The Island of Shikoku was named as one of the Best Places to Visit in Asia Pacific for 2019 by the Popular Travel Guidebook Lonely Planet

Shikoku named as one of the top destinations in Asia Pacific for 2019
The internationally acclaimed travel guidebook Lonely Planet (*1) has named Shikoku as one of the best places to visit in Asia Pacific for 2019. Shikoku is the smallest of Japan’s four major islands and is home to the prefectures of Kagawa, Tokushima, Kochi and Ehime. Thanks to warm ocean currents, the island boasts rich natural vistas nurtured by temperate climates. From the crystal clear waters of the Niyodo River to its many mountains and coastlines, Shikoku has an abundance of natural charms. Additionally, the island also lays claim to one of the world’s three greatest currents with its Naruto Whirlpools.

On the cultural side, Shikoku also has one of Japan’s most famous pilgrimages, the Shikoku Henro (or 88 Temple Pilgrimage) which continues to attract both domestic and international challengers. The route passes through all four prefectures of Shikoku and was established over 1,200 years ago by the legendary founder of the Shingon school of Buddhism, the monk Kukai. The Shikoku Henro pilgrimage takes participants across a string of sacred sites that offer countless spiritual experiences.

Shikoku beckons travelers with a wide range of attractions that include seasonal allures, outdoor activities, delicious cuisine and historical experiences. Of the exquisite local fare that is on offer, favorites such as Sanuki Udon Noodles and Matsuyama Sushi are must tries. Additionally, Shikoku is also home to the oldest onsen in Japan, Dogo Onsen.

Recently, the number of overseas visitors to Shikoku has been on the rise with them spending more time on the island than ever. In fact, the number of overnight stays reached a record of 934,110 nights in 2018. Since January 2018, international flights are now available to Tokushima in addition to the already existing routes to Takamatsu and Matsuyama. (*2)

Being included on Lonely Planet’s Best in Asia Pacific 2019 list is evidence of Shikoku’s charm as a destination for overseas visitors and will undoubtedly lead to an increase in the number of tourists from abroad.

(*1) Lonely Planet is the world’s leading travel content company. It has published guidebooks on over 120 countries and also provides digital content on nearly every destination on the globe. Lonely Planet annually announces a “Best in Asia Pacific” destination list in July.

(*2) As of Aug 2019, there are flights from Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong to Takamatsu Airport. Also, Matsuyama Airport has flights to Shanghai and Seoul as well as charter flights to Taipei. Lastly, Tokushima Awaodori Airport operates irregular services to Hong Kong with the aim of eventually having regular flights.
Top Destinations in Shikoku as per the Best in Asia Pacific 2019 Listing

Shikoku Henro (88 Temple Pilgrimage)
Those who embark on this pilgrimage take a route that encompasses all of Shikoku’s four prefectures. The course is comprised of 88 sacred temples and was established by the revolutionary Buddhist monk Kukai as far back as 813. In more recent times, pilgrims have opted to take on the Shikoku Henro to conquer personal challenges (looking to improve their health, find a good partner, etc.). The total distance of the pilgrimage varies from 1,100 km to 1,400 km. Some 400 overseas travellers complete the walking pilgrimage each year. Each participant is free to select the order of the temples. What’s more, there are also many other ways to enjoy the course such as by tour bus or by rental car.

Iya Valley (Tokushima Prefecture)
The Iya Valley is one of the top three hidden scenic spots in Japan. From early summer to autumn, beautiful vistas await along the V-shaped valley. Additionally, the area is home to the Kazurabashi Bridge which is considered as one of Japan’s Important Tangible Folk Cultural Properties by the Agency for Cultural Affairs. There are considerable gaps between each of the bridge’s wooden steps, so those who brave the crossing need to muster their courage beforehand. Still, the spectacular views from high above are worth having to overcome the initial fright.

Naruto Whirlpools (Tokushima Prefecture)
Due to the tides, the whirlpools here change roughly every six hours and can typically be seen once in the morning and then again in the afternoon for around an hour or two. These currents are considered one of the top three in the world along with the Strait of Messina (that is situated between the Italian Peninsula and the Island of Sicily) and the Seymour Narrows (between the west coast of North America and Vancouver Island). The tides are at their fastest around the full moon and new moon every month and visitors can see especially large whirlpools during spring and autumn. The best views are through the glass panels at the Uzu-no-Michi Walkway under the Onaruto Bridge. Alternatively, boat tours are also an option.
Kochi Castle (Kochi Prefecture)
First built approximately 400 years ago, Kochi Castle is one of twelve castles in Japan that retain their original keeps. The fortress’s fifteen structures are designated as Important Cultural Properties. Located in the heart of Kochi city, visitors to the castle have easy access to local restaurants as well as options for shopping.

Hirome Market (Kochi Prefecture)
Hirome Market hosts a cluster of street-stand shops that are spread across its seven squares. A variety of local and international foods is available here, in addition to unique souvenirs, clothes, etc. Visitors will see groups of people enjoying reasonably priced local fare all across the spacious area.

Dogo Onsen (Ehime Prefecture)
Dogo Onsen is said to be the oldest hot spring in Japan, and it appears even in the Nihon Shoki (Chronicles of Japan), one of the oldest books in Japan written in the eighth century. Its main building became the first public bath facility designated as one of Japan’s Important Cultural Properties in 1994. Dogo Onsen has been awarded three stars by the Michelin Green Guide Japan. It is also often said to be the inspiration for the internationally popular film Spirited Away by Miyazaki Hayao.

For more information and photo download, please visit: https://business.jnto.go.jp/story_ideas/1332

Mt. Ishizuchi (Ehime Prefecture)
Mt. Ishizuchi is the highest peak in western Japan and considered one of the nation’s top seven sacred mountains. The crag has been worshiped since ancient times as the home of deities, and also played a critical role in the spiritual training of the monk Kukai. Every year, tens of thousands of visitors flock to Mt. Ishizuchi for a ceremony held at Ishuzuchi Shrine between July 1 and July 10.

Visitors to Mt. Ishizuchi can make the ascent on foot or via the ropeway. Depending on the season, those who make the trek to Mt. Ishizuchi will experience something entirely different (colorful flowers in spring, thick alpine plants in summer, and crimson foliage in autumn).

※ Dogo Onsen may appear differently in the future due to the current ongoing renovations.
Other travel destinations as recommended by JNTO’s “100 Experiences in Japan - Find the Japan of your Dreams!”

Awa Odori Festival (Tokushima Prefecture)
The Awa Odori dance is one of Japan’s top traditional performing arts that originated in Tokushima prefecture more than 400 years ago. More than a hundred thousand members of the audience join the dance in groups called Ren to perform to the rhythms played on traditional instruments such as the shamisen and taiko drum. The festival is held annually during the Obon period (August 12-15).
For more information, please visit: https://setouchitrip.com/travel-directory/940?dir=list
For photo download, please visit: https://business.jnto.go.jp/story_ideas/1332

Shimanami Kaido (Ehime Prefecture)
One of the best ways to explore the stunning Seto Inland Sea is the Shimanami Kaido. This 70-kilometer route connects Onomichi City in Hiroshima Prefecture with Imabari City in Ehime Prefecture. Explorable by bicycle, this course is the first of its kind to cross a strait in Japan and can be done even by beginner cyclists. Along the way, there are many facilities to rest, allowing for the Shimanami Kaido to be explored at leisure.
For more information, please visit: http://www.sunrise-ityouma.jp/archives/english/
For photo download, please visit: https://business.jnto.go.jp/story_ideas/1332

Canoeing along the Shimanto River (Kochi Prefecture)
The Shimanto River flows gracefully through the surrounding mountains and is often called “Japan’s last remaining pristine stream.” The river has iconic bridges called “Chinkabashi.” These are low water crossings constructed without parapets in order not to be washed away by floods. Visitors can enjoy canoeing and kayaking, appreciate the clear waters of the Shimanto River as well as the mountain views nearby, and a series of Chinkabashi that add a unique but harmonious flare to the area’s natural backdrop.
For more information, please visit: http://www.withriver.info/english/
For photo download, please visit: https://business.jnto.go.jp/story_ideas/1332
Yoshino River Rafting (Kochi Prefecture)
The Yoshino River is the largest river in Shikoku and best known for its white-water rapids. Particularly of note are the significant drop-offs of the Oboke & Koboke areas that make the Yoshino River one of Japan’s top spots for rafting. There is also a variety of other outdoor activities available along the river including a half-day tour, full-day tour, family activities, and canoeing. For more information, please visit: https://en.happyraft.com/

Wasanbon at Mamehana (Kagawa Prefecture)
Experience the making of traditional dry sweet Wasanbon at Mamehana, a local sweets manufacturer. Wasanbon is a traditional accompaniment to green tea that shares its name with the fine-grained sugar used to make it. Visitors can create their own Wasanbon with the Mamehana’s handcrafted wooden molds called kashikigata. English speaking staff are also on site to give instructions. Visitors can enjoy the handmade sweets with a fresh cup of matcha green tea and also procure sweets as souvenirs. For more information, please visit: https://www.mamehana-kasikigata.com/

Takamatsu’s Local Fish Market Tour (Kagawa Prefecture)
Professional guides at the local fish market in Takamatsu take their guests through the live fish auction that features locally caught delicacies from the Seto Inland Sea, such as the red sea bream. Visitors will also learn about the history of the fish market and finish the morning activity with a fresh seafood breakfast. For more information, please visit: https://shikoku-guide.com/en/experience/localfish/

*The above travel destinations are listed in the “100 Experiences in Japan - Find the Japan of your Dreams!” (https://asset.japan.travel/image/upload/v1563519630/pdf/100experiencesinjapan.pdf) This is a travel guide designed for foreign visitors to Japan and offers in-depth content about Japan in addition to seasonal happenings. Please see the following URL for additional information about Japan: https://www.japan.travel/en/*
Recommended Travel Routes (Source: Organization for Promotion of Tourism in Shikoku)

Sample Route No.1
1. Narita International Airport / Haneda Airport
   / International Flights from Asia
2. Takamatsu Airport
3. Zentsuji Temple
4. Chikurinji Temple
5. Shimanto River
6. Cape Ashizuri
7. Yuzumizugaura Terraced Fields
8. Uchikoza Kabuki Theater
9. Dogo Onsen
10. Matsuyama Airport
11. Narita International Airport / Haneda Airport
   / International Flights to Asia

Sample Route No.2
1. Narita International Airport
   / Haneda Airport / International Flights from Asia
2. Matsuyama Airport
3. Yokomine Temple
4. Kazurabashi Bridge in Iya Valley
5. Chikurinji Temple
6. Muroto Global Geopark
7. Senba Kaigai
8. Naruto Whirlpools
9. Ryozenji Temple
10. Kankakei Gorge
11. Takamatsu Airport
12. Narita International Airport / Haneda Airport
   / International Flights to Asia

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