

Things to see and do in Kumamoto

Kumamoto Castle (熊本城) – One of the top 3 castles in Japan, this is a must-see for anyone in downtown Kumamoto.

Although you cannot enter the castle due to damage from the 2016 earthquakes, it's still impressive to see from the adjacent park. <http://kumamoto-guide.jp/kumamoto-castle/>

Suizenji Park (水前寺公園) – Another must-see in Kumamoto city, Suizenji Park is a traditional Japanese garden. It has a lot of koi fish and a miniature representation of Mt. Fuji.

<https://kumamoto-guide.jp/en/spots/detail/75>

Aso Milk Farm (阿蘇ミルク牧場) - The milk farm celebrates

Aso's famous red cows with interactive cow milking, animal petting, pig races and of course a shop selling local products including one of the best soft creams around! <http://aso-milk.jp/>

Aso Caldera (阿蘇山) - Only recently reopened and subject to gas levels, gaze into the mouth of Kumamoto's most active volcano. Find up to date access information here: <http://www.aso.ne.jp/~volcano/eng/>

Kuju Mountain Range and Flower Park (九重連山/九重花公園) – Stretching from Aso into Oita prefecture, this mountain range is hiking heaven! There are many different peaks, including the highest on Kyushu. There are also many onsen nestled in the range. The flower park boasts many varieties which change with the seasons.

<http://www.explore-kumamoto.com/kuju/>

Shirakawa Source (白川水源) – That big river that runs through Kumamoto City? This is its source! Watch the water literally bubbling from the ground and bring a bottle to take some home with you!

<https://www.minamiasokanko.jp/suigen-list/shirakawa-suigen.html>

Soba Dojo Minami Aso (そば道場) - Make and eat your own soba noodles with the help of professional old ladies.

<http://www.aso-kugino.jp/sobadojyo.html>

Kurokawa Onsen (黒川温泉) – There are many great onsen in Kumamoto, but Kurokawa is undoubtedly the best. It is a natural hot spring town surrounded by nature with 24 onsen which have a range of water types. You can buy a pass for ¥1300 which gives you access to 3 onsen of your choice (and is valid for 6 months after stamping!) or pay ¥500 per onsen. Staying at a ryokan here is highly recommended.

https://www.kurokawaonsen.or.jp/eng_new/

Yachiyoza theatre in Yamaga (八千代座) – The first Kabuki theatre in Kyushu, it displays original advertising boards on its ceiling. You can visit the theatre to look around as well as see a variety of performances, including Kabuki featuring famous actor Bando Tamasaburo. <https://www.yachiyoza.com/english.html>

Kikuchi Gorge (菊池渓谷) – This gorge in the middle of a forest has only recently reopened after earthquake

damage. The river is cool all year round and has many short waterfalls. A great place for walking, swimming or taking photographs. <http://www.kikuchikanko.ne.jp/>

Kikuchi Castle Ruins (鞠智城) – The archaeological site of a 1,300 year old hill fort with some recreated buildings.

There is also an information centre with subtitled movie. <http://www.kofunkan.pref.kumamoto.jp/kikuchijo/>

Motor Sports in Ozu (大津のモータースポーツ) – You can try dirt biking at the Honda factory in Ozu Town! Call up and make a reservation at Honda Safety and Riding Plaza Kyushu. They will provide all the gear you need to enjoy! <http://www.hsr.jp/>

Greenland (グリーンランド) – An amusement park in Arao, it offers something for just about everyone. At ¥1,600 entrance fee for adults, it's a bargain for a fun day out. Be careful though as the opening hours are a little short and it can get pretty busy on weekends and public holidays. <http://www.greenland.co.jp/park/>



Forest Adventure Misato (フォレストアドベンチャー) – Ropes course and zip lining set in a cedar forest, this activity is fun for everyone, not just kids! Enjoy climbing and swinging through the beautiful scenery while safely harnessed up. <http://fa-misato.foret-aventure.jp/eng/>

3,333 steps (日本一の石段) – The number one stone stairway in Japan, you can climb this 2km feat any day of the year. There is an annual festival in November to see who can climb it the fastest, but attending just for fun is also encouraged! <https://kumanago.jp/en/spots/detail/43000000299.html>

Aeon Mall Kumamoto (イオンモール熊本公式) – Shops, restaurants, onsen, cinema, Aeon mall has it all! Shops include Uniqlo, H&M, GU, Sanrio, Starbucks and many, many more. <http://kumamoto-aeonmall.com/>

Suntory Beer Factory (サントリー九州熊本工場) – If you take the guided tour of the factory, you are rewarded with 15 minutes of free drink testing! Making a reservation and taking the bus is recommended! <https://www.suntory.co.jp/factory/kyushu-kumamoto/>

Dolphin watching (イルカウォッチング) – A pod of around 200 wild dolphins live in the Ariake Sea between Amakusa and Nagasaki. There are boat tours in both Kamiamakusa and Itsuwa where sightings are almost guaranteed. Reservation is required beforehand and check for cancellations in case of extreme weather. <https://www.seacruise.jp/cruise/english>

Roller Luge and Zorbing (ローラーリュージュ, ゴーブ) – Visit Ashikita to jet down a concrete course on a sled, then roll down a large hill in an inflated ball. Health and safety not included. http://www.ajkj.jp/ajkj/kumamoto/ashikita/kanko/kaihin_kouen/kaihin_kouen.html

Kuma River Rafting (ラフティング) – There are several companies in Hitoyoshi that operate rafting tours down the Kuma River. Companies generally operate from April to October but may change due to weather conditions. Reservation in advance is advised. <http://www.landearth.co.jp/en/>

Aoi Aso Shrine (青井阿蘇神社) – This shrine in Hitoyoshi is designated as a National Treasure of Japan, one of only two such shrines in Kyushu! <https://kumanago.jp/en/spots/detail/430000000822.html>

SL Hitoyoshi (SL 人吉) – A steam train that runs along the Kuma River once a day from Kumamoto Station to Hitoyoshi station and back. Reservation is necessary in advance. <https://www.jrkyushu.co.jp/english/train/sl.html>

Festivals

Hinokuni Festival (2018.8.3 – 5) – Dancers fill the main streets of Kumamoto. The Prefectural BoE usually takes part so volunteer if you can next year!

Yamaga Lantern Festival (2018.8.15 – 16) – Decorative Lanterns line the streets and women dance with lanterns on their heads.

Hassaku Festival (2018.9.1-2) – A festival dating back over 200 years in Yamato Town. It features floats made from branches and grasses. There is also a fireworks display.

Ezuko Fireworks Festival (2018.10.14) – Fireworks show at Ezuko Lake, south of Kumamoto City.

Yatsushiro Fireworks Festival (end of October) – A huge fireworks festival in Yatsushiro where 31 famous (?) pyro technicians compete through displays of skilled fireworks.

Yatsushiro Myoken Festival (2018.11.22 – 23) – One of the 3 great festivals in Kyushu, there is a big parade including horses.

Aso Fire Festival (2019.3.17) – See the kanji for “fire” burned onto the hillside. Also a unique opportunity to swing flaming bales of hay around your head for fun!

Mizukami Hanami Festival (end of March) – People come from all over Kyushu to see the cherry blossoms by Ichifusa Dam in Mizukami.

Most towns will also hold their own local festivals in the summer. Ask around and look for posters to find out when yours is! You can also find out about great local events from co-workers and friends!