

Ise-Shima & Kumano

Easily accessible from Nagoya and Osaka, the Ise-Shima Peninsula provides an exciting detour from Japan's tourism hotspots. This often-overlooked region houses some of the country's oldest Shinto shrines, while also offering beautiful coastal scenery to explore and a number of culinary delights! Our 4-day journey into Ise-Shima can be easily integrated into a longer tour of Japan.



Day 1 – Ise Jingu (-)

Depart Nagoya this morning on the local train bound for Ise, a journey of approx. 90 minutes.

Situated on the Shima Peninsula in Japan's central Mie prefecture, Ise is a small coastal city best known for housing the *Ise Jingu*, the most sacred religious complex in Japan. The Ise Jingu, or the Grand Shrine of Ise, is not in fact a single shrine but rather a collection of over 100 shrines, of which the oldest are believed to date back to the 3rd century. Collectively, they are considered Japan's most important place of Shinto worship and pilgrimage.

After arriving in Ise and checking into your hotel, we recommend beginning your tour with a visit to the inner shrine of Ise, or the *Naiku*, which is located on the outskirts of the city and easily accessed by bus or taxi. The approach to the inner shrine begins at the Uji Bridge, an 100m long wooden bridge that crosses the Isuzugawa River. From here, the path climbs through serene forest and past several smaller shrines to eventually arrive at the main sanctuary.

The Naiku is the oldest and most important of the Ise shrines, serving as a place of worship for the sun goddess Amaterasu, Japan's supreme deity. This age and prominence might not be immediately apparent at first glance, however. In keeping with Japanese religious traditions, the Ise Jingu are



decidedly unostentatious in design, a collection of sparsely decorated and largely unadorned timber shrines enclosed within dense forests of Japanese cypress trees, and the inner shrine is no exception. Much of the drama of a visit to the Naiku is in the approach and in its serene setting. The first-time visitor may also be struck by how new and unweathered the shrine structures appear. This is because the Ise shrines are dismantled and rebuilt every 20 years in what is a centuries-old Shinto custom – a process that even extends to the Uji Bridge. Not all of the Ise shrine buildings undergo this process of renewal, however, and many of the secondary shrines located on the periphery of the inner shrine more clearly show their age.

After exploring the inner shrine, you may like to enjoy a stroll through *Oharaimachi*. Located at the foot of the inner shrine, this shopping and temple district serves as its main approach and is lined with buildings that recall Japan's Edo era. Here you can shop for souvenirs and sample local specialties

such as Ise-style Udon noodles and colourful mochi sweets, or rice cakes.

If you are keen to continue your exploration of the Ise shrines, a visit can also be made to the Sarutahiko Shrine, located just beyond Oharaimachi's old shopping district. Ise's outer shrine, or *Geku*, is found closer to the city centre and can be visited on the way back to your hotel. Located within easy walking distance of Ise-shi Station, the outer shrine sits within a forest of tall cypress trees, accessed by a similar approach to the inner shrine. Near the entrance to the outer shrine is the Sengukan Museum, where you can learn about the process of reconstruction that the Ise shrines undergo every 20 years.

Dining in Ise City

The Ise-Shima region is known for its food culture, and Ise city is at the heart of many of its culinary traditions! This evening, we recommend sampling one of the region's signature local dishes, such as spiny lobster (often referred to simply as "Ise lobster" in Japan on account of its association with the Ise region), Ise clams, or Ise-style Udon noodles, which are served in a rich soy sauce. Another local specialty is tekonezushi, a variety of sushi served in a vinegar marinade.

Day 2: Ago Bay Cruise and Ise-Shima Cycling Tour (B, L)

After its shrines, Ise-Shima's greatest attraction is undoubtedly its beautiful coastline, which will be the focal point of today's tour, as you enjoy a cruise on Ago Bay followed by a guided bicycle tour on the Sakishima Peninsula.

From Ise, take the train to Kashikojima, where you will be met and escorted to the cruise liner that will take you across Ago Bay. The half-hour cruise on Ago Bay offers lovely views of the bay and its many densely forested islands. During the cruise, you are also sure to spot many pearl rafts, signs of this traditional and still-thriving industry, for Ago Bay is at the centre of Japanese pearl cultivation. With luck, you may arrive at your destination, Wagu Port, in time to see the morning's catch of seafood being unloaded at Wagu Bay.



On disembarking at Wagu Port, you'll begin your bicycle tour, exploring the Sakishima Peninsula at a relaxed pace and in the company of an experienced biking guide, while taking in local highlights including the Pearl Bridge, Azuma Beach and Mugisaki Lighthouse. This is also a chance to enjoy the views of the Pacific Ocean and the many small communities that populate the peninsula and support its fishing and pearl cultivation industries. (Please note that the bicycle tour is shared and you are likely to be joined by other guests).

During the bike ride, you'll also have the opportunity to visit an Ama Diver's hut, where you can learn more about Japan's famous pearl divers while enjoying a lunch of barbecued seafood.

The ama are female divers whose history and traditions are thought to date back as far as 2,000 years, making their practice at least as old as the Ise

Jingu shrines. Though often described as pearl divers, the ama have traditionally dived for seafood and in particular abalone, a prized offering at Shinto shrines, including the Ise Jingu. The lunch will be served in a traditional Ama divers hut and is a chance to learn more about their way of life and to interact with some of the divers.

Your bicycle tour ends at Wagu Port, from where you make the return journey back across Ago Bay to Kashikojima and then by train to Ise.



Day 3: Kumano City (B)

Check out of your hotel in Ise after breakfast and travel by train to Kumano city. This is a journey of approx. 2 hours, with a change of train in Matsusaka. You'll make most of the journey on the Wide View Nanki, whose broad windows will allow you to enjoy the fabulous coastal views as you approach Kumano (we suggest sitting on the left!)

On arrival in Kumano, we recommend hiring a bicycle from Kumano Station and cycling the short distance (approx. 3km) to the Onigajo Rocks, an impressive coastal rock wall that extends for over 1



kilometre around a prominent cape. A walking trail leads around the rocks and cape, offering lovely views of the Pacific Ocean and Shichiri-mihama beach. This track also forms part of a scenic coastal hiking route centred on the Matsumoto-Toge Pass, itself a section of the broader Kumano Kodo trail, Japan's most famous pilgrimage trail. Parking your bike at the nearby Onigajo Centre, you can explore the walking trail around the rocks and, if you choose, carry on to the top of the Matsumoto-Toge Pass, before returning to the Onigajo Centre to collect your bike and perhaps enjoy a break for lunch.

In the afternoon, you may like to carry on exploring Kumano city and its coastline by bike. Continuing west along the coast from Onigajo, and following the course of Shichiri-mihama beach, you can enjoy pleasant views of the sea while stopping at local landmarks including Shishiiwa, or "Lion's Rock", and Hananoiwaya Shrine,

believed to be one of the oldest Shinto shrines in Japan.

When ready, return your bike to Kumano Sta. and make your way back to your hotel within Kumano city.

Day 4: Nachi Taisha; train to Osaka (B)

Your journey ends today in Osaka, which is accessible by train from Kumano. En route to Osaka, we recommend making a detour to visit one of the Kumano region's – and by extension Japan's – most beautiful shrines, Nachi Taisha.

Located in the Kii Mountains, Nachi Taisha is one of the three Kumano Sanzan shrines, the main points of worship on the famous Kumano Kodo pilgrimage route. Of the three Kumano shrines, Nachi Taisha enjoys perhaps the most dramatic location, nestled deep within the Kii Mountains and overlooking a spectacular waterfall. The sight of the shrine's three-storied pagoda set against the backdrop of the Nachi Falls is one of Japan's most famous landscape scenes, and one you'll likely recognise from the tourist literature!

To access Nachi Taisha, take the local train from Kumano to Kii-Katsuura, from where you can catch the bus to Nachi Shrine (approx. 30 mins). If preferred, you can also hop off the bus at "Daimonzaka", from where you can enjoy a short hike along a scenic section of the famous Kumano Kodo pilgrimage trail to arrive at the shrine (do note that this involves lots of steps.)



You'll want to allow 1-2 hours to explore the shrine and the surrounding forest trails. Be sure to snap a photo of the Seigantoji temple against the backdrop of the Nachi Falls. When ready, return to Kii-Katsuura by bus and continue the rest of the way to Osaka by train (approx. 3½ hours).

Your tour of Ise-Shima & Kumano ends in Osaka, but this is unlikely to be the end of your journey in Japan. We can help with your onward travel arrangements if required, and with ideas for how to incorporate Ise-Shima & Kumano into a longer tour of Japan.

Price Guide:

The cost of this itinerary is from **£720 per person**, based on two travellers in shared twin/double accommodation and mid-range hotels (superior hotels available from **£1,090pp**). This cost is inclusive of rail fares – if travelling with a JR Pass as part of a longer tour of Japan, the cost of this itinerary starts from **£625pp**.

For more information, or if you would like to enquire about a tailor-made holiday combining part or all of the above itinerary, please [contact us](#).

Includes:

- Twin/double accommodation with breakfast
- Meals as outlined in itinerary
- Ago Bay cruise, cycling tour, and Ama Hut experience with English-speaking guide (day 2)
- Long-distance train fares (Matsusaka – Kumanoshi; Kii-Katsuura – Shin-Osaka)
- A prepaid Suica card is provided to cover local rail fares

Excludes:

- International flights – please ask us for a quote
- Visas
- Personal travel insurance
- Personal expenses and tips
- Supplementary travel expenses and entrance fees during self-guided days
- Lunch and dinner to own account unless stated otherwise in itinerary

Photo credits

The photo of the Ise shrines (page 2) is courtesy of Jingushicho; the photos of Pearl Bridge and the Ama Divers Hut (page 3) are courtesy of Bicycle Journey Ise-Shima; the photo of Lion's Rock (page 4) is courtesy of the Kumano Tourist Office.

Suggested accommodations

<i>Mid-range (3-star equivalent)</i>			
Location	Hotel	Hotel Category	Room
Ise City	Ise Pearl Pier Hotel	Mid-range	Standard twin/double
Kumano City	Seiryuso	Mid-range	Japanese Room (Futon) <i>or</i> Western-style (twin/double)

<i>Superior (4-star equivalent)</i>			
Location	Hotel	Hotel Category	Room
Ise City	Mie VISON	Superior	Standard twin/double
Kumano City	Kumano Club	Deluxe	Superior Suite



New for 2021/22 – Mie VISON

Mie VISON, Japan's largest commercial resort village, opened summer 2021 in Taki Town, located just outside of Ise city and in the centre of Mie prefecture. At the heart of the resort is the Hotel VISON, an 155-room hotel that offers an assortment of facilities and easy access to the shrines of Ise, Ise-Shima National Park, and the beautiful Ago Bay. VISON's 155 rooms are split across four main buildings, or hatago, each with its own theme and design sensibility, ranging from Spanish modernism to Nordic minimalism.