Travel Guide of Scenic Byways in Kyushu

Q-6 Kagoshima Scenic Byways

Cities of Kagoshima, Ibusuki, MinamiKyushu, MinamiSatsuma, and Makurazaki (Kagoshima Pref.) —Active Volcano, Shirasu Plateau & Sub-tropical Zone, Leading Activities toward Meiji Era —

Kagoshima Prefecture in the southern Kyushu has Kagoshima Bay in the center. In addition, the Osumi Peninsula is located on the east side of the bay, and the Satsuma Peninsula, on the west side. Under such topographical conditions, Kagoshima Scenic Byway extends from Sakurajima in the bay to the southern part of the Satsuma Peninsula. In other words, it belongs to Kirishima Kinkōwan National Park in the subtropical region composed of four cities: Kagoshima, Minami-satsuma, Ibusuki and Makurazaki.

The most important feature common to all areas of Kagoshima Scenic Byway is that active volcanoes line up on the Kyushu volcano front that extends from Kagoshima Bay. Hot water erupts from the submarine volcano “Wakamiko” in the back of the bay, and bubbles sometimes appear. In addition, steam smoke from Sakurajima volcano can be seen almost every day. The average number of eruptions over the past 10 years is about 590 per year. Citizens may be sometimes surprised by explosion sound, and suffer from the fall of volcanic ash.

On the other hand, you can find Mountain of Kaimon-dake at the entrance to the bay, and the top was capped by a large eruption at the end of the 9th century. (See the Photo (4)).

Interest in volcanoes lies not only in eruptions but also in its grace. Many blessings such as Sakurajima’s radish, industrial products using volcanic ash, and hot springs can be obtained. Alternatively, the local people are also known as Satsuma-Hayato based on their ethnicity, and their spiritual power seems to be trained by the eruption hardship. From these, it will be interesting to experience the life of local people, thinking the meaning of living in a volcanic area while appearing more attractive than danger.

(Access) Kagoshima Airport is a base for accessing the scenic routes of Kagoshima, and the international lines are 6 routes to Korea, China and Taiwan, while Domestic lines are 17 routes, 8 of which are serviced on Okinawa and southern islands.

The terminal station of Kyushu Shinkansen is Kagoshima Central Station, which takes about 1 hour and 30 minutes to Hakata Station (Fukuoka). At Kagoshima Central Station, trains run on the Kagoshima Main Line, the Nippo Main Line, and the Ibusuki-makurazaki Line.

As for the expressway, the Kyushu Expressway and the Minami-Kyushu Expressway are connected in the center of Kagoshima City. These transports provide easy access to a variety
of local attractions.

(Main Route of Landscape Area) The main road of Sakurajima is National Route 224, which leads to Prefectural Road 26 on the east side. Therefore, you can use go around Sakurajima using these roads. There is also a ferry connecting Sakurajima to Kagoshima City Center, and the trip takes 15 minutes. In Kagoshima City, trams run to serve in urban areas.

On the other hand, National Routes 225 and 226 from Kagoshima City to the southern part of the Satsuma Peninsula are complemented by the Ibusuki Skyline (motorway). Bus routes on these roads are available to access the main attractive spots of the scenic byway network. Also, prefectural roads on the peninsular are well-maintained, so you can enjoy comfortable driving in the countryside.

(Regional Resources) The active volcanoes of Kagoshima Bay, the “Shirasu” plateau that spreads throughout the region, the historical heritage of Shimazu Clan (Satsuma Domain), and the footsteps of the youth of the Meiji Restoration are important regional resources for this scenic route.

(A) Kagoshima Bay and Shirasu Plateau which were created by Volcanic Eruption.

Kagoshima Bay and its surroundings were rifts in the earth, and had a lot of volcanic activities. At that time, the Aira caldera was formed at the back of the bay, the Ata north caldera at the center, and the Ata south caldera at the entrance to the bay. Seawater flowed into there. In addition, Sakurajima in the back of the bay was originally an island, but the eruption of 1914 led to link with the Osumi Peninsula. As a result, the current Kagoshima Bay was born. By the way, except for the waterway (strait) on the west side of Sakurajima and the entrance of the bay, the average depth of the bay is about 130m and the maximum depth is about 240m.

On the other hand, a large amount of pyroclastic flow erupts due to various volcanic activities covering Satsuma Peninsula and the Osumi peninsula, creating the Shirasu plateau widely. The slope of this Shirasu Plateau is vulnerable in the rain, so it forms a cliff of about 20-100 meters. The collapsed Shirasu sand flows into the sea and is launched to the coast, creating a beautiful long arched beach. In particular, the west coast of Satsuma Peninsula is 47 km long and is called “Fukiage Hama (beach)”.

In short, driving along the coastline, you’ll encounter unique landscapes of cracks, long and steep plateau cliffs, and arched white beaches.

(B) Historic Heritage of Shimazu Clan.

From the Kamakura period to the Edo period, the Shimazu Clan (Satsuma Domain) ruled the vast territory of Kagoshima Prefecture and southern area of Miyazaki Prefecture. For this reason, during the Edo period (17th to 19th centuries), a samurai system was established that did not concentrate in the castle town of Kagoshima, even under the law of “one castle in one country”.

In other words, while there was a group of samurai who lived and worked in the castle town, many samurai who were engaged in agriculture on a daily basis and engaged as soldiers in emergency situations were assigned to each region. This samurai was a semi-peasant and half-samurai, and called as Goshi in Japanese, who means a local warrior.

The total of the two types of samurai reached about 40% of the total population of the Satsuma domain. The financial situation of the clan was bad because it was difficult to produce rice in Shirasu Plateau, and typhoons and volcanoes caused many disasters. In addition, because the Kagoshima area was located at the southern end of country, so it was necessary to strictly defend the whole area. For these reasons, the aforementioned samurai system was devised.

In this distinctive samurai society, the village where samurai (Goshi) and their family lived was called “Fumoto”. Samurai residences in well condition were built, and community system with a unique culture was established. (See Photo (3).)

(C) Leading Activities toward Meiji Era

In the radical political change from the Edo period to the Meiji period (19th and 20th centuries), Satsuma people played a more important role than the people of other regions. Shimazu Nariakira (feudal lord) promoted measures to strengthen the wealth and military power.

In particular, after Anglo-Satsuma War in 1863, the modernization of various industries such as shipbuilding and machinery was promoted, and its heritage was registered as a “Meiji Japanese Industrial Revolution Heritage”.

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Considering the above-mentioned, the area of scenic Kagoshima byways can be divided into 5 blocks, allowing you to experience these meaningful and interesting tours. (See the map.)

(1) Sakurajima Island of World Geopark.

The ferry from Kagoshima port in the center of Kagoshima City to Sakurajima Port is used by residents and tourists. In the daytime,
there are 4 round trips per hour. In addition to this liner, there are 1- or 2-hour cruise tours depending on the season, where you can see Kagoshima City and Sakurajima volcano from the bay.

In 2013, Sakurajima Volcano and Kinko Bay (alias “Kagoshima Bay”) were registered in the World Geopark. Attractive spots of Sakurajima are the lava coast, the hot water from the submarine volcano, the torii (shrine gate) buried in volcanic ash, and the crater that generates steam. Sightseeing bus tours run 8 times a day at the base of the volcano.

(2) Downtown of Kagoshima City

Block (2) is the heart of Kagoshima City. Going north from JR Kagoshima Central Station, there are prefectural road 21 and National Route 10 through which a tram passes. Important scenic resources along these roads are the Shimazu heritage of the Edo period and the world industrial heritage of the early Meiji era.

In addition, a youth sculpture monument is installed in front of JR Kagoshima Central Station. In 1865, under the protection of Shimazu Clan, they broke the shogunate’s national sequestration order and studied in the UK. Most of them returned home after the Meiji Restoration, gained high government status, and contributed greatly to the modernization of Japan. For this reason, looking at history textbooks, you can easily list the people who were active in the Meiji period.

If you go about 500 meters north from JR Central Station along the tramway, you will find the Kōtsuki River. Kajiya-machi Town along the river was a residential area for junior samurai. Many talented people who were deeply involved in the Meiji Restoration grew up in this town, and related materials are exhibited in the nearby hometown museum (Ishin Furusatokan). It is very meaningful and effective to travel around the city based on that information.

When you get off a tram at Aquarium Station, you will arrive at Kagoshima Port, where you can find the old port (important cultural property) and the aquarium.

Then, if you go north on National Route 10, you will arrive at the Memorial Park of Ishibashi (Stone Bridge). Here, three stone bridges that once spanned the Kōtsuki River were moved and rebuilt after the big flood. These original bridges were built in the mid-19th century and provide a detailed method of design and construction techniques developed in Kyushu.

If proceeding about 2km north on National Route 10, you will find Shimazu Villa and Sengan-en Garden. In addition, as one of the ‘Meiji Industrial Revolution Heritage: Steel, Shipbuilding, Coal
Industry” (2015 World Cultural Heritage), you can see the western-style building for industrial complex “Shōko Shūsei Kan (building)” in the same place. “Shōko” means respecting the old culture, and “Shūsei” means gathering many things together.

In other words, at the end of Edo period, Shimazu Nariakira (Daيمyō) started industries such as shipbuilding, steel making, spinning, and glass manufacturing to increase wealth and strengthen maritime defense. These factories were in the Shūsei-kan building, but is now the museum that conveys the history and culture of the Shimazu Clan.

Returning to the city center and climbing the hill behind the city hall, you can see Kagoshima Bay, Sakurajima Volcano, and the Osumi Peninsula. This hill is called Shirøyama because the castle was built in the past.

During the Edo period, however, the inner castle of Shimazu Clan was newly built at the foot of the hill and was called Kagoshima Castle (or Tsurumaru Castle). The castle was often destroyed in disasters and rebuilt each time, but has not been rebuilt since the 1874 fire. Still, the stone wall, moats, stone bridge, and the main gate remain.

(3) Chiran-cho district in Minami-Kyushu City.

From JR Kagoshima Central Station, Chiran-cho Town in Minami-Kyushu City is about 50 minutes by car and about 70 minutes by bus. It is famous for the samurai residences and the Peace Memorial Museum.

a) In Chiran-cho, the samurai residences which are the main axis of the "Fumoto" village in the Edo period are remained for more than 800m long. As shown in the photo, the gate along the road is beautifully shaped with a combination of yew trees and stone walls, and is highly regarded as one of 100 carefully selected Japanese roads.

The Japanese garden in the mansion is designed with trees and stones against the background of the surrounding mountains and nature. With this excellent design, seven gardens have been designated as one of 100 most beautiful historical buildings in Japan. The street of samurai residences is registered as a traditional building conservation area.

b) At the end of the Pacific War, a military base for special attacks was built in Chiran-cho Town. Many young attackers flew planes and attacked enemy warships in exchange for their lives. This is an unprecedented tragedy in human history. After the war, the Peace Memorial Museum was built to pray for peace and display the portraits and materials of the attackers. Please visit the memorial and watch the materials carefully to prevent this tragedy from happening again.

(4) Ibusuki: Area of Sand steaming spa town.

When driving about 50 km south of Kagoshima Central Station along National Route 266, or traversing about an hour on JR Ibusuki Makurazaki Line, you will arrive at the center of Ibusuki City. It is located on the southeastern tip of the Satsuma Peninsula, and you can take a ferry across Kagoshima Bay to connect to Minami-Osumi Town on the Osumi Peninsula.

In Ibusuki City and surroundings, the Volcano (Kaimondake), caldera (Lake Ikeda), crater (Yamakawa Bay) and sandy beach baths are important and typical scenic spots. Furthermore, the Hashimuraw-gawa ruins near JR Ibusuki Station, which clarified the difference between the Jomon period and the Yayoi period, has been designated as a national historical site.

(5) Areas of Makurazaki City and Minami-Kyushu City

When proceeding west along National Route 266, you will arrive at the Makurazaki City. The city thrives with fishery industry, and the amount of production of bonito chips, which is essential for Japanese cuisine, is the highest in Japan. While watching Kaimon-dake Mountain, you can visit the Makurazaki Fish Center, the long and slender rock (Tategamiwa), and the brewery of Satsuma Shochū.

Next is a tour of the southwestern end of Kyushu. The main spots are Bonotsu Port area, Noma Peninsula and Fukiage-hama Beach. Bonotsu is a base of trade with China, and is known as a port where ambassadors from Japan to Tang stopped on the way. It was also the port where the monk Ganjin came to Japan at the request of the Emperor and landed with difficulty. Ganjin went from Bonotsu to the capital of Nara via Dazaifu in Fukuoka, and worked on fundamental reforms of Japanese Buddhism.

You can enjoy fishing and marine sports on the coast of Noma Peninsula. There are also places where you can enjoy the view of complex rocks and small islands. In addition, the landscape of terraced farm fields with natural stones on the slopes is very impressive.

As going around the Noma Peninsula, the scenery turns into a long white sand beach (Fukiage-hama Beach). A sand festival is held every May on the sand beach, where you can see a lot of wonderful works of great people and famous buildings. In addition, several old samurai residences remain in the center of Minami-Satsuma City, and you can trace the changes of Japanese houses over 100 years.