

●

07 Kagoshima

Japan

●

Preface

It's not just its proximity to an active volcano that means Kagoshima in southern Japan is often referred to as the Japanese Naples. Like its Italian counterpart, there's also great food, a strong culture of local traditions and an enjoyable climate too. Add to this the surrounding region of Kyushu's highly developed transport system and you have a well-connected city with the feel of a small-town escape.

●

Few cities can match Kagoshima for location. Tucked away at the southern end of the island of Kyushu, this tight-knit metropolis of 600,000 hugs Kinko Bay, directly facing Sakurajima, one of the most active volcanoes in the world. It's a spectacular vista and, like many things about Kagoshima, deserves to be better known.

With its balmy climate, blue waters and proximity to a simmering volcano, Kagoshima is frequently touted as a Japanese Naples. Add in the distinctive cuisine, the unpretentious residents and a sun-bleached quality that gives summer afternoons a quiet, almost lethargic atmosphere and it's not a far-fetched comparison. Though Sakurajima hasn't exploded with any serious force since 1914, it grumbles away relentlessly. Ferries ply the route between the volcano and the city in a breezy 15 minutes.

Food plays a big part in the life of Kagoshima, where local delicacies run from *kibinago*, a small silvery herring served as sashimi, to *karukan*, a sweet rice cake. The city also has its own style of ramen noodles served with a thick, vinegary broth and a slab of soft pork. The roasters at Voila Coffee are sending their beans all over Japan, while Chojiya has been making its rich soy sauce since 1735. Its shochu breweries are unrivalled.

Kagoshima has a strong sense of its own identity, combining the friendliness of a small town with the vibrancy of a bigger city. In the bustling Tenmonkan commercial district, young people are opening their own studios, shops and bakeries.

Even to the rest of Japan, Kagoshima is a revelation. Now linked to the regional capital Fukuoka by bullet train, you can't help but hope that connectivity doesn't dilute the charm of this little-known city. — (M)

Why it works:

- 01 Mountains, beaches and hot springs are all within easy reach.
- 02 Speedy access to Fukuoka by bullet train and less than two hours by plane to Tokyo.
- 03 With its warm climate, relaxed pace and compact size this distinctive *inaka* (country city) has quality of life in abundance.
- 04 Good food and fresh produce, from the waterside fish market to family run establishments serving regional dishes.
- 05 A thriving craft industry that includes contemporary woodcraft at Crate and a Satsuma pottery tradition dating back 400 years at the Chin Jukan kiln.

