



Left: The setting sun reflects on the rice fields of Hamanoura Tanada. Above: Yufuin town is a quaint onsen town at the foot of Mt Yufu. Below: One of the tranquil hot springs of Kyushu Island.

Spotlight on *Kyushu Island*

Stunning scenery, unique dining and hot springs aplenty in Japan.

Konnichiwa (hello) from Kyushu Island – Japan’s steamy hot spring island. Blend culture, cuisine, and a curiosity for new experiences, and the country’s southernmost island is set to top many a traveller’s wish list.

Explore ... **An original village**

Ride the luxurious Yufuin no Mori train from Hakata City, Fukuoka Prefecture, into Yufuin. The wooden carriages wink at a bygone era. Laidback Yufuin town, cradled by Aso-Kuju National Park, offers visitors a window into rural life. Cobblestone laneways lead to shrines, temples and cosy cafes. Lake Kinrin, Yufuin’s postcard centrepiece, has a rare mix of both hot springs and fresh water. In the mornings a magical mist dusts the landscape, the perfect antidote to city stresses. *Yufuin no Mori train (book in advance)* jrkyushu.co.jp/english/

Visit ... **Steamy sights**

Oita Prefecture’s famous hot spring city, Beppu, puffs away like a witch’s cauldron. Volcanically heated springs – christened ‘blood pond hell’, ‘white pond hell’, and ‘cooking pot hell’ among other ‘hells’ – have bubbled for centuries, creating an area dubbed Hells of Beppu. The springs are too hot for bathing – but local restaurants use them to steam food in vats heated from underground. Called *Jigoku mushi* (hell steamed), it’s a must try.

Try ... **Birthdaysuit bathing**

Kurokawa Onsen (hot spring) town has more public baths than you can shake your bathers at. But you won’t be needing those. I’m immersed in 39°C mineral-infused water wearing nothing but a small towel over my



Must-try foods

- * **Sumibi-yaki:** Charcoal-grilled chicken cooked with pepper and garlic.
- * **Sashimi:** Tender, thinly sliced raw fish or meat dipped in soy sauce.
- * **Shojin ryori:** Traditional Buddhist vegetarian dishes.

hair. Nothing feels more natural. Japanese folk regularly bare all to slip into therapeutic baths – men to one side, women another – to treat their ailments. The minerals work naturally, soothing mind and muscles.

Sleep ... **In peace**

KAI Yufuin has been created with the wisdom of Zen in mind. Mt Yufu towers as a

backdrop to rolling rice terraces. Each guest room in the *ryokan* (Japanese-style inn) is designed to blend with nature. The tatami mats are made from shichitoui grass, and suites facing a sawtooth oak forest have private outdoor hot-spring baths. **AWW** *Rooms at KAI Yufuin are currently starting from around \$300, hoshinoresorts.com/en/ *Japan, Malaysian and Qantas airlines fly to Japan. Fares start from around \$2000.