

Tokunoshima Island

Tokunoshima is one of eight inhabited islands in the Amami archipelago, which stretches over 200 kilometers between Kyushu and Okinawa. Along with its neighboring islands, Tokunoshima was once a part of the Eurasian continent before separating some two million years ago. It is a little less than 250 square kilometers in area, with a population of approximately 23,000.

Much of the island's mountainous topography is covered with lush laurel forests and around 1,000 species of native plants, and is home to a number of endemic animal species. The flatter, arable areas of the island are used to cultivate sugar cane for use in products like the popular distilled spirit known as *shochu*—as well as banana, papaya, passion fruit, and citrus. Dramatic rugged cliffs and a string of broad white sand beaches ring the coast, which is surrounded by a coral reef teeming with sea life. A large portion of the island is part of the Amami Gunto National Park, and a candidate for World Heritage Site status.

The island's history and culture have been shaped by Tokunoshima's location between the Japanese mainland, Okinawa, and China. The earliest known records of the island date back to the eighth century, when it was mentioned in a Japanese historical chronicle. Starting in the fifteenth century, Tokunoshima was part of the Ryukyu Kingdom, ruled from the island of Okinawa, until it was incorporated into the Satsuma domain of Japan's southern island of Kyushu in 1609. For a short time after World War II, it was administered by the U.S. Occupation before reverting to Japan in 1953.

Tokunoshima is now part of Kagoshima Prefecture. Regular ferries and flights offer easy access for visitors to enjoy remarkable natural landscapes, a wide choice of marine sports, and the chance to experience the island's culture, including the boisterous social highlight of "bull sumo" events.