

Hitoyoshi, Kumamoto Prefecture

Tourist Guidebook

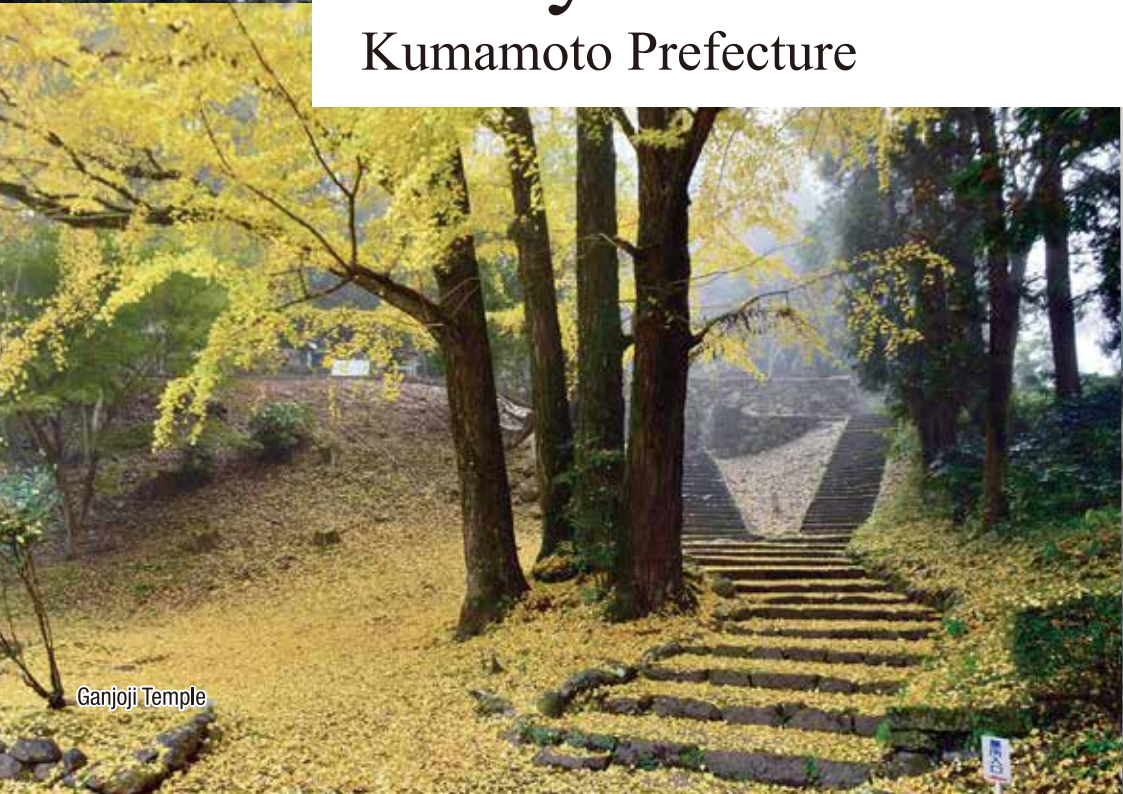
Hitoyoshi, Kumamoto Prefecture—Tourist Guidebook

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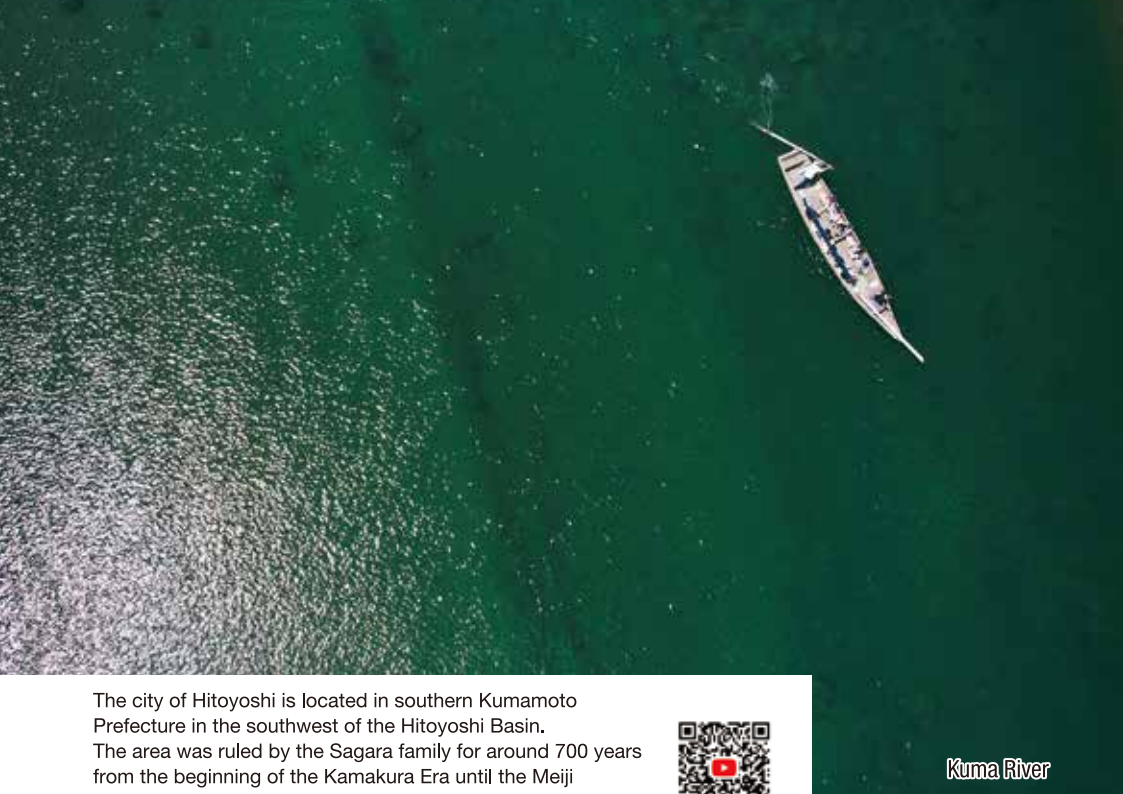
*The information herein is correct as of January 31, 2025



Hitoyoshi Castle Ruins



Ganjoji Temple



Kuma River

Hitoyoshi

Kumamoto Prefecture

The city of Hitoyoshi is located in southern Kumamoto Prefecture in the southwest of the Hitoyoshi Basin. The area was ruled by the Sagara family for around 700 years from the beginning of the Kamakura Era until the Meiji Restoration, and that long history is evidenced in the many cultural assets still in existence. Hitoyoshi is full of charm and still retains the atmosphere of a castle town.



welcome to
Hitoyoshi City



Square turret and multi-gated turret

A City of Japan Heritage



Aoi Aso Jinja Shrine

Kumamoto Prefecture's first National Treasure

This shrine is affectionately known by locals as “Aoi-san.” The present complex of shrine buildings, which took four years to construct starting in 1610, is a priceless architectural work which has survived for over 400 years. The shrine was designated as a National Treasure in 2008.

Location 118 Kamiaoi-machi, Hitoyoshi
☎0966-22-2274



Aoi Aso Jinja Shrine



Aoi Shrine Grove / National Treasure Memorial Hall

Designed by the architect Kengo Kuma, this facility was built to commemorate the 10th anniversary of Aoi Aso Jinja Shrine being designated as a National Treasure. Exhibits at the hall include holy *goshinto* and *honotoken* swords, which were restored after being damaged during torrential rains in 2020.

Hours 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. (final admission 4:30 p.m.)
Prices Adults 500 yen, elementary/
junior high school students 300 yen



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Hitoyoshi Castle Ruins

One of the 100 Fine Castles of Japan and residence of the Sagara clan

Also known as “Crescent Moon Castle,” Hitoyoshi Castle is the former home of the Sagara clan, who ruled the Hitoyoshi Kuma region for around 700 years.

With its authentic construction, the castle dates back to the Warring States period of Japanese history, and its present form was conceived in the era of Sagara Nagatsune, the 20th head of the Sagara clan.



Japan Heritage

The Japan Heritage program was established in 2015 by the Agency for Cultural Affairs. Historical attractions and distinctive features from around the country are designated as stories, and the Hitoyoshi Kuma region was one of the first 18 Japan Heritage sites.



Japan Heritage
Hitoyoshi Kuma

Nature, History, and Activities

Kaname Falls

Designated Prefectural Place of Scenic Beauty

Kaname Falls includes three separate waterfalls, Medaki, Odaki, and Hiradaki. Odaki is the tallest and the billowing spray as its water plunges from a height of 36 meters is a majestic sight.

Location Kaname-cho, Hitoyoshi

Eikokuji Temple



This temple belongs to the Soto school of Zen Buddhism and is also known as the "Temple of Ghosts." In it there is a hanging scroll that depicts a ghost-like figure thought to have been drawn by the founder of the temple, Jitteichoshin Osho.

Location 5 Dote-machi, Hitoyoshi ☎0966-22-2458



Sekisuiji Temple



This temple is famous for its main gate, which is made from a large, round, hollowed-out rock. In the grounds are Megane-bashi Bridge (literally "eyeglasses bridge") and a natural spring. Among the artifacts in the temple's collection are lithographs of the sixteen disciples of Buddha who attained Nirvana and a hanging scroll of the Ten Kings of Hell.

Location 2348 Nishimon, Shimoharada-machi, Hitoyoshi ☎0966-22-4411

Hitoyoshi Roadside Station/ Hitoyoshi Craft Park Ishino Park



An interactive theme park for experiencing the culture of Hitoyoshi

This attraction enables visitors to create their own handicrafts and features exhibits of traditional artifacts and toys from the Hitoyoshi Kuma region. It includes six different plazas both large and small, and is popular as a destination for family days out. There are also a souvenir store and a campground.

Location 1425-1 Akaikehara-machi, Hitoyoshi

☎0966-22-6700

Hours 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.



Hitoyoshi Roadside Station
Hitoyoshi Craft Park Ishino Park



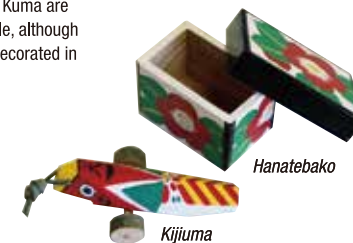
Blacksmithing workshop

Kijiuma



Sumioka Folk Toy Factory

Kijiuma are traditional Japanese toys which are cute and have a subtle charm. *Kijiuma* and *Kijiguruma* used to be made all over Kyushu. With a decline in the number of craftspeople, the method for producing these toys is seen as an aspect of Japanese culture that should be cherished, and was chosen as an Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property of Japan in January 2025. The colors and shapes of *kijiuma* vary depending on the region in which they are made, and with two wheels and no saddle, *kijiuma* from Hitoyoshi Kuma are relatively simple, although they are also decorated in vibrant colors.



Hanatebako

Kijiuma

Sagara 33 Kannon

Enter the world of prayer on a tour of pilgrimage sites

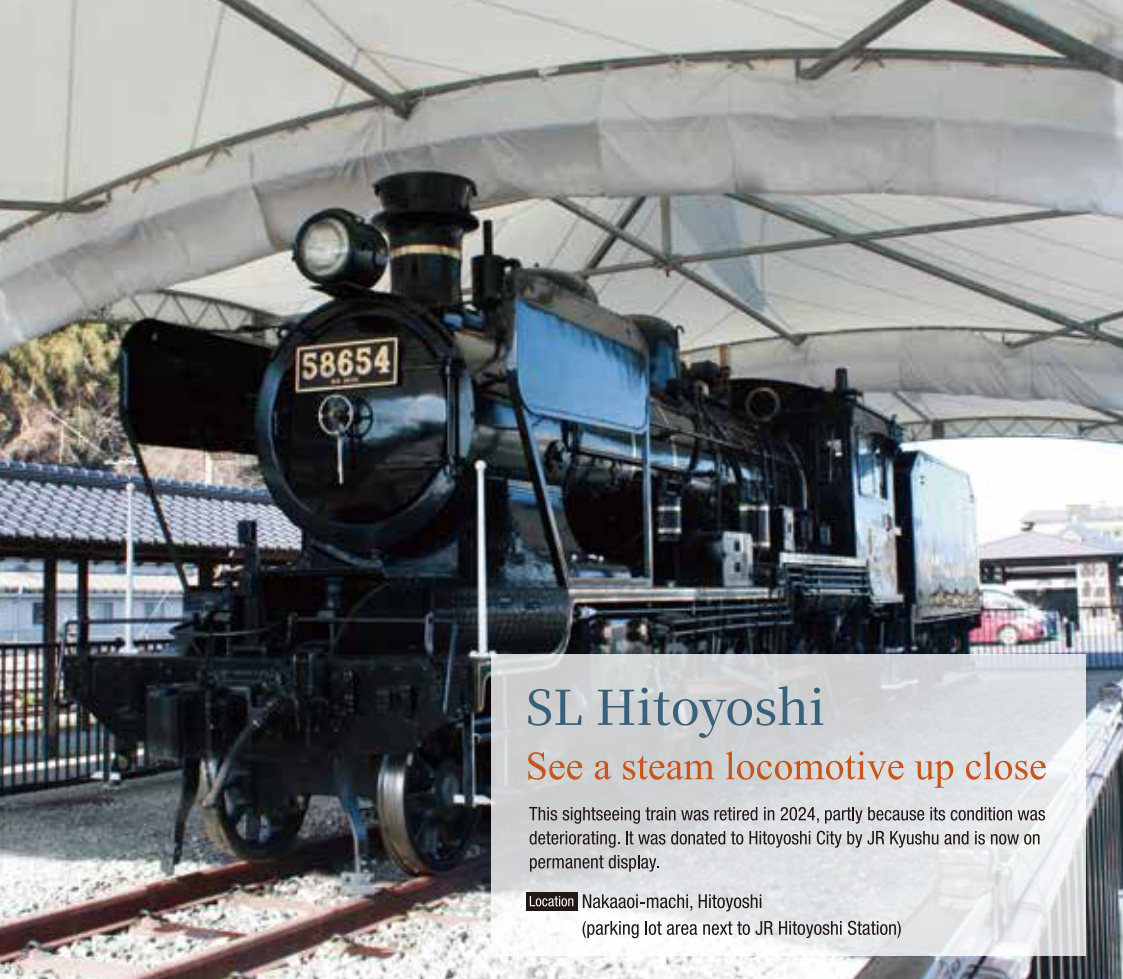
There are 35 pilgrimage sites dedicated to Kannon (the Buddhist deity of compassion) in Hitoyoshi Kuma, each of which grants its own unique blessing, and their statues of Kannon are unveiled during the spring and fall equinoxes.

The picture on the right shows a statue of the thousand-armed Kannon at the 9th pilgrimage site, Murayama Kannon Hall.



Tour the Sagara 33 Kannon





SL Hitoyoshi

See a steam locomotive up close

This sightseeing train was retired in 2024, partly because its condition was deteriorating. It was donated to Hitoyoshi City by JR Kyushu and is now on permanent display.

Location Nakaaoi-machi, Hitoyoshi
(parking lot area next to JR Hitoyoshi Station)



Kumagawa Rail Yunomae Line

Traveling through the countryside

This railway line runs between Hitoyoshi and the town of Yunomae. Along the way it passes through beautiful countryside.



Kumagawa Rail Yunomae Line



Bicycles can be taken on board (booking required)

Karakuri Clock

This clock features mechanical dolls and was inspired by Hitoyoshi Castle and the surrounding town. It operates every hour on the hour from 9:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m. (5:00 p.m. in winter)

Location In front of JR Hitoyoshi Station



Hitoyoshi Engine Shed

This is the only stone-built engine shed in Japan that is still in use. Its appearance has remained unaltered since the Meiji era.

Location In front of JR Hitoyoshi Station



Hitoyoshi Rail Museum Mozoca Station 868



Situated next to JR Hitoyoshi Station, this museum conveys the history and appeal of the Hisatsu Line. Visitors can enjoy everything from a mini-train to rail bikes, dioramas, and videos.

Location 343-14 Nakaaoi-machi, Hitoyoshi

☎0966-23-2000

Hours 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.

Closed Wednesday (if Wednesday is a public holiday, the following day)



Unsun Karuta

The card game *Unsun Karuta* was originally based on the Portuguese *Namban Carta*, which was introduced to Japan in the mid-16th century. There is a store on Kajiya-machi-dori called *Unsun Karuta no ie* ("the house of *Unsun Karuta*") where visitors can learn about this traditional game.



Kajiya-machi-dori Retaining traces of the castle town

In an era when the Sagara clan ruled Hitoyoshi Kuma, this street was lined with blacksmith's stores, and is still characterized by its charming paving stones. As well as restaurants and distilleries, its many attractions include the tea factory and shop Cha no Kura (Tateyama Sho-Ten) and the Miso and Soy Sauce Factory (Kamada Shoyury).

Fun Activities



Kumagawa Kudari

Enjoy the castle town
from aboard a boat

Kumagawa Kudari is the experience of traveling on wooden pleasure boats along the Kuma River, which is the longest in Kumamoto Prefecture. This traditional activity has a history of more than a century. On a half-hour trip, passengers can enjoy Hitoyoshi Castle Ruins and the nature of the seasons.



In winter you can travel by *kotatsubune*. These boats have low wooden tables fitted with charcoal burners, beneath which passengers keep warm by covering their legs with duvet-style futons.



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White-Water Rafting

Feel the thrill of the natural environment

This exciting activity involves boarding a rubber raft and cooperating with your fellow passengers to paddle down the magnificent Kuma River. The sense of unity with the rapids is irresistible. Each raft is captained by a skilled river guide and everyone from families to senior citizens can safely participate.



Kuma River activities



HASENBA

This is the departure point for *Kumagawa Kudari* pleasure boats. It has an open terrace overlooking Hitoyoshi Castle Ruins. As well as the reception desk for *Kumagawa Kudari* and white-water rafting, HASENBA features a store selling local products, a café, and more.



HASENBA

Location 333-1 Shimoshin-machi, Hitoyoshi
☎0966-22-5555
Hours 9:00 a.m.—5:00 p.m.
Closed Wednesday
 (open every day during Golden Week
 and from late July through August)



Explore Hitoyoshi by rental bicycle

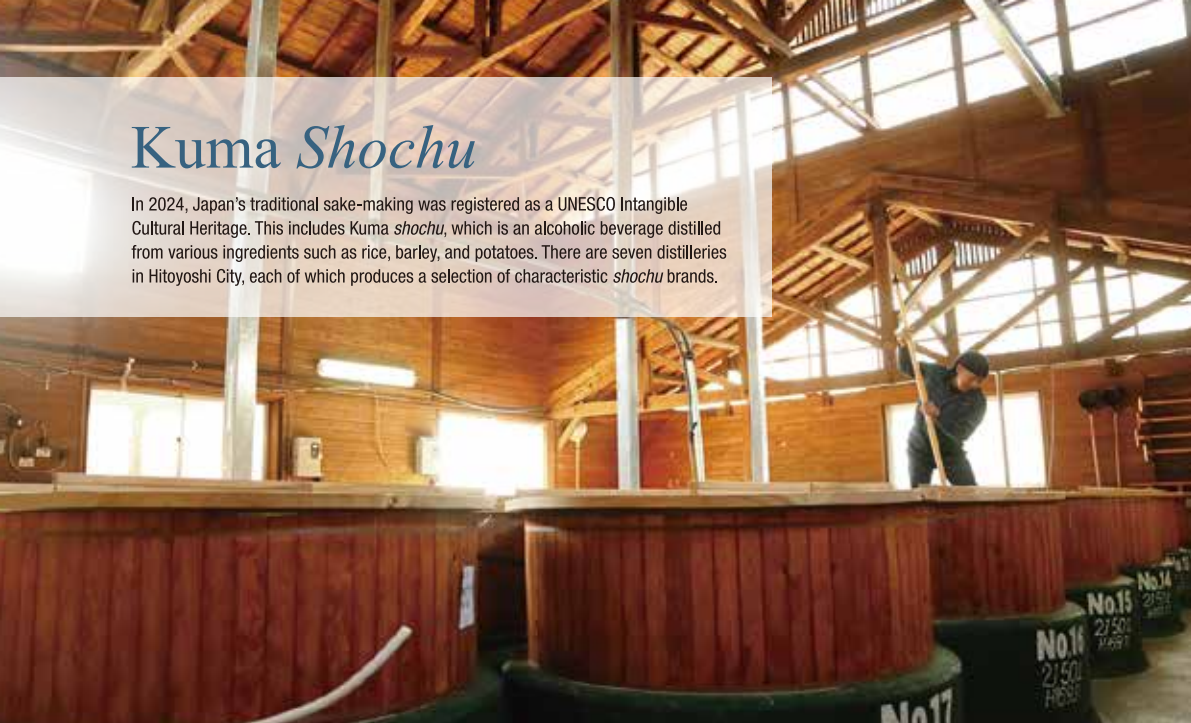
Bicycles are available for rent at HASENBA and Hitoyoshi Craft Park Ishino Park. How about touring the attractions of the city while feeling the wind in your hair?



Rental bicycles

Kuma Shochu

In 2024, Japan's traditional sake-making was registered as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. This includes Kuma *shochu*, which is an alcoholic beverage distilled from various ingredients such as rice, barley, and potatoes. There are seven distilleries in Hitoyoshi City, each of which produces a selection of characteristic *shochu* brands.



Kuma Shochu: A Global Brand Born from Pure Water



Takahashi
Shuzo

Fukuda
Shuzo

Jufuku
Shuzo

Sengetsu
Shuzo

Yamatoichi
Shuzomoto

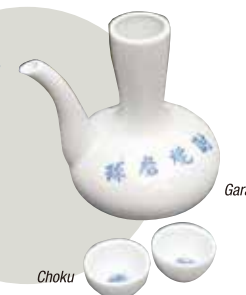
Fukano
Shuzo

Torikai
Shuzo

Kuma *shochu* has a 500-year history. It is defined as a bottled alcoholic beverage with domestically produced rice as its base ingredient, distilled in Hitoyoshi Kuma from *moromi* (fermentation mash) prepared using water from the region. There are two distillation methods, atmospheric distillation and reduced pressure distillation. In 1995, Kuma *shochu* was also recognized by the World Trade Organization (WTO) as having geographical indication of the place of origin.

Gara and Choku

A porcelain *gara* (pot) and *choku* (cups) are used when drinking Kuma *shochu*.



Gara

Choku



The distilleries have a timeless charm in which brick chimneys and the like can still be seen.



Kuma shochu

Sengetsu Shuzo Sengetsu Shiromigura



This distillery was founded over 120 years ago. It is open to the public all year round and visitors can observe the *shochu*-making process. Including products available only at the distillery, Sengetsu has a lineup of around 30 *shochu* brands that visitors can taste before they buy. There is also a panoramic view of Hitoyoshi, including the castle ruins and the Kuma River.

Location 1 Shin-machi, Hitoyoshi

☎0966-22-3207

Hours 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.

Closed Open every day



Kuma Shochu Museum Hakutake Densho-gura



The authentic rice *shochu* Hakutake is representative of Kuma *shochu* and well known all over Japan. The Kuma Shochu Museum Hakutake Densho-gura showcases the history, culture, and production methods of Kuma *shochu*. Visitors can taste and purchase a variety of different *shochu*.

Location 461-7 Gonoharu-machi,

Hitoyoshi

☎0966-32-9750

Hours 9:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.

Closed Year-end and
New Year holidays



Yamatoichi Shuzomoto

Many distilleries in Hitoyoshi allow visitors to look around and learn brewing techniques direct from the *shochu* makers themselves.

Kuma Shochu Tourism Study and experience shochu

In Hitoyoshi, you can compare the tastes of *shochu* brands, sample different blends, and even make your own label. Depending on the time of year, there are special programs that enable you to try *shochu* preparation, experience what it is like to be a *shochu* brewer, and much more.



A City of Outstanding Cuisine

From classic dishes to modern cafés

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Uemura Unagiya

Lined with renowned *unagi* restaurants

There are noted *unagi* (eel) restaurants all over Hitoyoshi. Diners can enjoy comparing the differences and characteristics of each, including an establishment founded more than a century ago where the *unagi* is freshly prepared to order, and another that overcame flood damage and boasts a special sauce with a secret recipe.



Marufuchi Sobaya



Haorai Ramen

Noodle restaurants where there is always a line outside

There are also plenty of noodle restaurants in Hitoyoshi! They include soba restaurants founded over 100 years ago and ramen restaurants to which many of the diners have traveled from outside the prefecture specifically to visit. Some have a line outside even on weekdays.



Tateyama Sho-Ten



Machiya Gallery Tateyama



FILLING

Hitoyoshi's Stylish Cafés

Enjoy the individuality of them all!

From cafés that are uncompromising about coffee to those serving distinctive confectionery, miso and soy sauce makers, pickled vegetable stores, and rice specialists, each has evolved by capitalizing on its own unique strengths. Have fun visiting these wonderful cafés.



Hitoyoshi Ekiben Yamaguchi/ *Kurimeshi* (chestnut rice)

The JR Hisatsu Line not currently operating, but this popular *ekiben* (station lunch box) store, with its prizewinning record at *ekiben* contests, is still going strong.



Ao. Hostel & Cafe Lounge

Hitoyoshi: The Home of *Onsen*

Hitoyoshi's *onsen* (hot springs) have a long history, and there is a record of Tametsugu, the 12th head of the Sagara clan, taking a hot-spring cure in 1492. Many *onsen* can be found beside the Kuma River, and there are more than 50 sources of natural hot spring water in Hitoyoshi as a whole. As well as traditional Japanese inns with bathing facilities, there are 20 *onsen* open to the general public, and *onsen* are an important tourist resource for the city. They are also popular as a beauty treatment.



Styles include retro *onsen*, those with plentiful facilities, and hotels where you can drop in for a quick visit without staying overnight



Hitoyoshi onsen map

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Relax While Soothing Your Travel Fatigue

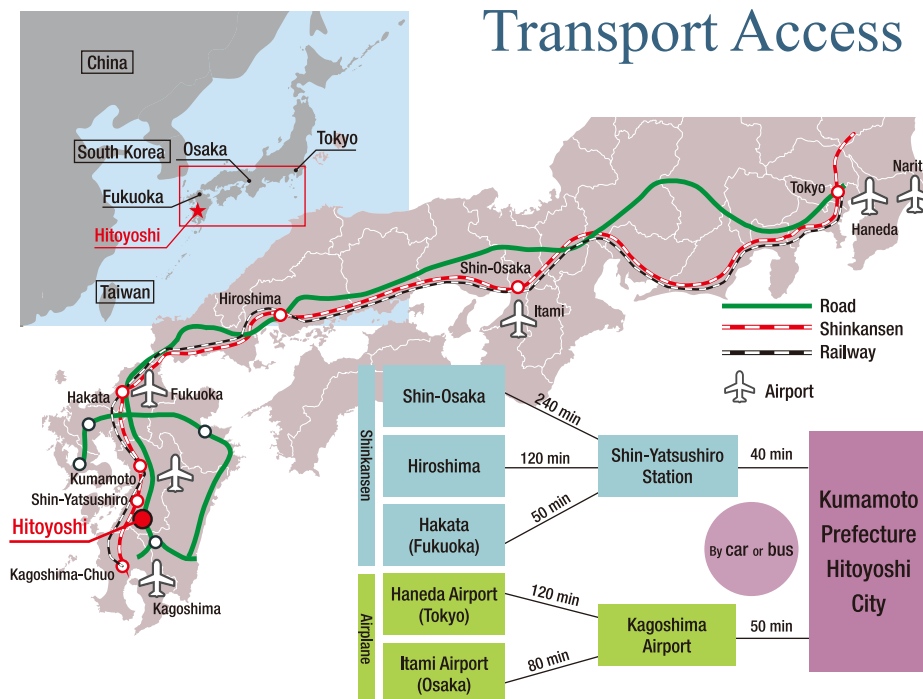
From nationally registered Tangible Cultural Properties to hidden gems



Hitoyoshi has everything from traditional inns nationally registered as Tangible Cultural Properties to business hotels with a lineup of the latest facilities and hidden retreats away from the city center. You are sure to find the ideal accommodation to suit your tastes.



Transport Access



Transport access to Hitoyoshi

- JR *Please be aware that all train services to and from Hitoyoshi Station are currently suspended
- Hakata Station → Shin-Yatsushiro Station Approx. 50 min (Shinkansen)
 - Kumamoto Station → Shin-Yatsushiro Station Approx. 10 min (Shinkansen)
 - Kagoshima-Chuo Station → Shin-Yatsushiro Station Approx. 45 min (Shinkansen)

Expressway bus

- Shin-Yatsushiro Station → Hitoyoshi IC Approx. 40 min
- Hakata Bus Terminal → Hitoyoshi IC Approx. 2 h 40 min
- Kumamoto Sakura Machi Bus Terminal → Hitoyoshi IC Approx. 1 h 40 min
- Kagoshima Airport → Hitoyoshi IC Approx. 1 h
- Miyazaki Station → Hitoyoshi IC Approx. 2 h

Tsubame Airport Liner

- Kagoshima Airport → Hitoyoshi Station Approx. 1 h 15 min

Kyushu Expressway

- Fukuoka IC → Hitoyoshi IC Approx. 2 h
- Kumamoto IC → Hitoyoshi IC Approx. 1 h
- Miyazaki IC → Hitoyoshi IC Approx. 1 h 10 min
- Kagoshima IC → Hitoyoshi IC Approx. 1 h 10 min



Expressway bus information (Hitoyoshi City website)



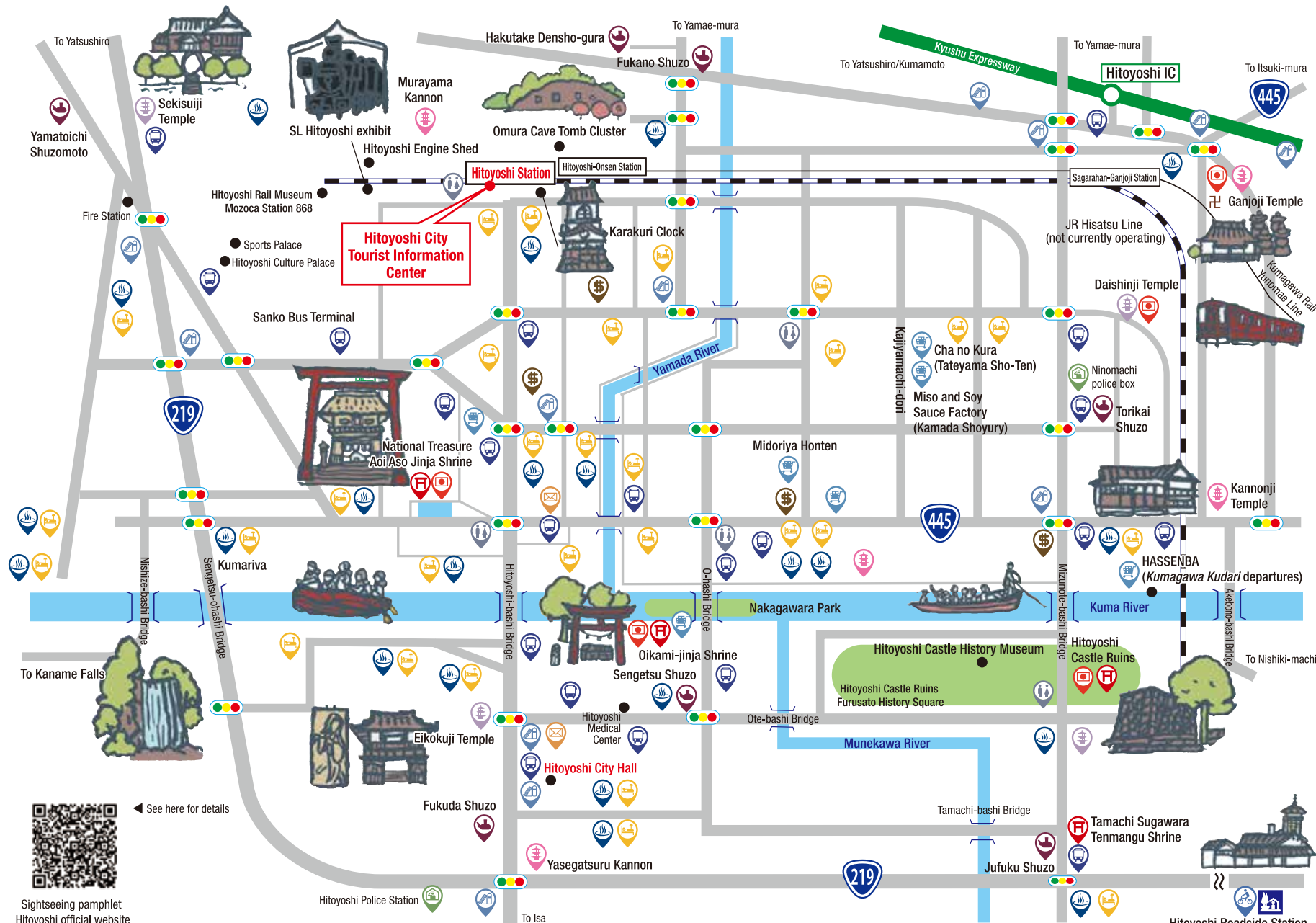
Sanko Bus website



Tsubame Airport Liner website (Japanese only)

Transportation in Hitoyoshi

- Tsubame-Kotsu TEL 0966-22-5115
- TaKuRoo Hitoyoshi Office TEL 0966-23-2525
- Kumagawa Rail Yunomae Line TEL 0966-23-5011
- Bus (Sanko Bus) TEL 0966-22-5205



Hitoyoshi City Tourist Information Center
 326-1 Nakaaioi-machi,
 Hitoyoshi
 Inside JR Hitoyoshi Station
 ☎ 0966-22-2411
 Open: 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.
 Open every day

Legend

- Japan Heritage
- Sagara 33 Kannon
- Kuma *Shochu* Distillery
- Onsen open to visitors during the day
- Souvenirs
- Accommodations
- Convenience store (ATM)
- Bank (ATM)
- Post office
- Temple
- Shrine
- Restrooms
- Bus stop
- Rental bicycles
- Police box



Sightseeing pamphlet
 Hitoyoshi official website

◀ See here for details

Hitoyoshi City Center Map

- ◆ Traveling from Hitoyoshi IC to the city center by taxi is convenient (approx. 5 min). Please check the operational status of transit buses before you travel.
- ◆ Railway services (JR Hisatsu Line) are currently suspended.



Hitoyoshi Roadside Station
 Hitoyoshi Craft Park Ishino Park