottori Sand Dunes.



Top: My Wife in the Dunes (IV)
Bottom: Sand Dune Landscape with My Wife (III)



Crafted Beauty

Objects of beauty, function, simplicity — hand-crafted and designed for daily life.

These key values underpin the essence of Mingei, Japan's influential folk art movement, quietly brought to life by generations of anonymous craftsmanship.

San'in has a deeply unique craftsmanship heritage with close ties to the Mingei world — and it's still thriving, with countless artisans across its mountains, coastlines and rural communities.

Indigo-tyed textiles, *washi* paper, earthy ceramics using local soils, woodcarved kitchen tools: the region's crafted objects are inspired by the natural landscape, while respecting heritage and elevating the rituals of daily life.

Yoshida Shoya was a leading force in the Mingei movement in Tottori Prefecture. Doctor, activist, designer, maker: he was deeply inspired by Mingei philosophies and spent decades acting to promote and preserve of Tottori's traditional craftsmanship.

In the 1930s, he collaborated with Tottori's artisans to pioneer a system supporting local crafts,

spanning design and production to sales.

He went on to open Takumi, Japan's oldest crafts specialty shop in the heart of Tottori city — and it still exists today, offering a smoothly curated collection of crafted objects (from bowls and textiles to trays) that fit timelessly into modern daily life, alongside a popular contemporary crafts café with tasty lunches served on local ceramics.

Just a few minutes away on foot is another highlight: Tottori Folk Crafts Museum, which Shoya opened in 1949. A stillness fills the carefully preserved space, with its stone steps leading to an entranceway where shoes are slipped off — flowing into a series of intimate floors with simple crafted interiors blending Japanese and Western aesthetics.

Here, the museum displays signature Mingei pieces from its 5,000 collection, offering a deep-dive into the region's layered crafts heritage.

And so today in Tottori, the spirit of Shoya's Mingei movement lives on — as new generations continue to build on the foundations he created, balancing innovation with a respect for the timeless beauty of hand-crafted objects in everyday life.

Mingei Guide

What is Mingei?

Mingei is a Japanese folk art movement which emerged in the 1920s, emphasizing the value of everyday objects crafted with beauty, functionality and natural materials. It celebrates the craftsmanship of anonymous artisans, through objects such as pottery, textiles, woodwork and metal. Its core philosophy is the idea of fusing simplicity and utility with beauty in daily life, as expressed through generations of craftsmanship.

What are San'in's most famous *mingei* crafts?

Indigo-dyed textiles, Tottori ceramics, wood-carved kitchen tools and handmade *washi* paper, among many others.

How are San'in's *mingei* crafts unique?

These objects offer a distinct rural interpretation of the Mingei movement. Rooted deeply in their surroundings, they are inspired and shaped by the region's natural landscape and the rhythms of local daily life. The end result is the simplicity and beauty of crafted objects that mirror San'in's intuitively close ties between humans and nature, expressed through abundant localized materials — from the earthy soils used in Tottori ceramics to naturally-dyed textiles.

And where can people enjoy them?

In Tottori, sip coffee or enjoy seasonal local lunch on hand-shaped ceramics in **Takumi Coffee Shop**, a modern Mingei café (takumi-coffee-shop.com), before picking up unique daily objects to take home from the nearby iconic **Takumi** crafts store (takumikogei.theshop.jp).

Survey the simplicity and beauty of the curated objects on display at the Tottori Folk Crafts Museum (tottori-mingei.jp), while deepening your knowledge of Japan's crafts movement.

Further afield in Matsue city, visit objects (objects.jp) an atmospheric shop with an impressive contemporary curation of crafts — glass, bamboo, ceramics, wood, metal — many by local makers.



EARTH



Takao Kobayashi picks up a plate, its timeless blocks of green and black glaze reflecting a blend of innovation with tradition.

“I’m sixth generation of this kiln, so we’ve been passing down these techniques for many years,” he says. “We want to keep these traditions alive for the future.”

Ushinoto Kiln spans a scenic hilltop in the quiet town of Kawahara in Tottori Prefecture. Here, scattered among fruit trees and wild flowers sits a traditional Japanese family home alongside pottery workshops, a climbing kiln and warehouses lined with pots and neat stacks of chopped wood.

It was in 1838 that the kiln was brought to life by Kobayashi’s ancestors. Long famed for its high quality and extra strong clay, handmade on-site from local soil, it was initially known for domestic objects such as sake cups decorated with traditional

plum blossom motifs.

But the kiln shifted its creative perspective in the 1930s. Encouraged by visits from Mingei pioneers (including movement founder Soetsu Yanagi, Tottori’s Shoya Yoshida and English potter Bernard Leach), fourth generation kiln head Hideharu Kobayashi soon embraced Mingei philosophies of simple, functional beauty.

The end result was a longstanding revival of Ushinoto ware — and indelible ties with the region’s famed Mingei crafts. Ushinoto pottery became synonymous with a sense of organic beauty and innovative natural glazes, in raw and earthy shades reflecting the surrounding landscape — including its now iconic (and still popular) green and black plates.



FIRE

A surge of fire, an alchemic fusion of nature’s raw elements, a cooling river plunge — and the result is the purest Japanese steel.

More than 1,000 years ago, Japanese craftsmen pioneered the traditional *tatara* method of creating strong, durable and high-quality steel known as *tamahagane*.

Long used to forge samurai swords, the steel is born from a labor-intensive process, balancing the power of nature and elemental ingredients (iron sand, charcoal, clay) with meticulous human mastery.

Hidden deep in the mountains of Shimane Prefecture is Sugaya Tatara Sannai, once a thriving steel village. It’s home to Japan’s last original *tatara* furnace, operational from 1721 to the early 1920s, with 120 resident artisans at its peak.

Today, Sugaya Tatara Sannai is a vital part of

Japan’s cultural heritage. Visitors can explore the millennia-old craft of *tatara*, beginning with the sacred *katsura* tree at its entrance, believed to embody the spirit of the god of ironmaking.

The process begins with the creation of a handcrafted clay furnace, inside which iron sand and charcoal are layered and burned for days, under constant supervision. Once smelting is complete, the furnace is broken open and the iron is cooled in a nearby river — before being transformed into swords and knives by skilled artisans.

It’s an intense process which Studio Ghibli fans might recognize from scenes in the popular film *Princess Mononoke*, inspired by this legendary community of steelmakers.

Visitors can also take part in Japanese blacksmith workshops, explore the Historical Museum of Iron in Yoshida village and stop by modern-day metal crafts studios.

Humans and Nature

Thriving beech forests. Pure spring water. Wild mountain plants. Daisenji Temple, which spans the slopes of sacred Mount Daisen in Tottori Prefecture, is the perfect embodiment of the connective harmony between humans and nature — a cornerstone of Japanese spirituality.

The wild beauty that surrounds the temple, whose roots date back more than 1,200 years, has long been worshipped in alignment with the Shinto belief that *kami* — or gods — reside in every natural element: stones, rocks, rivers, trees.

In particular, Daisenji is famously wrapped in pristine expanses of beech forests, one of the largest in Western Japan. These carefully nurtured trees, a longstanding symbol of resilience, are known for their capacity for high water retention.

Here, temple trees filter the region's rainfall into Mount Daisen's network of underground springs, where it continues a 30-year journey through its landscape — eventually emerging at the foot of the mountain as spring water, before flowing into the nearby Sea of Japan.

Daisenji's water is deeply revered for its purity and mineral-rich qualities — and is a critical component in the mountain's circulatory life force, nurturing wild plants, agricultural produce, farm animals and marine life as well as the local community.

Its importance is perhaps best summed up in an often-heard saying among locals — “Thanks to Mount Daisen...” reflecting both gratitude and reverence to this natural phenomenon.

Today, visitors can take a contemplative stroll among the trees and soak up a tranquil moment of forest bathing along the moss-covered steps and stone pathways that lead to the temple.

More active ways to appreciate the mountain include trekking, waterfall climbing and downhill cycling. These activities are perfectly complemented by sacred hot spring *onsen* where the gods were once thought to bathe plus delicious vegetarian meals, made using wild vegetables grown in the mountain's fertile soil, during stays at Sanrakuso, the sole temple lodge still standing on Mount Daisen.



Stay

Tottori / Shiontei

Pause and recharge at Shiontei — a deluxe *ryokan* hotel which opened in 2021 in the century-old hot spring escape Kaike Onsen in Yonago. Home to ten elegantly designed rooms, guests can enjoy al fresco soaks in private open-air baths, scatterings of ceramics crafted by Akihiro Maeda, a Living National Treasure, and quality cuisine rooted in the seasonal flavors of San'in's surrounding mountains and seas.

Website: yado-shiontei.jp/eng/

Shimane / Minamikan

A serene sanctuary on the shores of Lake Shinji, Minamikan is a legendary *ryokan* long loved by literary and cultural figures — including Lafcadio Hearn and Mingei masters Kanjiro Kawai and Shiko Munakata. In addition to its timeless *ryokan* rooms with sunset views across the lake is the celebrated beauty of its traditional Japanese garden, with perfectly raked sand, jewel bright moss and centuries-old pine trees.

Website: www.minami-g.co.jp/minamikan/lg_en/



Info

By Plane

From Tokyo (Haneda):
Tottori (Tottori) ANA: 75 min
Tottori (Yonago) ANA: 80 min
Shimane (Izumo) JAL: 80 min
Shimane (Iwami) ANA: 90 min

By Train

Okayama—Tottori (Yonago)
Express Trains: 120 min
Osaka—Tottori (Tottori)
Express Trains: 150 min

By Car

Hiroshima—Shimane (Matsue): 180 min
Okayama—Tottori (Yonago): 150 min

