

Travel Guide of Scenic Byway Kyushu

Q-9 Aso・Kumamoto Scenic Roads

Cities of Aso and Kumamoto; Towns of Kikuyou, Ozu, Minamioguni, Oguni and Takamori; Villages of Ubuyama, MinamiAso and Nishihara (Kumamoto Prefecture)--Aso Volcano and Caldera, Higo-Kaido Road, and Kumamoto Castle Town--

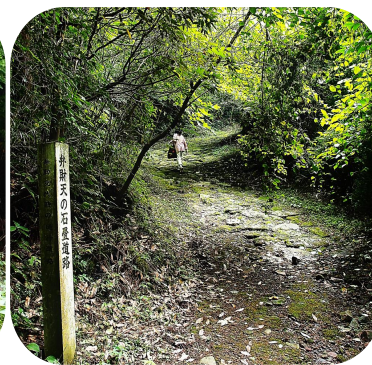
As shown in the photo (5) on page 2, Aso Volcano is located in the center of Kyushu, and consist of world-famous large caldera, scenic outer ring mountains, and five central volcanic hills. It is a representative landscape of Kyushu, and is the largest resource of the Aso/Kumamoto Scenic Road.

Roughly speaking, this landscape area is divided into 3 blocks: Ubuyama Village & Oguni Town, Aso Volcano Area, and Kumamoto Castle Town.

In the Edo period, the Bungo-kaido road linking Kumamoto City and Oita City was established, and the total length was 124 km via Aso City and Takeda City. In its heyday, there were seven lodging towns along the road. Even today, some of the villages in the mountainous area

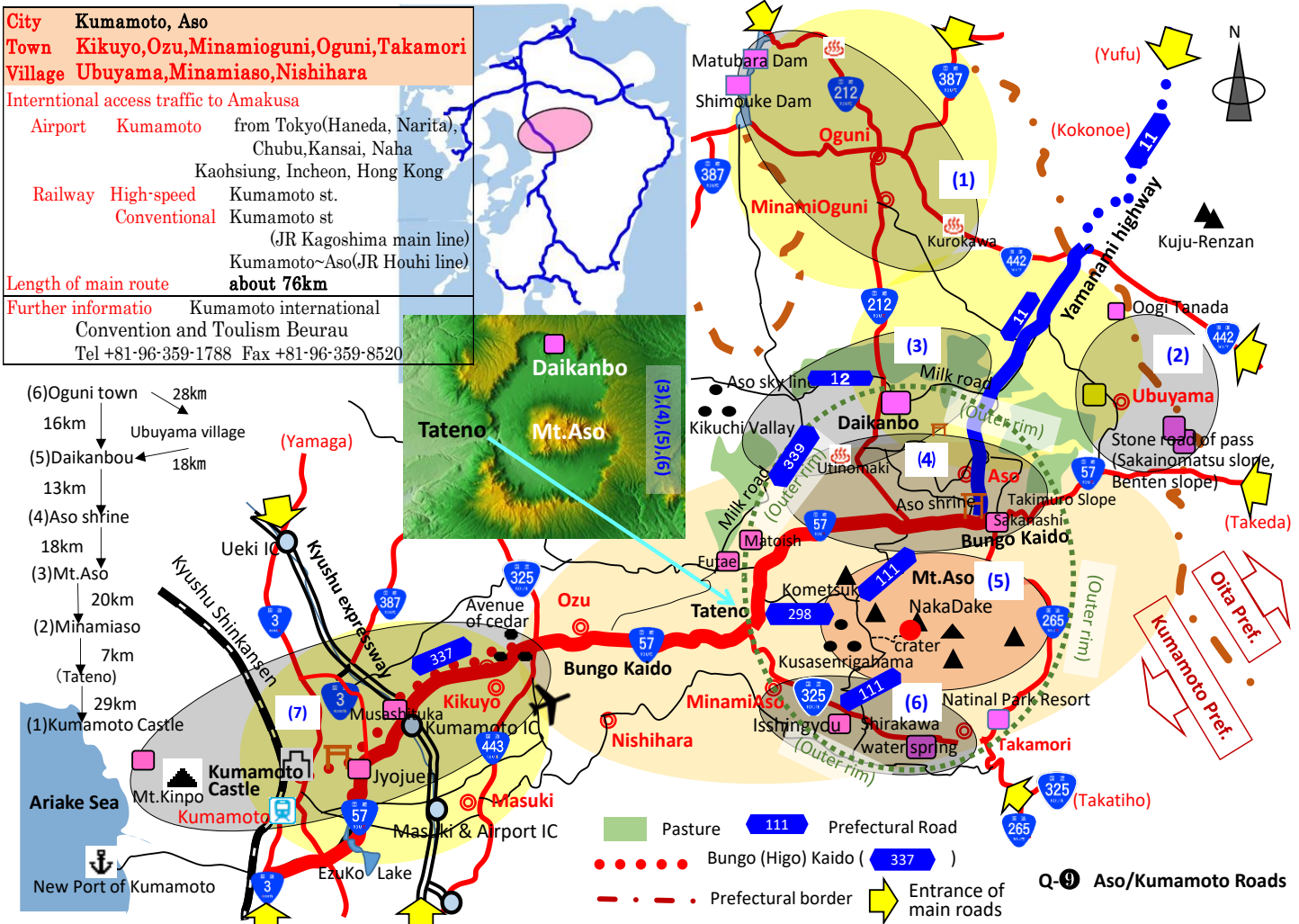
of Aso Kuju National Park remain their atmosphere, and their heritage can be seen.

(Main Route). The main roads in this landscape area are Bungo-kaido Road, National Route 57 and Yamanami-Highway. Among them, Bungo-kaido is a historic road, but it is now converted to the National Route 57. So, these new and old routes overlap or are parallel in some sections.



(2) A cobble stone road in Ubuyam Village that remains as it was, and echinops setifer at Higotai-Park

City	Kumamoto, Aso	
Town	Kikuyo, Ozu, Minamioguni, Oguni, Takamori	
Village	Ubuyama, Minamiaso, Nishihara	
International access traffic to Amakusa		
Airport	Kumamoto	from Tokyo (Haneda, Narita), Chubu, Kansai, Naha, Kaohsiung, Incheon, Hong Kong
Railway	High-speed	Kumamoto st.
	Conventional	Kumamoto st. (JR Kagoshima main line) Kumamoto~Aso (JR Houhi line)
Length of main route	about 76km	
Further informatio	Kumamoto international Convention and Toulism Beurau Tel +81-96-359-1788 Fax +81-96-359-8520	



Yamanami Highway is the prefectural road 11 built as a tourist road in 1964, and part of it is a scenic route (blue thick line in the figure). However, this area is adjacent to the scenic route (Q-8) of The "Yamanami Highland Parkway". Because of this, many travelers may follow their route back and forth.

When using public transportation, there are highway buses and sightseeing buses from Kumamoto City to Aso, or the Hōhi Line that connects Kumamoto and Aso.

(Access). The access point to the "Aso/Kumamoto Scenic Route" is Kumamoto Airport. There are 6 courses between Kumamoto Airport and major domestic airports, with a flight to Amakusa Airport. In addition, there are three international routes to Kaohsiung, Incheon and Hong Kong.

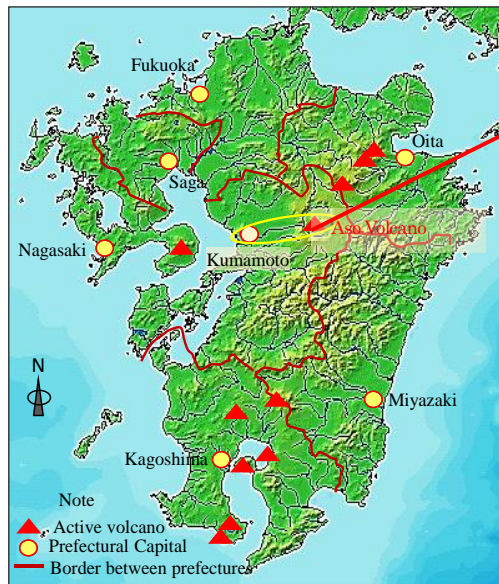
On the other hand, Kumamoto Station is located in Kumamoto City, and it takes about one hour to Hakata Station, Fukuoka Airport or Kagoshima Chuo Station. Kumamoto Station is connected not only to the Kyushu Shinkansen, but also to the Kagoshima Main Line, Hōhi Line, and Misumi Line, and high-speed buses and long-distance buses. Given these facts, Fukuoka Airport and Kumamoto Station are also access points to this scenic route.

(Regional Resources). The main resources of the scenic route area are Aso Volcano, historical sites on Higo-Kaido Road, and Kumamoto Castle Town.

a) Aso Volcano.

The caldera diameter of Aso volcano is 18 km east-west, 25 km south-north, and outer ring length 128 km. The volcanic crater zone consists of four massive eruptions dating from 47,000 to 40,000 years ago, with pyroclastic flow deposits spreading outside the ring area.

The volcano in the center of the caldera consists of five mountains lined up almost linearly from east to west, with an altitude of 1000-1600m. Volcanic smoke is rising from the Nakadake crater. These volcanic areas are registered as "Aso / Kuju National Park", and "Global Geopark".



Aso Volcano located in the central part of Kyushu Main Island.

Rural landscape spreading to the caldera and 5 volcanos in the Central crater hill.

(5) Aso Volcano in the Aso area of Kumamoto Prefecture.



Current Crater in Nakadake of Aso



(1) Kurokawa Spa which is one of the most popular nationwide. (Minami Oguni Town).

b) Bungo-Kaido Road.

In the 17th century, the Bungo kaido from Kumamoto to Oita was constructed for "Sankinkotai", which was a working system of the Daimyo to go to Edo every other year. Therefore, the lord of the Kumamoto clan and his servants walked along the Bungo-kaido, then moved by boat from Oita to Osaka Port, and walked along the Tokaido again.

Bungo-kaido of 124 km had many post-inn towns such as Otsu and Uchinomaki. Trees were also planted every 4 km to mark distance. The biggest obstacle of the Bungo-kaido is the steep slope of mountains in the outer ring. When it rained, the road surface became muddy with volcanic ash, and made difficult to walk. Because of it, some ridge and steep slope were paved with stone.

Walking along the cobbled Bungo Kaido, you'll find stone bridges, drainage channel, or old shrine, which will remind past towns and villages (see photos (2) and (4)).

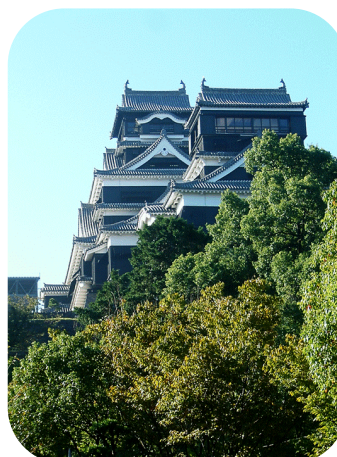
c) Kumamoto Castle and its Town.

If you look closely at the outer ring of the caldera, you can see that the outer ring is missing in the Tateno area (west side), and the Shirakawa River flows from the outer ring toward the Ariake Sea. Taking advantage of this terrain, National Route 57 runs along the Shirakawa and continues to Kumamoto Castle in Kumamoto City. After passing Oozu-cho Town on the way, it is divided into a bypass and Prefectural Road 377, the latter taking over the old road.

The left bank of Shirakawa River is flat and the right bank is hilly.



(7) Urban Area of Kumamoto City and Kumamoto Castle





(3) "Daikanbo" in Outer Rim (Mount for observatory, 936m in altitude)



(4) Aso Jinja Shrine and the Parade of Shinto Ritual. (Aso City, Kumamoto).



(4) Stone Road at Futae Peak on Bungo Kaido



(4) Trace of Matoishi's tea house



(6) Shirakawa's water spring

Therefore, Kumamoto Castle was built on the hill on the right bank. The old castle was built in the Middle Ages but was replaced by a large castle in the 17th century.

In particular, Kato Kiyomasa, the first castle lord in the Edo period, was a warlord who experienced many wars during the Warring States period. For this reason, Kumamoto Castle was built with special attention to defense. There were many innovations, such as high arched stone walls, intricate alleys, key-shaped intersections, plazas for gathering soldiers, and the arrangements of temples. In fact, the Satsuma Rebellion (War of West & South) at the end of 19th century failed to occupy the castle, despite the many buildings burning. It is seen that the entire town of Kumamoto was a fortified city.

(1) Healing area of Oguni & Minami-Oguni

The Oguni & Minami-Oguni area, a healing place surrounded by lush forests, is the source of the Chikugo River, the largest river in Kyushu. If going to Oguni Town along National Route 442 and 387, you can heal your body in the rustic hot springs here and there.

There are two dams in this area, Shimouke Dam and Matsubara Dam, but there have been strong opposition from local people for a long time during the construction. As a result, it has had a major impact on the way we guarantee the development of Japan's social capital and environmental considerations.

On the north side of Aso Volcano, Minami-Oguni Town extends to the outer rim and is full of highland vegetables, livestock and forestry. Also, there are Japanese-style of hot springs such as Kurokawa Onsen along the stream, and Senomoto Kogen Plateau, at an altitude of about 900m is a vast highland on the Kuju mountain range with the autumn leaves and the ears of Susuki (Japanese pampas).

(2) Ubuyama Village

Ubuyama Village is a typical mountain village sandwiched between the Yamanami-highway and Bungo-kaido Road. The village extends to the rich natural plateau on the outer rim of Aso

Volcano, so you can enjoy a slow drive and trekking under the wind of the plateau.

The main attractions include an old cobblestone road a little far from the Bungo-kaido road, a spectacular view from the concrete arch bridge (Higotai Bridge, 200m long) above a dam lake, and a truss bridge with wooden roof. At the end of summer, a rare ball-shaped flower designated as a village flower is in full bloom (see Photo (2)). Besides, you can eat delicious river fish dishes called as Yamame (brook trout).

(3) & (4) Zone of Aso Shrine, and Daikanbo on outer rim.

After returning to National Route 57 from Ubuyama Village, and getting off the altitude difference of 200m, you will arrive at the steep slope of Takimuro-zaka on the Bungo-kaido. Then you can find the Sakanashi's post-inn town and Hyuga Kaido. Many people and things went in and out, and many shops lined up. If visiting there, you can see old buildings, stone bridges, as well as the townscape at that time.

In the center of Aso City, there is Aso Shrine related to the Aso clan who ruled the Aso area in the Middle ages. Aso Shrine is the headquarter of 450 branch shrines, and the famous fire festival (national intangible folk cultural asset) is held in every February to pray for a good harvest. A few kilometers west of the shrine on National Route 57, you will find the roadside station "Aso" and the Aso Station of JR Hoho Line. They are relay points for climbing Aso Volcano, where many tourists visit.

From Aso Shrine, passing through Uchinomaki Spa and climbing the north side of the outer ring, you will reach Daikanbo Observatory. From there, you can see a panorama of the huge caldera and Go-gaku (five volcanos). In order to pass through the pastureland, the sections of prefectural roads No.45, 12, and 339 are called the milk road, but they go around the outer ring of caldera.

On the other hand, there is Prefectural Road 149 at the foot of the outer ring from Uchimaki Onsen to Akamizu. There is the old "Matoishi Ochaya" for the daimyo, which was the Daimyo rest



(5) Senrigahama Prairie of old Crater.



(7) Ozu Kaido (Kikuchi City).



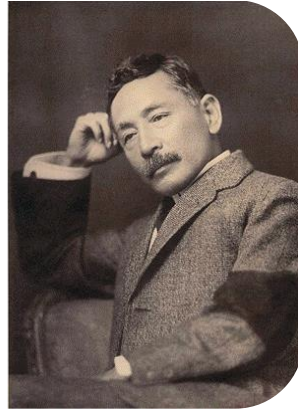
(7) Suizenji Park of Japanese style (Kumamoto City).



Kiyomasa Kato who built Kumamoto castle (1562~1611)



Musashi Miyamoto of skilled swordsman (1584~1645)



Soseki Natsume of the great novelist (1816~1916).



(7) "Reigan" Cave that Miyamoto Musashi wrote the Gorinnosho (Military Manual for Kendo))

(7) Three greats who made nationally famous Kumamoto.

house. Then, when you climb the outer ring, you will arrive at the Futae Pass and join the Milk Road.

(5) Area of Aso Volcano.

Aso consists of five volcanoes. As shown in the photo, steam is ejected from the crater in the western part of Nakadake Mount but it sometimes causes a large explosion.

As shown on the map, prefectural roads 111 and 292 from the national route to the crater are available, and the crater has three approach roads and bus services. Alternatively, you can enjoy charming views of the ancient crater meadow and scoria hill (Komezuka) in the surrounding area.

(6) Region of Minami-Aso Village and Takamori Town.

This area is along the outer edge of the caldera on the south side of Mount Aso. You can also go to Minami-Aso Village and Takamori Town on National Routes 57 and 325.

The main attractions in this area are its clean fountains, trekking on the outer ring of the caldera, and wonderful views of Aso Volcano. In particular, the water source of the Shirakawa River is one of 100 well-selected waters in Japan, and the nearby fountain park was realized by the suspension of construction of a railway tunnel with a large amount of spring water. With 32 tons of spring water per minute, the unique park is based on it.

In addition, the magnificent morning mist flowing through the bottom of the caldera will be an unforgettable memory for all visitors.

(7) Kumamoto Castle and its town.

The main route from Mt. Aso to Kumamoto Castle Town is the old route of National Route 57, and the section between Futae Pass and Otsu Town was called Otsu Kaido. In the Edo period, cedar trees were planted along roads, cobblestone paths were created, and trees were planted to show the distance.

In Kumamoto Castle Town, three famous great persons appeared from the Edo period to the Meiji period. Everyone is known nationwide, but one of them is Kato Kiyomasa, who was the first castle owner in the Edo period. Kumamoto Castle was built with his skill, and various social infrastructure such as river renovation in the Kumamoto area, improvement of the Bungo-kaido road, and reclaimed land were established.

The most famous swordsmen in Japan is Musashi Miyamoto, who was invited to Kumamoto by Hosokawa's Clan after a duel on Ganryu-jima Island in Shimonoseki City (1612), and spent the rest of his life there. He stayed in the Reigan cave and wrote "The Book of Five Rings" (1643-45) to teach his swordsmanship.

Another great person is Soseki Natsume. He came to Kumamoto as a professor at Fifth High School (present Kumamoto University). Soseki spent several years in Kumamoto, and traveled to various parts of Fukuoka and Kumamoto. Based on that experience, he has created many Haiku (Japanese style of Poem). After that, he turned into a writer and worked on numerous masterpieces such as "Kusamakura" (The Three-Cornered World), "Botchan" (young son), and "Wagahai ha Neko dearu" (I am a Cat). English versions of these books are also published.

The landscape resources of this area are provided by the footprints of three great men. For example, we recommend Kumamoto Castle, Musashizuka Park, Reigan Cave related to Musashi, and a hiking courses with works of Soseki, but Kumamoto Castle is the most representative. Kumamoto Castle is a historic building, and it is highly valued not only for its protection, but also for its ability to withstand a huge earthquake in 2016 (Maximum seismic intensity 7).

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