

# FIVE REMARKABLE AND LESS KNOWN ISLANDS TO VISIT IN JAPAN



Japan is often associated with the modernity of its large cities, the traditions preserved in its temples, and the natural landscapes of its four great islands. However, the Japanese archipelago holds a multitude of island formations, many of them protecting an almost pristine nature, with landscapes that range from beaches that reminiscent those of the Caribbean, to lush and humid forests.

Some of the islands to visit in Japan are adorned for lush forests, while others seem to mimic the tropical paradise of the French Polynesian beaches. One thing holds true though... Traditions, nature and wild beauty can all be found in the islands that are worth exploring.

## Zamami

Kerama is one of the formations of the Okinawa archipelago in southern Japan, made up of 22 islands of which only 4 are inhabited. One of these islands is Zamami, where less than 1,000 people live. Its coastal geography resembles that of French Polynesia, with white sands and a sea of such vivid color that gives it its nickname of 'Kerama Blue'. In some of its beaches, such as Furuzamami, the rich marine fauna brings together those passionate about diving and those who go whale watching.

## Iriomote

This island is one of the most remote ones in the Okinawa archipelago. In fact, it is much closer to the coast of Taiwan than to the great islands of Japan. Iriomote Island is located in one of the rural parts of the country, with most of its surface covered by dense and humid mountain forests.

On the beach of Hoshuzina there are remains of protists called foraminifera, which are small yellow star-shaped creatures. When looked at closely, you can find star-shaped sand grains left by millions of tiny foraminifera remains.

Iriomote can be traveled by hiking, though not without difficulty, where waterfalls can be discovered; or by crossing the island's mangroves on a kayak. Lastly, just around the corner, you can find Yubu Island, separated by just a stretch of sand that can be crossed in a cart pulled by water buffalo, as hundreds of years ago.

## Tanegashima

At the western end of the Ōsumi Islands, in the extreme south of the country, there's an island that has become a hotspot for lovers of aerospace exploration.

The headquarters of the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency can be found in Tanegashima, where rockets with satellites are launched into outer space, almost like a spectacle for the eyes as the

flares reflect on the East China Sea.

The first firearm made in Japan was named after Tanegashima, and it was inspired by the arquebus (a long gun) that the Portuguese accidentally brought to the island's lord in the 15th century.

The west coast of the island has 12 kilometers of beaches. The one in Nagahama, famous for its white sands, has a Polynesian aesthetic where sea turtles nest. On the other side, to the east, one can find Kumano Beach and the Chikura Cavern, both recommended places to visit when the tide goes down.

## **Tsushima**

To the north of Nagasaki, halfway between the Korean peninsula and Japan, one can find Tsushima Island: a nature sanctuary that still preserves 90% of its vast forest territory.

This island is home of the Tsushima leopard cat, one of the most endangered species, and its fauna and flora can be seen in the Wildlife Conservation Center located in Saozaki Park.

The island has earned a reputation for its robuke noodles (made of sweet potatoes), and any videogame enthusiast will recognize its landscapes as they have been used as the setting for Ghost of Tsushima, released for Playstation this summer.

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