10. Tourism

Kagoshima Prefecture stretches 600 kilometers from north to south and has a host of tourist attractions. It is endowed with the most spectacular scenery of beautiful seas, mountains, rivers, numerous hot springs and a wide variety of flora and fauna. There are also many sites of cultural and historical interest. In 2006, over 47 million tourists visited Kagoshima from within Japan and from overseas, making it one of the country's leading tourist destinations.

The annual number of foreign visitors to Kagoshima steadily increased from 72,000 visitors in 2002 to some 112,000 visitors in 2006. 80% of the visitors hailed from East Asian countries, such as Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and China.

Kagoshima is actively trying to encourage more overseas tourists to visit the prefecture, thus the prefectural administration has been working hand-in-hand with representatives of the tourist industry to ensure that foreign tourists are satisfactorily catered to.

In this day and age of cruise tourism, the prefectural government has been developing the central port area to encourage more port calls. As part of its scheme to make Kagoshima the southern hub of Japan, operations of the "Marine Port Kagoshima", a berthing facility for large cruise liners, have started.

Furthermore, in March 2004, Japan's latest bullet train "Kyushu Shinkansen Tsubame" began service between Kagoshima Chuo Station in Kagoshima City and Shin-Yatsushiro Station in Yatsushiro City, Kumamoto prefecture. This has brought significant improvement to regional accessibility for Kagoshima residents, allowing them to travel between Hakata station in Fukuoka prefecture and Kagoshima City in a minimum of 2 hours and 10 minutes.
A further increase in accessibility is expected with the start of Shinkansen (bullet train) service between Shin-Yatsushiro Station and Hakata Station, which is slated to begin in the spring of 2011. This will shorten traveling time between Kagoshima Chuo Station and Hakata Station to a minimum of an hour and 20 minutes.

Kagoshima City -- An international tourist city steeped in history --

Lying in the shadow of the active volcano, Mt. Sakurajima, Kagoshima, once a castle town in the province of Satsuma, has become the center of politics, finance, culture and transport in southern Kyushu.

Many leading figures in Japanese history were born in Kagoshima, such as Saigo Takamori and Okubo Toshimichi, two men who played important roles in the Meiji Restoration of 1868 and the city is filled with many historic sites associated with these pioneers. There are also many new attractions such as museums and a spectacular aquarium. The city is also frequented by large international cruise liners. Kagoshima City has sister city relationships with Naples in Italy, Perth in Australia and Miami in the US. It also has a friendship-city relationship with Changsha in China.

The retro-style “City View Bus”, connecting all the major tourist attractions in the city, is a popular and inexpensive way of seeing all the sights.

Sakurajima-- The symbol of Kagoshima --

One of the world's most famous active volcanoes, Mt. Sakurajima, stands majestically across Kagoshima Bay from the city. As the symbol of the city, it is a popular tourist destination.

Occasionally the volcano erupts, sending plumes of ash and smoke two or three kilometers up into the sky, to the amazement of visitors. Mt. Sakurajima has erupted many times in recorded history, but it is renowned for the great eruption of 1914. It is estimated that nearly three billion tons of lava poured down the volcano, burying a nearby village and filling the 400 to 500 meter-wide strait that then separated the island of Sakurajima from the Osumi Peninsula. The boundless lava fields have an unusual appearance and visitors standing in their midst may likely believe themselves to be looking at a lunar landscape.

Sakurajima is also known for the world's largest radishes and the world’s smallest mandarin oranges. Ferry service only takes 15 minutes to connect the 4 kilometers distance between Kagoshima City and Sakurajima.

With a population of 610,000 residents, Kagoshima is likely the only major city in the world that lies a mere 4 kilometers away from an active volcano.
Ibusuki -Hot spring resort-

Situated in the very south of Satsuma Peninsula, Ibusuki's sub-tropical climate guarantees year round sun and warmth. Famous as a hot spring resort, the area is visited by many tourists every year, especially those wishing to try the world's only natural sand steam bath. Nearby are the volcano Mt. Kaimon, whose striking cone-shaped silhouette has earned it the nickname of "The Fuji of Satsuma", and Lake Ikeda, Kyushu's largest lake.

There are also many other tourist attractions in the area including Flower Park Kagoshima, the largest of its kind in Japan with about 400,000 flowers and trees of 2,400 different species, which bloom throughout the year.

Lake Ikeda is famous for its giant eels, which grow to a length of 2 meters and a circumference of 50 centimeters, and its legendary monster "Isshi", which is similar to the “Nessie” of Loch Ness.

Kirishima- A hot spring resort rich in culture and history -

The picturesque mountain region of Kirishima, which was the first to be recognized as a National Park of Japan, is a mountain range of 23 volcanic peaks, including Mt. Karakuni, the highest peak and Mt. Takachiho, the mythological birthplace of Japan.

The scenery changes drastically with the seasons: in early summer, the mountains are ablaze with the bright red flowers of the Miyama-Kirishima azaleas; the fiery autumn colors attract visitors from all over; and the unusual phenomenon of trees covered in hoarfrost in winter is a spectacular sight. The foothills have also become a tourist resort with an abundance of hot springs, hotels, and guesthouses. There are also many sports facilities where visitors enjoy sports such as tennis and horse-riding, as well as cultural and art facilities well-known among tourists: the Kirishima International Concert Hall (Miyama Conseru), where international music festivals are held; and the Kirishima Open-air Museum, where an impressive line-up of modern sculptures are displayed amidst the lush greenery of Kirishima.

In addition, the 1997 discovery of a 9,500 archaeological site-the oldest and largest remains of a prehistoric Japanese settlement, at Uenohara in Kirishima City, has been gathering much academic interest in the field of prehistoric culture. In order to preserve this site as a historic and cultural heritage site, the Uenohara Jomon-no-mori Park opened in October 2002 to provide visitors with opportunities to experience and learn about the Jomon culture.

Nansatsu (Southern Satsuma Peninsula) "Romantic route" with sand dunes and full of historical scenic sites-

The 47-kilometer long sand dunes of Fukiage Beach rank together with Kujukuri Beach in Chiba Prefecture and Tottori Beach in Tottori Prefecture as the three most famous beaches of Japan. A corner of this sand dune sits Minami-Satsuma city, where a
sand sculpture festival is held annually and attracts droves of sand sculptors from across the nation and overseas.

In the city of Minami Kyushu, there is the town of Chiran, where the cluster of 260 year-old samurai houses preserved in their original state with their beautiful Japanese gardens have earned the town the nickname of "Little Kyoto." The central streets of the town were planned with careful consideration of the surrounding landscape: trees planted along both sides of boulevards, and clear streams full of colorful carps running along the streets.

The port of Bonotsu boasts a coastline of extremely different scenery as well as an enchanting view of the sunset. Bonotsu has prospered as a port since the start of trade with China and the southern countries during the 9th C, with the Tang emissary from China also making use of its facilities then.

**Hokusatsu (Northern Satsuma Peninsula) -the home of cranes and hot springs-**

Izumi City, at the northern region of the prefecture, is known throughout the world for the over 10,000 cranes that migrate there annually from mid-October to end-March. The cranes can be watched at close range from the Crane Observation Center.

The basin of Sendai River, which is one of Kyushu's three largest rivers, boasts magnificent natural beauty, including the 210m-wide waterfalls at Sogi; the Tsuruda Dam, the largest dam within western Japan; numerous hot springs; and tourist farms where visitors can enjoy the bounty of the season.

The local tourist sites are focused on the Sendai and Izumi "Kyushu Shinkansen" stations to provide an integrated tour experience while a leisurely scenic coastline train trip along the "Hisatsu Orange Railway" is available for one’s enjoyment.

**Osumi -a sub-tropical atmosphere with islands to its south-**

The Osumi Peninsula and Satsuma Peninsula together make up the Kagoshima mainland. The land is blessed with a warm climate and flowers blooming riotously everywhere. As befitting one of top agricultural producers of Japan, vast expanses of tranquil fields stretch endlessly beyond the landscape while the waters of the Japan Current flow along the eastern coast.

This region is famous for a variety of natural attractions: Cape Sata, located at the southernmost tip of the Osumi Peninsula amidst lush sub-tropical vegetation; Uchinoura, where the first space center of Japan is situated; the white sand dunes and green pine forests of Shibushi; the azalea blossoms and other flowers of Takatoge Tsudujigaoka Park; Kanoya Rose Garden, the largest rose garden throughout Japan; and Kihoku-Tenkyukan, an astronomical observatory, which is said to have the most beautiful view of the stars of anywhere in Japan.
In addition, facilities such as the Osumi Kouiki Park, where visitors can enjoy sports and recreational activities amongst nature; and the Shoyoju-no-mori, a nature reserve where visitors can explore the largest laurel forest within western Japan; are also available.

**Tanegashima and Yakushima - the floating Alps and the space center -**

South of the Kagoshima mainland, with an approximate traveling time of a hundred minutes, lies the island of Yakushima, home to Kyushu’s highest mountain, Mt. Miyanoura and many other peaks. As such, the island is also known as the floating Alps. Yakushima became the first place in Japan to be designated a World Natural Heritage Site.

The island's symbol is the "Jomon-Sugi" cedar tree, estimated at 7,200 years old. Yakushima Environmental Culture Village Center, where visitors can learn about the island's precious natural environment, has been drawing world attention as an eco-tourist spot for environmental studies. It was also the venue for the Kagoshima International Conference on World Natural Heritage Site.

Next to Yakushima lies the Island of Tanegashima, where the first firearms were introduced into Japan. It is also home to the Tanegashima Space Center, said to be the world's most beautiful space center. Annexes to the Tanegashima Space Center include a Science and Technology Center and a Rocket Launch Center where visitors can take part in rocket launch simulations.

**Amami - Mysterious ocean scenery -**

The Amami islands are made up of the islands of Amami-Oshima, Kikai, Tokunoshima, Okinoerabu and Yoron. The islands are treasure troves of nature, with subtropical vegetation, including hibiscus and bougainvillea; the rare Amami black rabbit and coral-filled emerald green seas. The area is a sea resort paradise, offering excellent windsurfing, sea kayaking, scuba diving and other sporting activities, as well as thalassotherapy, a form of seawater therapy that makes use of the natural resources of Amami.

Aside from being a tourist destination steeped in mystique and possessing unique customs and culture, “Shimauta” or island folk songs that have been passed down the generations in Amami have also captured the hearts of many with their evolution into world music and are currently enjoying great popularity within Japan.

Near the Amami airport which serves as the gateway to and from the Amami islands, stands the Amami Park Tanaka Isson Memorial Art Museum. The park not only introduces the beautiful nature, diverse history and culture of the Amami islands, it also showcases through a permanent exhibit, the works of Tanaka Isson, the great Japanese painter who created a compilation featuring the natural scenery of the Amami islands. In addition, subtropical flora and fauna as well as canoeing activities can be enjoyed in the mangrove virgin forest near the park.