

# WAKASA

Pure.  
Calm.  
Escape.

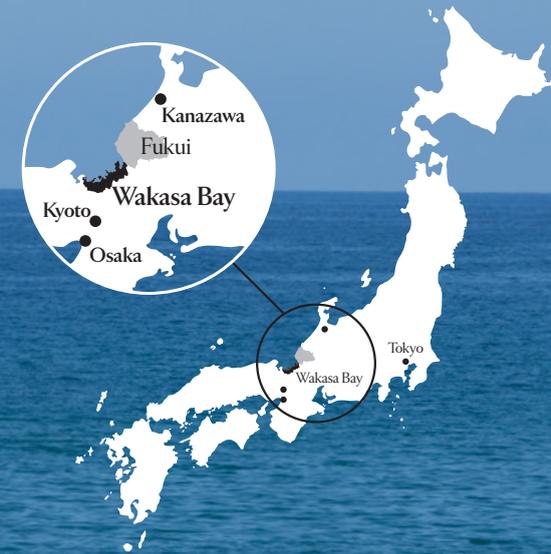




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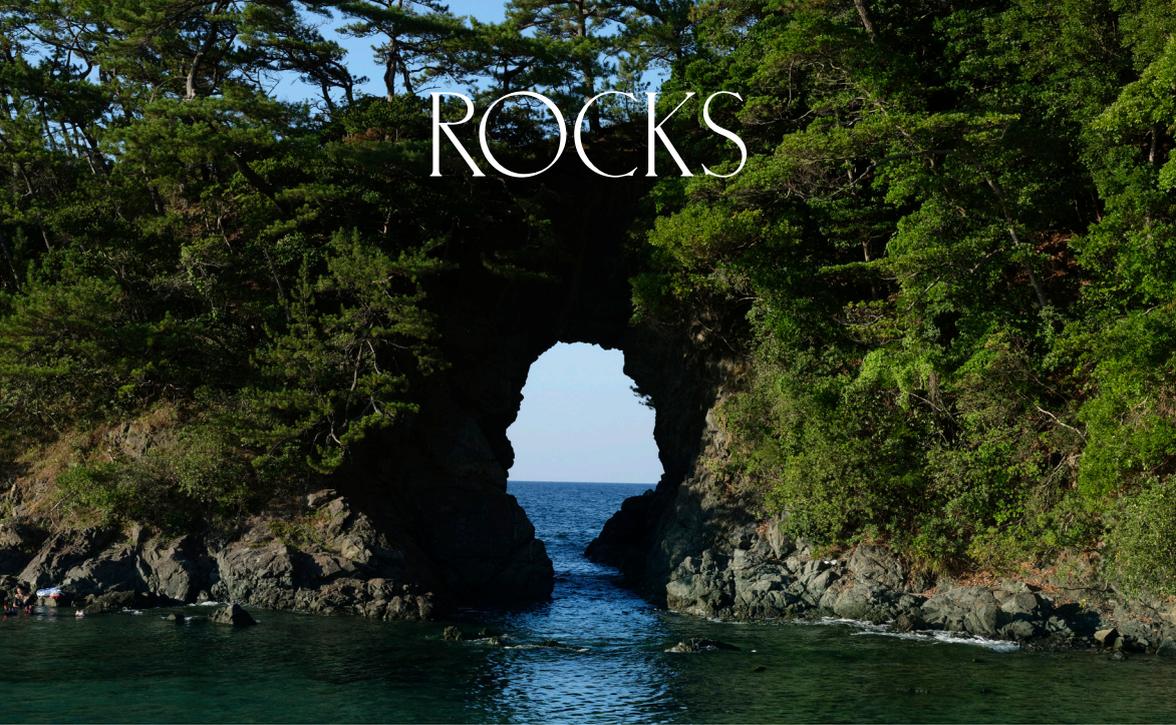
# ESSENCE OF WAKASA BAY



The taste of fresh snow crabs.  
Time-steeped rock formations.  
Ancient trading routes. Forest-wrapped temples.  
Pure mountain water. Surf communities.  
And a symphony of blues – in seas, lakes and skies.

Wakasa. This below-the-radar region is among Japan's most treasure-packed gems and a perfect alternative to overtouristed hot spots. Scenic, peaceful and laid-back, it flows alongside the Sea of Japan, at the southern tip of Fukui Prefecture, on Japan's western coastline – easily accessible by train from Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto. From food and culture to scene-stealing nature: the region balances a warm, local atmosphere with natural beauty and layered history.

# ROCKS



Time and water shape the landscape in Wakasa Bay. The Fukui region has long been famed for its millennia-old dinosaur fossils and ancient rocks – and in Wakasa, this rich heritage is highly visible along its rare saw-toothed ria coastline.

Uniquely formed and steeped in beauty, picture mountains plunging into jagged inlets, with folding cliffs carved by tides and sculptural rocks rising from seas.

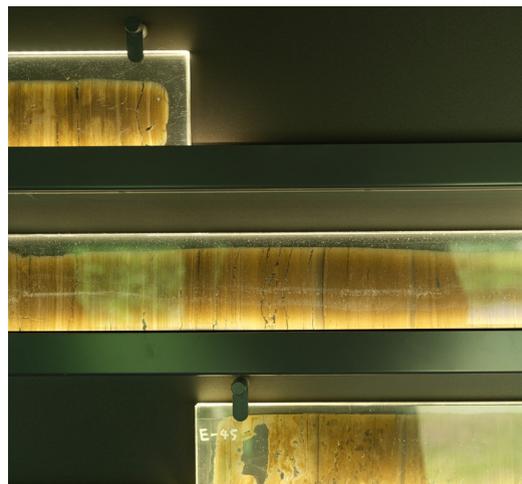
A highlight is Shiroyama Park, a scenic stretch of beach wrapped in rock formations, including Meikyo-do Cave, with its legendary mirror-like opening framing sea views.

Another standout spot is Sotomo – a dramatic stretch of coastline around 6km long, punctuated by tumbling cliffs, abstract granite formations, angular caves, arches and fissures. Best viewed from the sea, boat tours offer close-up vistas of the raw beauty of the coastline, which forms part of Wakasa Bay Quasi-National Park.

The story continues inland, where Mikata Five Lakes, an ancient network of water basins, are home to some of the world's best-preserved varves: sediment

layers accumulated, quietly and steadily, over tens of thousands of years. This world is centre stage at the Varve Museum, spanning a serene space designed by architect Hiroshi Naito.

From seas to lakes, the landscape of Wakasa is a potent time-capsule, containing a rare glimpse of geological evolution.



**How to do it** Take a [Sotomo boat cruise](#) from Wakasa Fisherman's Wharf; and visit the [Varve Museum](#).

# ROUTES



For centuries, merchants walked along the Saba Kaido – the ancient “Mackerel Road” trade route winding through the mountainous heart of Wakasa.

The route provided a vital connection between ancient capital Kyoto and the sea – with Wakasa's fishing villages sending wares such as salt and fish, including *saba* mackerel.

The nature-soaked journey – meandering for 72km past rivers, villages, temples – was not only logistically vital, it was culturally rich.

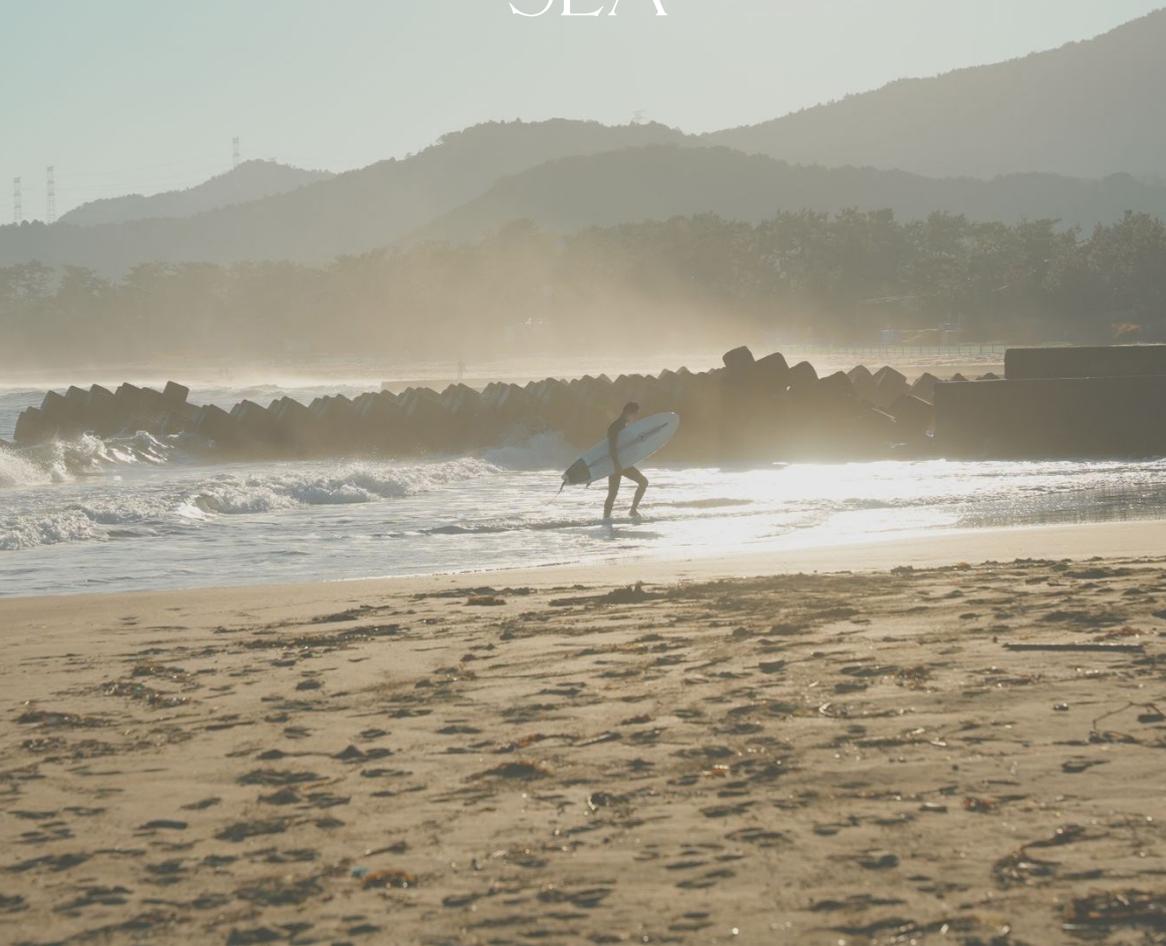
Starting at coastal city Obama, the region's exposure to overseas goods and travellers left a lasting imprint on Kyoto culture, from food and homes to lifestyles.

Today, visitors can follow in merchants' footsteps, exploring Saba Kaido's beauty and heritage first-hand – walking, driving or cycling (an official cycling map marks seven routes).

Highlights include the time-capsule serenity of post town Kumagawa-juku, with atmospheric traditional architecture (check in at Yao Kumagawa hotel or recharge at Thee Coffee); historic temples such as Wakasa Kokubun-ji; the drama of the mountain landscape; and ancient stone markers indicating distances from Kyoto.

**How to do it** Pick up a [cycling map](#); explore [Wakasa Kokubun-ji](#); check into Yao [Kumagawa](#); and stop by [Thee Coffee](#).

# SEA



**S**weeping white beaches, rolling waves, salty spray – and a laid-back tempo rooted in community spirit.

Wakasa Bay's rising surf scene is a refreshing addition to the region's ancient temples, trade route heritage and mountainous landscape.

The sea – with its layered blue waters – is a key protagonist. The perfect place to recharge, Wakasa is home to countless beaches overlooking the Sea of Japan. The mountains create deep sea waters, rich in seafood – and ideal for winter surf swells.

At Takahama, wide beaches with rolling waves are wrapped in pine trees, with skies ablaze as the sun sets behind mountains. It's home to Surf Hotel Il Mare, a seven-room hotel with sea views.

Wakasa-Wada is another hub. The white sand beach has a peaceful local feel, with community spirit centre stage at Familiar Beachside Village, a buzzy café and guesthouse run by local surfer Shungo Imai.

It's the sea, in its many shades of blue, that ultimately anchors the region – shaping local life, grounded in heritage, while embracing new ways of living.

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How to do it      Take a [surf class](#) in Takahama; check into [Surf Hotel Il Mare](#); and recharge at [Familiar Beachside Village](#).

# LAKES



**P**icture still, clear waters with mirror-like surfaces – reflecting skies, forests and mountains. Wakasa is famed for the beauty of its legendary lakes. Mikata Goko is a network of five ancient water basins, its pure waters dramatically wrapped in the natural landscape.

Also known as Mikata Five Lakes, the scenic spot is a hub for countless activities – from canoeing and swimming to fishing, hiking and nature photography.

It's also a geological wonder. The lakes are positioned in ancient depressions, with sediment layers known as varves preserved over millennia, offering unprecedented insight into Wakasa's natural history.

Each lake also has its own water quality – from fresh to salty – with exquisite seasonal foliage and 10,000-plus bird species, including rare sea eagles.

For the best overview, hop on a chair lift at the Rainbow Line to a mountaintop park – where terraces offer cinematic panoramas across the five lakes, flowing into the Sea of Japan.

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How to do it      Explore each of the [five lakes](#); soak up the view (with an icecream) at the [Mikata Goko Rainbow Line](#).

# SERENITY



Breathe in – and out. Wakasa is steeped in serenity, with a rich temple culture harmonised with the beauty of the natural landscape. Countless temples are scattered across Wakasa's mountains, forests and coastal shores. Among them is Myotsuji Temple. A deeply tranquil haven hidden among forested cedar groves, *momiji* maples and cherry blossom trees, it's home to the exquisite wood craftsmanship of a main hall (with three iconic Buddhist statues) plus a tiered pagoda dating back more than 750 years.

No less enchanting is Nakayamadera Temple. Here, centuries-old temple architecture is again centre stage, along with Buddha warrior statues and a rich natural setting in the mountains of Takahama.

Zen is also deeply significant in Wakasa. It was here that Shaku Soen was born in the 19th century – a significant spiritual figure, celebrated as the first Japanese monk to teach Zen in Europe and the US.

And the power of the natural landscape is timelessly aligned with this heritage – as reflected while wandering among the pure flowing water, sacred shrines and Buddha statues of Uriwari Waterfall.



How to do it  
Visit [Myotsuji Temple](#);  
explore [Nakayamadera Temple](#);  
and stroll around [Uriwari Waterfall](#).

# FLAVOURS



Snow crab. *Unagi* eels. Sea salt. Pickled plums. Fresh rice. Fermented mackerel. And pure mountain spring water. Wakasa is heaven for food-lovers and synonymous with a spectrum of unique flavours, all anchored in the seasons and born from seas and mountains.

Its food credentials are rooted in heritage. Blessed with rich coastal waters, pure water and direct trade routes, Wakasa was historically known as a *mikeetsukuni* – “a land of imperial provisions”, supplying the ancient capital Kyoto with seafood, salt and preserved foods, helping to shape early court cuisine.

Today, it remains home to an abundance of flavours, ingredients and tastes. Winter is a highlight, with its famously delicious snow crabs, in addition to a cornucopia of maritime treats – sea bream, oysters, squid, pufferfish.

Freshwater *unagi* eel is also celebrated – perfectly placed on rice cultivated with pure mountain water. Countless plum farms line lakeside shores producing delicious *umeboshi* pickles; while traditional fermentation techniques are another local specialty, as reflected in *besbiko* – mackerel fermented in rice bran and salt (a necessary preservation technique along the Saba Kaido).

How to do it  
Enjoy snow crab at [Wakasa Miyabi](#);  
eat *unagi* eel charcoal grilled on rice at [Unagiya Moemon](#);  
and buy pickled plums at [Kawai Farm](#).

# SLEEPING

Surf hotels. Traditional houses. Seafront retreats. Mountain cabins. Wakasa offers a spectrum of hotel escapes, rooted in nature, heritage and local lifestyles.



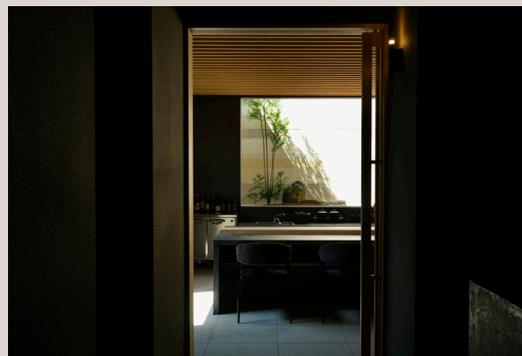
## Surf Hotel II Mare

A modern hotel on Takahama beach, with seven clean-lined bright rooms with sea views and a roof terrace – perfectly positioned for surfing.



## Yao Kumagawa and Sanza Kumagawa

For an atmospheric taste of Saba Kaido heritage, Yao Kumagawa has four elegantly renovated traditional houses scattered in scenic post town Kumagawa-juku. Sister property Sanza Kumagawa has contemporary wood cabins and a campsite cocooned in mountains, plus tasty DIY cuisine.



## fuu the FLAG

A deluxe contemporary villa, with sea views, modern interiors, a terrace jacuzzi and intimate restaurant with modern Japanese cuisine served at a wooden counter.



## Wakasa Kajitsu

A serene escape in fishing village Ano, with 13 rooms in three renovated traditional buildings and sweeping views across seas and surrounding mountains.



## Obama Machiya Stay

A collection of eight atmospheric traditional *machiya* townhouses across Obama, offering comfortable accommodation rooted in the city's rich local culture.

## Familiar Beachside Village

Simple budget accommodation at surf hub Familiar Beachside Village on Wakasa-Wada beach, staying in either a private room or a shared dormitory.

## Chobei

A simple inn on a beach overlooking Tsuruga Bay, with eight rooms and an abundance of fresh seafood (including wintertime snow crab menus).

## Ocean Hotel Resort & Spa Uminpia

A sweeping ocean resort overlooking Kohama Bay, home to contemporary rooms with blue sea vistas, communal baths, indoor pool and sauna and a restaurant-with-a-view.

## Katsumiya

A small *ryokan* inn on the Tsuruga Peninsula, with simple modern Japanese rooms and a restaurant serving Wakasa seafood treats.

# FESTIVALS



It's all about festivals in Wakasa. The region is home to a rich schedule of festivals, with dozens unfolding through the seasons – from large-scale public *matsuri* festivals to ancient temple and shrine rituals and community events.

Many festivals are connected to water, mirroring Wakasa's landscape of seas to lakes, as well as fire, food and Buddhist rituals.

Among the most sacred is Omizu-Okuri in Obama, an ancient spring water-sending ceremony every March. A community highlight is Takahama Shichi-nen Matsuri, held every seventh year. In summer, the Wakasa Ohi Super Fireworks Festival lights up the coast, while Takahama skies are also ablaze. And lantern-lit processions lead the way at Obama's autumn Hoze Festival.

These colourful festivals are a microcosm of life in Wakasa – and a vibrant expression of rural communities shaped by the natural landscape, strong human ties and a deep spiritual heritage.

Calendar	
<b>Spring</b>	<b>April:</b> Hana-Kae Festival (Tsuruga) <b>April and May:</b> King's Dance Group (Tsuruga, Wakasa)
<b>Summer</b>	<b>June (every seventh year):</b> Takahama Seven Year Festival (Takahama) <b>August / September:</b> Wakasa Ohi Super Fireworks Festival (Ohi)
<b>Autumn</b>	<b>September:</b> Obama Hojo Festival (Obama)
<b>Winter</b>	<b>January:</b> Hyuga Underwater Tug of War (Mihama)

How to do it Stop by [Tsuruga Yama Museum](#) to explore the monumental *yama* floats used at Keji Jingu Shrine Festival; and check a [full calendar of events](#) before visiting.

# ACCESS

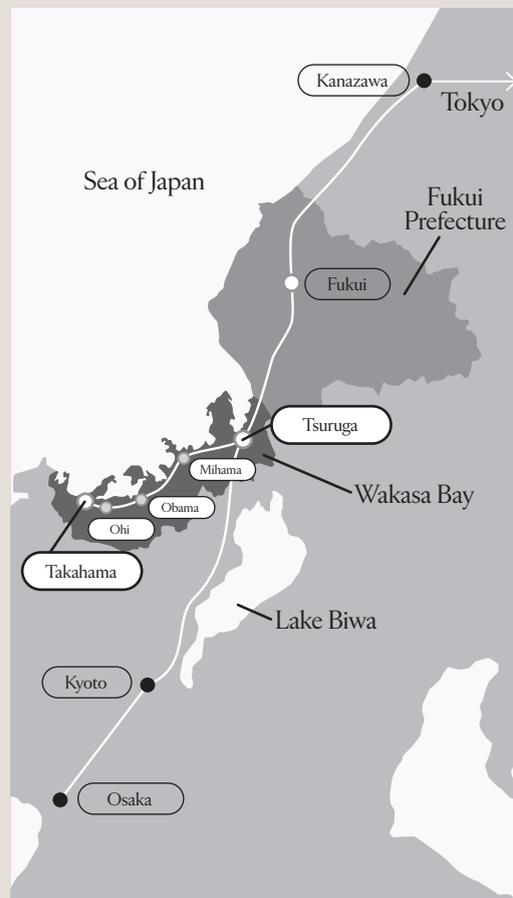
Wakasa spans the southern area of Fukui Prefecture, running alongside the Sea of Japan in western Japan. The region is easily accessible by rail and road, with direct train connections from Kyoto (1.5-2 hours) and Osaka (2-2.5 hours). From Tokyo, Wakasa is accessible by bullet train and local train (3.5-4 hours). Compact and scenic, Wakasa's mountains and coastal regions are also ideal to explore by car.

## Classic Trains

Take the scenic route from Kyoto or Osaka – by travelling on board [Kyoto Tango Railway's](#) special trio of trains: Akamatsu (red), Aomatsu (blue) or Kuromatsu (black). Board at Fukuchiyama, enjoying wooden floors, sweeping views and old school elegance, before alighting at Amanohashidate and finishing the journey by local train. The Aomatsu train connects Kyoto and Takahama, with a transfer at Higashi-Maizaru Station.



## MAP



## TRANSPORT

