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KYUSHU: A PARADISE OF POTTERY

The southern island of Kyushu is a paradise for travelers interested in Japanese ceramics. Kyushu was Japan's gateway to Asia when travel was by sail; it offered the shortest route to Korea and China. Numerous innovations entered Japan via Kyushu, making the island a sophisticated leader rather than a southern backwater.

With its mild climate, beautiful natural scenery, dozens of kilns, and rich history, Kyushu is a rewarding destination any time of year.

Japanese ceramic production was revolutionized in the 16th century, with the introduction of advanced techniques from Korea. Korean potters brought the art of making high-fired, glazed porcelains into a country whose potters had been turning out primarily earthenware and stoneware. Kyushu's proximity to Korea gave it a large population of Korean potters, and the porcelain industry flourished. Today, 400 years later, Kyushu is one of the world's great centers of ceramic production.

Travelers in Kyushu are never far from a kiln, and each one has its particular characteristics and traditions. Imari's elegant blue and white porcelains, the dazzling colors of *Iro-Nabeshima* ware, *Hasami* ware with its distinctive latticework filigree, creamy *Satsuma* stoneware, *Onda* folk pottery, with its rustic glazes and unusual handles, *Karatsu* tea bowls, prized by connoisseurs for their irregular shapes and subtle colors – these wares represent a tiny portion of what Kyushu has to offer. The variety is staggering, and prices are considerably less at the source than when displayed on department store shelves.

Days 1 & 2: FUKUOKA (Part of Day 1 will be spent reaching Kyushu)



Fukuoka, with its international airport and bullet train service, is the main jumping off point for a tour of Kyushu. Located on Kyushu's northern coast, this metropolis of 1.3 million is the island's largest and most dynamic city.

From **Osaka**, it takes only 2 hours and 45 minutes to reach Fukuoka via new "Rail

Star” bullet trains, which went into service in March 2000. The bullet train station in Fukuoka is called Hakata, after a former name for the city.

Transportation Tip:

You can also reach Fukuoka by Japan Airlines from **Narita Airport**. If you choose this option, you can purchase a Kyushu only JR Rail Pass, rather than an all-Japan JR Rail Pass. The best option would be to purchase one 7-day Kyushu pass and one 5-day Kyushu pass, for a total of 35,000 yen, vs. a 14-day all Japan JR Rail Pass for 45,100 yen. The all Japan Rail Pass does not have a 5-day option.

The **Fukuoka Art Museum** is a must-see attraction. One of the largest museums in the country, it specializes in modern Asian art, but also has a good collection of ceramics from around Kyushu. Instead of taped headsets, the museum provides volunteer guides fluent in several languages. Located on the grounds where a daiyo’s castle once stood, the art museum is a pleasant place to have lunch.

Travelers who want the atmosphere of times past will like the **Hakata Machiya Folk Museum**, with its reconstructed 19th and early 20th century buildings. **Yusentei** is an elegant garden and tea arbor that formerly belonged to a local daimyo.

Among the city’s ancient Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples are **Kushida Shrine**, where a giant float from the annual Yamakasa Festival is on display, and **Shofukuji**, Japan’s first Zen Buddhist Temple. Zen was another Asian import that reached Japan by way of Kyushu. It arrived here with a monk returning from China in 1195. He also brought a new drink called tea, which helped meditating monks stay awake.

Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine, on the outskirts of the city, is a large and lovely shrine known throughout Japan. It’s a popular tourist destination, and the street leading up to the main gate is lined with souvenir shops selling well-made folkcraft items as well as mass-produced trinkets. The shrine is noted for its 6,000 plum trees, which bloom in late winter.

Fukuoka’s most famous ceramic item is not pottery, but a clay doll. Hakata **ningyo** dolls are prized for their exquisite features and kimonos. Outlying areas are home to kilns that produce **Agano** and **Takatori** wares.



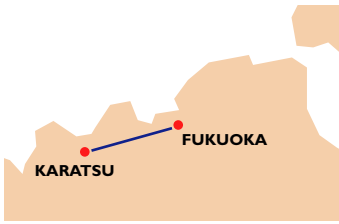
Subway



Daizafu Tenmangu Shrine

Day 3 – KARATSU

From Fukuoka take the subway and then the Chikuhi JR line to **Karatsu** (1 hour and 10 minutes). **Karatsu** ware is highly prized by Japanese, and this small seaside city is an important stop for serious collectors. Dozens of kilns turn out the earth-toned stoneware that appeals to tea ceremony aficionados. The sturdy shapes and



understated glazes and decoration are the antithesis of the porcelain found further south in Imari and Arita. Here in Karatsu, less is more.

The *Nakazato* family has been making pottery in Karatsu for 13 generations, and a visit to one of their kilns is an excellent introduction to the traditional methods used in Japan to throw, decorate, and fire a pot.

The kilns of *Taroemon Nakazato* and *Takashi Nakazato* are used to having visitors and are well equipped to handle them. Galleries display works for sale as well as works by past masters that are not for sale. The work area is set up so that visitors can watch some of the production process without disturbing the craftsmen.

At smaller, less famous kilns, often no one is on hand to receive visitors, and the craftsman has to stop work in order to do so. Best to phone ahead.

To see the works of nearly two dozen Karatsu potters exhibited under one roof, visit *Furusato Kaikan Hall*. Another way to see a good selection of Karatsu ware is to stay overnight in a traditional Japanese inn, where meals will be artistically presented on locally made dishes. The *Yoyokaku Ryokan* is used to welcoming foreign guests, and some English is spoken. The inn's extensive grounds include a lovely garden, and a gallery displaying items made by Takashi Nakazato.

Karatsu's other sights are the castle, which has been rebuilt and serves as a museum of local history, and Festival Float Hall, which exhibits the huge, colorful floats that are paraded through the streets during the city's annual Kunchi Festival in early November.



Kunchi Festival

Note:

Fukuoka has several volunteer guide organizations, and it is possible to arrange for a guide to travel with you on a day trip to Karatsu. Contact JNTO to obtain telephone numbers of such guide organizations. Advance reservations are required, and you are expected to pay the guide's round-trip transportation and buy him/her lunch. These guides are not professionals, just everyday Japanese citizens who want experience a day with a foreign traveler.

Day 4 – IMARI

Imari is one hour by train from Karatsu. The name Imari is synonymous with Japanese porcelain. Four hundred years ago, Japan lagged behind China and Korea in the ability to produce porcelain ware. When a Japanese army invaded Korea at



the end of the 16th century, some of the warlords brought back Korean potters in order to learn from them how to make porcelain.

The lord of Nabeshima, whose fief included Imari, returned with a potter named Ri Sanpei. He is credited with finding clay suitable for making porcelain, and initiating its production in Japan.

Visitors to Imari today can see the remains of Lord Nabeshima's private kiln, which in feudal times was closed to all except those who worked there, so that others wouldn't learn the secret of how to make porcelain.

Some of the finest porcelain ever produced in Japan came from the Nabeshima kiln. Called ***Iro-Nabeshima ware***, these exquisitely decorated pieces were never sold commercially; they were made solely for the personal use of the clan, and for the clan to give as gifts. Items with the slightest flaw were destroyed before they could leave the kiln.

These once-secret wares are now on display in leading museums worldwide.

In Japan, the ***Kurita Museum*** in Ashikaga, and its branch in ***Tokyo***, owns an outstanding collection. The ***Kyushu Ceramic Museum*** in nearby Arita also has some on exhibit.

There are still kilns operating in ***Okawachiyama*** (15-minute bus or taxi ride from Imari Station), the narrow mountain village where the daimyo's private kiln was located, but these wares do not rival what was made for Lord Nabeshima.



Imari

Day 5 – Arita

Arita (20 minutes by train or 40 minutes by bus from Imari) is a porcelain-lover's paradise. Some 150 shops selling ceramics line the streets, and collectors can shop 'til they drop. Some dealers specialize in antique porcelain (ask for ***Ko-Imari***); others in wares that are produced today (***Imari-yaki***). Among the latter, ***Koransha*** and ***Fukagawa*** are well-known companies. Both allow visitors to go on factory tours, and both also display collections of their wares made in earlier times.



Arita

Museum-hopping is the other major activity in Arita. The ***Kyushu Ceramic Museum*** exhibits wares from all over Kyushu, and is a must-see destination for anyone taking a pottery tour through Kyushu. Headsets with English commentary are available. Don't plan to be Arita on a Monday, as some of the museums are closed.

Other sights on the tourist circuit include the ***Ceramic Art Museum (Arita Toji Bijutsukan)***, where local ceramics old and new are displayed in an old stone storehouse, and ***Arita Porcelain Park***, which is something of a pottery theme park. It showcases European as well as Japanese porcelains, and features, among other things, a replica of a German Baroque Palace.

Several places in Arita, including the Porcelain Park, let visitors draw their own designs on unfinished porcelain ware, and will ship it to their home after it has been fired. Ri Sanpei's kaolin quarry, four centuries old and still a source of kaolin, is now part of the tourist circuit. A small folk museum stands nearby. **Tozan Jinja** is a Shinto shrine decorated with porcelains donated by local potters.

In Lord Nabeshima's time, some of the porcelain fired at Okawachiyama was sent over to Arita for the delicate process of applying overglaze enamel. This step is so difficult that only a few families were qualified to do it. Descendants of some of these families are still working in Arita today, and they are among the most famous ceramic artists in Japan. The names **Kakiemon** and **Imaemon** have superstar status, and **Gen-emon** is not far behind.

Their family compounds are also on the tourist circuit, and visitors can see examples of porcelain decorated by several generations of ancestors on display, as well as whatever current wares are available for sale. Watching craftsmen at work is not possible for the general public, since the tedious process of applying glazes and enamels requires intense concentration.

Day 6 – HASAMI



Hasami ware, named after the small town in **Nagasaki Prefecture** where it is made, is instantly recognizable. Its distinguishing feature is an area of latticework filigree on the side of the pot. This distinctive porcelain ware used to be made entirely by hand, a procedure that requires considerable skill and time. Nowadays, some of the kilns have automated part of the process. The price will reflect whether or not an item is made completely by hand.

This style of pottery is so unique that ceramic buffs in Japan rarely run across it being made. That's what draws visitors to **Hasami** (a 20 minute bus ride from Arita).

The **Hasami Ceramics Hall**, called **Togei no Yakata**, offers one-stop looking and shopping. Porcelains made in times past are on display, and works of present-day potters are for sale (Closed Tuesday).

Day 7 – NAGASAKI



Nagasaki Harbor

To reach **Nagasaki** from Hasami, take a bus to Kawatana Station (less than 30 minutes), and change to a Nagasaki train. (Express trains take 1 hour and 10 minutes.)

Nagasaki was well known outside of Japan long before an atomic bomb was dropped on it in 1945. During the 220 years when the shogunate forbade any contact with other countries, Nagasaki was Japan's only window to the outside world. A small number of Dutch and Chinese traders were allowed to live in Nagasaki, confined to walled compounds in the harbor.



Catholic Church

The city is a terrific place to shop for ceramics. Its long history of engaging in international trade and welcoming foreign visitors has made Nagasaki a shopper's paradise.

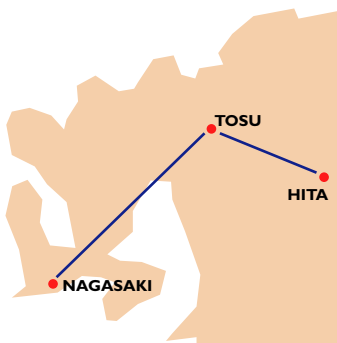
Besides ceramics old and new, the central shopping district offers antiques, jewelry, traditional Japanese crafts, and a wide variety of affordable souvenirs.

Nagasaki sights reflect the exotic history of this port city. Christian churches, show that Nagasaki was an early center of Christianity in Japan before the shogun closed the doors.

Festivals, temple architecture, and cuisine reflect the Chinese influence. Western-style houses, on the hillside overlooking the harbor, tell of the foreigners who arrived when the doors opened again in the mid-19th century. One merchant, Thomas Glover, built a house on extensive grounds that is now a popular museum.

Nagasaki's Peace Park and museum mark the epicenter of the Atomic Bombing. It is near the Catholic church of Urakami, destroyed by the bomb and later rebuilt.

Day 8 – O_{NTA}



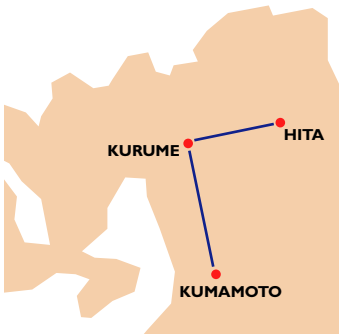
Onda is a tiny mountain hamlet, tucked away on the border of **Oita Prefecture**. Nearly every family makes ceramics for a living. To get here, take an express train from Nagasaki to Tosu (2 hours) and change for another express to Hita (50 minutes), then the bus to Onda (45 minutes), where the stop is actually called Sarayama.

Admirers of folk pottery from the English potter Bernard Leach to Shoji Hamada, a leader of Japan's 20th-century folk art (*mingei*) movement, have visited Onda. This remote village was settled by Korean potters centuries ago, and today's residents still use the old techniques. Clay is pounded by giant, hollowed-out logs that move up and down as water flows in and out of them – an ingenious system that requires no electricity. The resounding thump of these *kara-usu* logs can be heard throughout the village. Travelers who stay overnight in the local minshuku will hear it as they fall asleep; it is the heartbeat of Onda.

About a dozen families live here, alongside a stream in a narrow valley, with mountains rising close behind their houses. Life revolves around potting. When the weather is good, practically every level surface in the village is filled with freshly-thrown pots set out to dry.

Visitors to Onta have a rare opportunity to experience village life firsthand, and to watch potters at work up close.

Day 9 – KUMAMOTO



Kumamoto is home to one of the most splendid castles in Japan, and in feudal times, castle towns attracted large numbers of craftsmen, including potters. To get here, take the bus back to Hita; hop the express train to Kurume; change for the express to Kumamoto (1 hour).

A daimyo and his retinue required a constant supply of handmade items, from articles of daily living to weapons and armor.

Visitors to Kumamoto can see daimyo culture at its best. Start your day in Kumamoto at the castle, a mammoth complex noted for its long, stone walls. The tall donjon that rises over the city is a reconstruction; the original was destroyed in a battle. Inside the donjon, several floors of exhibits tell the story of the local lords and their accomplishments.



Kumamoto Castle

The craftsmanship of the articles on display is exquisite. Notice the workmanship on the boat that carried the daimyo partway to the capital of Edo to see the shogun. Among the ceramics on exhibit are examples of *Shodai-yaki*, best known of the wares that were produced in this fief. *Shodai* ware stands out because of its beautiful rust-red color. This comes not only from the glazes, but also because the local clay is rich in iron.

For a more thorough look at Kumamoto's fine crafts, visit the **Prefectural Traditional Crafts Center**, not far from the castle. In addition to its good collection of ceramics, this museum features another local specialty: damascene ware.

The area around the castle has other museums as well. The **Municipal Museum**, designed by the dynamic architect Kisho Kurokawa, tells the city's colorful history. Also nearby is the **Prefectural Art Museum**. For those with time, the **International Folkcraft Museum** on the outskirts of the city has an excellent collection of ceramics and textiles.



Suizenji Park

Feudal lords in the Edo Period spent more time at peace than at war, and were able to devote attention and money to the aesthetic side of life. The lord of Kumamoto built a beautiful landscape garden, **Suizenji**, that is now a public park. Don't miss it. The design incorporates the famous woodblock print series by Hiroshige, showing the 53 stages of the Tokaido road. The famous way-stations are recreated in miniature in the landscape design, including a mini-Mount Fuji.

Near Suizenji is the kiln of a well-known Shodai-yaki potter, Makoto Chikashige. He decorates and glazes his work in much the same style as the earlier craftsmen who made wares for the daimyo.

Shodai ware by Chikashige and other potters working today is sold at souvenir and craft shops throughout the city, including the shop at **Suizenji Park**. The majority of Shodai kilns are outside the city center, or in other towns.

Day 10 – KAGOSHIMA CITY



An express train from Kumamoto to **Kagoshima** takes 3 1/2 hours. Nicknamed “Naples of the Orient,” Kagoshima is dominated by a live volcano, **Sakurajima**, that towers over the city.

This area at the southern tip of Kyushu was formerly the fief of Satsuma. The Satsuma clan was quite wealthy, and there is much to see in Kagoshima. Since most of the present-day Satsuma kilns are located outside the city, the first day will be spent seeing the sights within Kagoshima.

The lords of Satsuma lived well, and one of their estates, **Sengan-en**, is now a major stop on the Kagoshima tourist circuit. Allow plenty of time for your visit, for there is much to see.

Sengan-en is situated on the shore of Kagoshima Bay, and directly across the water is Sakurajima volcano. The landscape garden built by the daimyo was designed to take advantage of the volcano’s towering cone as part of the central view seen by strollers. For those who don’t want to take a boat across the bay and walk around the lava field, this is the best way to see Sakurajima.

After enjoying the garden, look inside the villa, and then turn your attention to the other buildings on the estate, which now function as museums. The thick-walled **Shoko Shuseikan** was part of a project started by Lord Nariakira a few years before Commodore Perry arrived with his Black Ships and reopened Japan to the outside world in 1853.

This building was the first Western-style factory in Japan, built by a daimyo who realized that times were changing, and he wanted to be ready. The exhibits show the extent of Nariakira’s vision. In this and other buildings, the clan manufactured ships, canons, weapons, glassware, and a myriad of objects designed to ensure Satsuma’s continued supremacy. Another house on the estate was built for an Englishman hired to be an advisor to the clan.

For a broader view of what went on in Satsuma during the 700-year-rule of the Shimazu clan, visit the Kagoshima Prefectural Museum of Culture, the Reimeikan. Located in the center of the city, this is one of the best prefectural museums in Japan. The diverse exhibits include excellent examples of Satsuma ware.

Other good collections of Satsuma ware can be found at the Nagashima Art Museum and the Kodama Art Museum. Satsuma became famous for glassware as well as pottery after Lord Nariakira built his western-style factory, and the ornate Satsuma kiriko glassware is sold in many shops that carry Satsuma pottery.

Most of the outstanding Satsuma ware today is made at kilns outside the city, but for those pressed for time, some manufacturers are located in the city proper. They tend toward mechanized rather than handmade techniques. **Urashima Toge** is one of the better known companies in Kagoshima City. Factory tours are possible.

Day 11 – Kilns outside KAGOSHIMA CITY

Miyama, northwest of the city, is a centuries-old potting community started by the Satsuma lords and staffed by Korean potters. Like other daimyo in Kyushu who went to Korea as part of the 1598 invasion force, the lord of Satsuma desired to produce porcelain in his fief. He returned with Korean potters, set them up with a kiln, and said he would supply whatever materials were necessary to achieve his goal. To be sure that no one bothered his Korean potters, he designated all of them as low-ranking samurai.

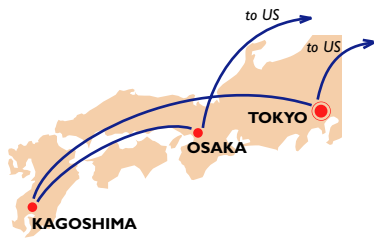
In spite of their best efforts, conditions here were not the same as at Imari, and only a porcelain look-alike could be produced. This is known today as White (**Shiro**) Satsuma. Shiro Satsuma is actually a form of stoneware that has been elegantly painted and decorated with overglaze enamel and gold.

The potters at Miyama created another type of ware sometimes called Black (**Kuro**) Satsuma, but also known as **Naeshirogawa**. This ware is dark, glistening, and strikingly handsome. Collectors of **mingei** (folk art) are particularly fond of Black Satsuma, as are some tea ceremony enthusiasts. In Kagoshima Prefecture, a popular form of Black Satsuma ware is a flattened teapot, often used by bars and restaurants to pour the favorite local drink, **shochu**, distilled from potatoes.

At Miyama today, there are 13 kilns run by descendants of the original Koreans. Both White and Black Satsuma ware is produced. Particularly interesting is the **kiln of Chin Jukan**, the 14th generation of his family to pot here. This family takes credit for being the first to originate White Satsuma ware, and a small museum on the property houses a representative selection of what the Chins have been making for the past 400 years. Several pieces have won prizes here and abroad. **Samejima Sataro** specializes in Black Satsuma, and is highly talented. His works sell so fast that his shelves are often empty. Even if there's nothing to buy, visitors can enjoy looking at his private collection of Naeshirogawa.

Another famous potting community outside of Kagoshima is **Ryumonji**, located in **Kajiki**, a town not far from Kagoshima's airport. The potters at Ryumonji do primarily Black Satsuma, but sometimes experiment with other colors and shapes. This pottery has been in existence for three centuries. When it fell on hard times in the devastation following World War II, the families organized themselves into a collective in order to share expenses. This worked well, and Ryumonji continues to operate as a collective today.

Day 12 – Return Home



Take bus to Kagoshima Airport. Fly to Osaka or Tokyo for flight home.

KYUSHU Pottery Fairs

The pottery fairs of Kyushu are wildly popular. They give potters a chance to sell off excess or slightly damaged inventory, and the public gets a chance to pick up bargains. Fairs are usually held on a weekend that includes a national holiday, so that more people will be free to travel. Arita wares are so popular, and the city has so many potters, that its spring and autumn fairs each draw nearly half a million people. (tel. 0955-42-4111 & 0955-43-2288 for Chawan Festival)

Arita's spring fair, known as the **Arita Ceramics Market**, is held annually during Golden Week, April 29-May 5. Arita's two autumn fairs, the **Autumn Ceramic Festival** and the **Chawan Festival** fall respectively on November 1-3 and November 21-25 coinciding with National Culture Day (November 3) and Labor Thanksgiving Day (November 23). A complete listing of pottery festivals in Kyushu can be found at http://www.e-yakimono.net/html/kyushu_festivals.htm

In addition to the Arita fairs, some of the other more popular Kyushu ceramics markets are:

- **Imari:** Nabeshima Festivals – April 1-5 and November 1-5 (tel. 0955-23-7293)
- **Hasami:** April 29 – May 5 at Yakimono Park (tel. 0956-85-2069)
- **Karatsu:** Held in autumn and spring at Furusato Alpino Hall. The spring fair is usually May 1-5 and the autumn fair usually coincides with the September 15th national holiday. The potters' association (*kumiai*) organizes the fairs and can provide dates each year (tel. 0955-73-4888)
- **Onta:** Folk Pottery Festival, Second weekend in October (tel. 0973-22-8210)
- **Miyama/Naeshirogawa:** 4 days coinciding with the November 3 national holiday (tel. 0973-22-8210)
- **Ryumonji:** Second weekend in December (tel. 0995-62-2111)

Books

Earth 'n Fire, by Amaury St.-Gilles, Shufunotomo Co., Tokyo, 1978
(out of print; check libraries). Most detailed English guide to kilns in Kyushu and throughout Japan.

Zen and the Art of Pottery, Kenneth R. Beittel, Weatherhill, paperback, March 1990

Inside Japanese Ceramics, by Richard L. Wilson, Weatherhill, paperback, June 1999

Japan Crafts Sourcebook: A Guide to Today's Traditional Handmade Objects, Japan Craft Forum, with an introduction by Diane Durston, Kodansha Intl., August 1996

Magazines

Check out back issues of **Ceramics Monthly** and **Studio Potter**. See the special issue of **Studio Potter Magazine**, entitled "Japan and America: Myth and Reality in Ceramics," with guest editors Louise Allison Cort and John Neely, Vol. 21, #1, December 1992

Websites

<http://www.japanesepottery.com> & <http://www.e-yakimono.net>

<http://www.ceramic.or.jp/welcome.html>

(Ceramic Society of Japan)

http://www.arita.or.jp/index_e.html

<http://www.artelino.com/articles/imari.asp>

http://www.jgc.co.jp/waza/bl_pottery/index.htm

(Essays on pottery and porcelain in Japan)

http://www.mingeikan.or.jp/Pages/tokubetu-kyushu_e.html

(Information on an Exhibition of Kyushu pottery held at the Japan Folk Craft Museum in 1998)

Vocabularu useful when visiting a kiln

gama or **kama** : kiln

jiki : porcelain

kanko annaijo : tourist information office or counter

kengaku : the word to use when asking permission to see a workshop or kiln

ko : old, as in Ko-Imari

kyodo kumiai : potters' association

mingei : folk art

noborigama : multi-chambered climbing kiln

sometsuke : blue and white ware

seiji : celadon

toki : earthenware

yaki : ware