



# Takamatsu and Iya Valley Tour

## Takamatsu and Iya Valley: Day 1

Your first evening on Shikoku will be spent in Takamatsu City; a city striving for modernity yet still holding on to the trappings of the Shōwa Era .

Facing the blue waters of the Seto Inland Sea, Takamatsu City boasts some of the freshest seafood in Japan despite its small size, and this evenings dinner will testify to this fact. Dinner will be at a local over the counter sushi bar utilizing the abundance of fresh ingredients available for an authentic Japanese dining experience.



## Takamatsu and Iya Valley: Day 2

After breakfast, you will visit a masterful example of Japanese architecture and gardening at one of Japan's most well-maintained parks, Ritsurin Garden. Maintained and expanded on for some 400 years by the rulers of Takamatsu, this garden contains all that one would expect from a Japanese garden: tea houses, shady pines, seasonal flowers, and green ponds full of happy koi fish.

However, the garden also holds on to some feudal trappings, denoting it as a place of leisure for past rulers. These include ponds and canals used for duck hunting, plants from far away prefectures given as gifts by other feudal lords, and even an artificial waterfall installed for the amusement of one local lord.

After visiting Ritsurin and grabbing lunch, the afternoon will consist of a foray into the 88 Temple Pilgrimage.

Shiromineji (temple 81) rests in the cool shade of mountain slopes and is surrounded by pines and the temple grounds are thick with moss and plant life creeping between the statues and various halls on the temple grounds. According to legend, Kūkai came to this area and buried a Cintamani Stone (a sort of jewel or orb that can grant wishes and prayers as well as open the mind to perfectly understand Buddhist scripture). From this a well sprung up and flowed over the mountains and it is said to continually give its water as supplication to the Buddha on behalf of all suffering beings.

From Shiromineji, you will walk along the old pilgrimage trail that leads to Negoroji (temple 82). The path winds through the mountain hills and has some inclines but is especially beautiful during late fall and the early mild Kagawa winter as the foliage turns from gentle greens to fiery shades of red and orange.

Negoroji stands on a mountain slope and from the bell tower offers a sweeping view of the Seto Sea and the suburbs and farms surrounding Takamatsu City. The lofty pines that cover the hillside constantly keep the temple grounds shaded and the abundant verdant moss covering stone and steps add to the mysterious atmosphere of this temple.

Back in Takamatsu, you will have ample free time to relax and discover a bit of downtown Takamatsu on your own. We encourage you to walk along the shopping arcade and explore the side alleys and streets. You never know what you might find.



## Takamatsu and Iya Valley: Day 3

After breakfast and hotel checkout, you will be visiting Konpira Shrine. Across Japan there are numerous “Konpira” and “Kotohira” Shrines but the one located here is the principal shrine of all of these in Japan.

The god of the shrine is Konpira-Gongen, and he is the god of merchants and sailors. In the past this shrine was the site of a pilgrimage in its own right. Pilgrims would depart from Marugame City and walk to the shrine to pray for mercantile success and safety on the seas. To this day one can see the port where pilgrims arrived in Marugame City.

Located at the end of some 785 steps, the shrine overlooks the sweeping rustic vistas of Kagawa’s countryside. The stairway too is lined with all manner of shops and stands selling everything from charms, pilgrimage gear, souvenirs, and even udon flavored ice-cream. The stairway spectacle truly makes the visit to this shrine.

After lunch, you will have a chance to step back in time by visiting the Konpira Grand Theater.

This kabuki theater is the oldest in Japan having been founded in 1835 and still retains some old-fashioned features, including a manually powered trapdoor that raises performers from underneath the stage.

The day will end with transportation to a meticulously restored collection of traditional Japanese mountain homes. Here in the remoteness of the Iya Valley you can experience firsthand the fulness of traditional rustic life.

After years of restoration, these homes recapture traditional mountain living in Japan while maintaining modern features without upsetting the experience. Your meal this evening will also be in traditional Iya style, as it will be prepared by the few remaining local “aunties” that still call the area home.



## Takamatsu and Iya Valley: Day 4

Due to the remote location, breakfast this morning will be self-prepared. On the previous day we will make a stop at a local shop or market so that you can purchase groceries. After this bit of self-service, the day will be spent exploring the Iya Valley.

First, you will visit the Kazurabashi vine bridge. According to local tales, the bridges were built by the defeated soldiers of the Taira clan after their defeat in Japan's earliest civil conflict, the Genpei War. The bridges were made of vines so they could easily be cut just in case the soldiers were pursued by their foe. Also, according to local tales, the nearby waterfall was a gathering place for the soldiers to lament their defeat with tales and songs of their old villages and homes.

This is not the only tragedy that has unfolded in this scenic valley. More recently, large concrete parking garages and other structures have been built in an effort to promote tourism. In addition to interrupting the scenic beauty of the area, these buildings also threaten the sensitive ecosystems of the valley and are evidence of good intentions having unintended consequences. Definitely food for thought along this journey.

The rest of your time in Iya Valley will be spent making soba for lunch under the caring eyes of local "aunties" as well as a visit to the "Scarecrow Village."

Practically abandoned, save for the scarecrows and their creator, this village is exactly what its name implies: a village inhabited by scarecrows designed to resemble old friends and neighbors that at one time inhabited this village. While charming and quirky, this village is nonetheless bitter-sweet and calls attention to the population issues that rural Japan faces.

This thought-provoking day will end once more in Takamatsu City. For the evening we once more encourage you to set out and explore the downtown streets for yourself.



## Takamatsu and Iya Valley: Day 5

After breakfast, today will be spent in Tokushima.

The first stop is Udatsu, a preserved block of traditional style homes that stand as a testament to this area's former status and wealth.

In the past, Tokushima was well renowned for producing indigo or export all over Japan to be made into dye. As modernity crept in however, this prosperity slowly dwindled leaving behind only traditions and structures.

In addition to learning about the process and importance of the indigo harvest to this region, you will also have a chance to try your hand at indigo dyeing. Though not originally known for the dyeing itself, Tokushima now has several workshops that offer the art as a trial experience.

Here you can dye your own handkerchief the old-fashioned way and come away with a one of kind souvenir that is rich in history, culture, and tradition.

After your foray into the rustic past, it is back to Takamatsu for your last night on the town.



## Takamatsu and Iya Valley: Day 6

After check out you will be brought to Takamatsu Station where you can embark towards the next leg of your journey.

Aboard the Marine Liner, with the azure waters of the Seto Sea rushing past we hope that you will remember what you've accomplished over the past five days.

You've come face to face with the rich traditions and past of this small island called Shikoku, seen the sights, walked part of the pilgrimage, and interacted with the locals.

You've also seen the state of the island and how modernity, for better or for worse, affects this small corner of Japan. We hope that the time here has been thought-provoking as well as enjoyable.

We hope that you will have a better perspective on why so many of us think this island is so interesting, absurd, unique and everything in between.

