



- Explore the regions -



1 Main tower view of Akashi Kaikyo Bridge, which is the world's longest suspension bridge (3,911 meters) and links Awaji Island to Japan's main island of Honshu. © KOBE TOURISM BUREAU.

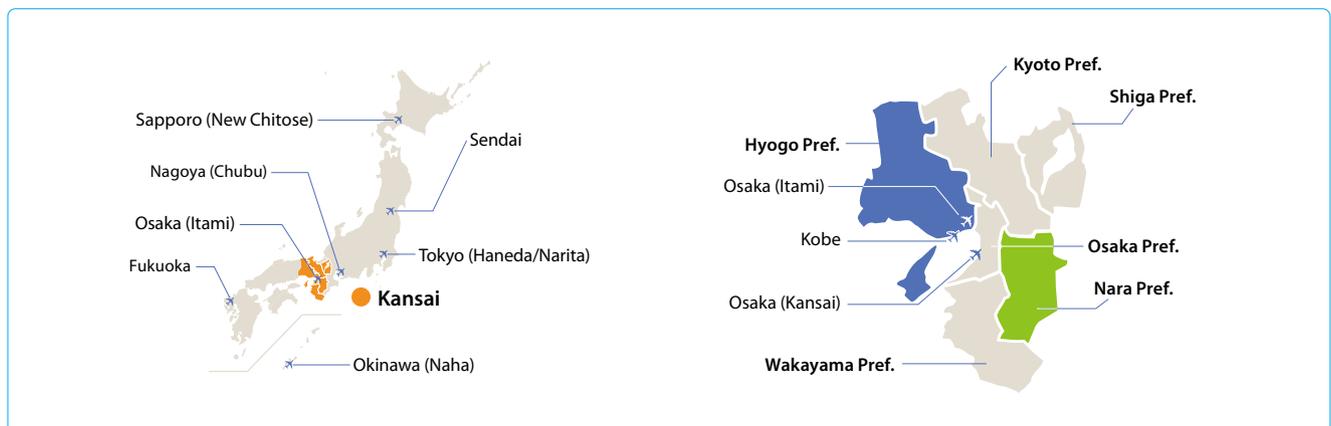


2 Sacred pine torches light the night during Omizutori ceremony, Nigatsu-do hall, Todai-ji temple, Nara Pref. Photo courtesy of Nara Visitors Bureau. (Photo credit: Akihiko Kimura.)

Island Life and Water for Wellness

Among Kansai regional attractions are bodies of water that nourish daily life and sustain sacred rituals. Linked to the main island of Honshu via the world's longest suspension bridge, Awaji Island (aka Awajishima) inspires wellness

and family fun from its culture, history, hot springs, cycling in nature, and theme parks. Enjoy the ceremony at Nara's renowned Todai-ji temple in which healing water is drawn from a sacred well.



Hyogo Pref.

Awaji Island via Akashi Kaikyo Bridge

According to the *Kojiki*, Japan's oldest legend and history chronicle, Awaji Island was the first land mass created in Japan by the gods with other islands following in succession to create today's vast archipelago. Awaji is the seventh largest island in Japan and the largest within the Seto Inland Sea, a body of water embraced by popular Kansai destinations like Osaka, Shikoku, and Kyushu.



Awaji Yumebutai is an integrated resort facility of hotel, greenhouse botanical garden, conference hall, and more, Awaji City. © Hyogo Tourism Bureau.

Surrounded by the sea with a topography of mountains and hills, the island has many leisure and recreational facilities taking advantage of abundant nature. Historic and cultural sites, including Sumoto Castle ruins and shrines linked to Japanese mythology, make Awaji Island a tourist hotspot. Recently opened is the Nijigen no Mori anime theme park featuring the world's largest model of Godzilla (120 meters long) in an interactive attraction that includes a museum and theater devoted to the beloved monster.

Linking Awajishima to the main island of Honshu is the Akashi Kaikyo Bridge, the world's longest suspension bridge at 3,911 meters. Part of the bridge has a walkway, allowing a thrilling stroll and view 50 meters down to the white-capped waves of Akashi Strait below. A bridge tour for those who want to experience the bridge at a more grandiose level lets you ascend the main tower, some 300 meters high. Explore the inside of the bridge, usually seen only from passing vehicles, and revel in main tower's panoramic view of Japan's first island. For details on the bridge tour (reservation required), visit www.jb-honshi.co.jp/english.

Getting There: ANA serves Osaka (Itami) from many cities across Japan, including Tokyo (Haneda and Narita), Sapporo (New Chitose), Fukuoka, and Okinawa. Akashi can be reached by trains in over an hour from Itami Airport.

Nara Pref.

Harmonious Healing by Fire and Water

Though Todai-ji temple is known for its Great Buddha, located to its right is the Nigatsu-do. The long wood balcony of this hall is lit up during Otaimatsu (March 1–14), an evening rite when torches light the way for priests to enter the hall and set alight pine logs arranged on the balcony so sparks shower down on people waiting below for the healing effect. This rite precedes Omizutori, the ritual drawing of water held late at night (March 12–13) in the dark of Todai-ji's sacred grounds.

Both events offer a singular opportunity to experience a Buddhist temple in Japan, especially when ethereal music accompanies the water ritual. After the water-drawing ceremony, prayers are offered throughout the night to all the gods as bells are rung and horns blown. Lighting of the pine logs, drawing water, and nightlong prayer are sacred practices held to cleanse sins and welcome spring for over 1,250 years, one of Japan's oldest recurring Buddhist ceremonies.

For Omizutori, priests in black robes and Tibetan-style headwear cross a slightly sloping hill to and from the Nigatsu-do, accompanied by a haunting melody and sutra chanting as they draw water from the sacred Wakasa Well for Kannon, Bodhisattva of Mercy, through the pine-scented air. The well water, reportedly flowing once a year, is believed to have restorative powers. Thus, healing and wellness derive from the fire and water ceremonies held at Todai-ji's Nigatsu-do. (As of this writing, visitors

may not be allowed to join the 2021 Omizutori due to coronavirus safety measures.)



Photo courtesy of Nara Visitors Bureau. (Photo credit: Asuka Mine.)

Getting There: ANA serves Osaka (Itami and Kansai) from many cities across Japan, including Tokyo (Haneda and Narita), Sapporo (New Chitose), Fukuoka, and Okinawa. Nara can be reached by limousine bus in about an hour from Itami Airport and in about 1.5 hours from Kansai Airport.

Looking Ahead

The next theme will be an Area Guide to the Okinawa region in April, when we introduce characteristic features of Okinawa's mainland and islands.

Handy URL

Visit the special website of Tastes of JAPAN by ANA Kansai.



Save on domestic flights within Japan by booking early and accessing lower fares!

