

ISESHIMA



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and timeless cycles — forever renewing.

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Where Life Flows like the Sea

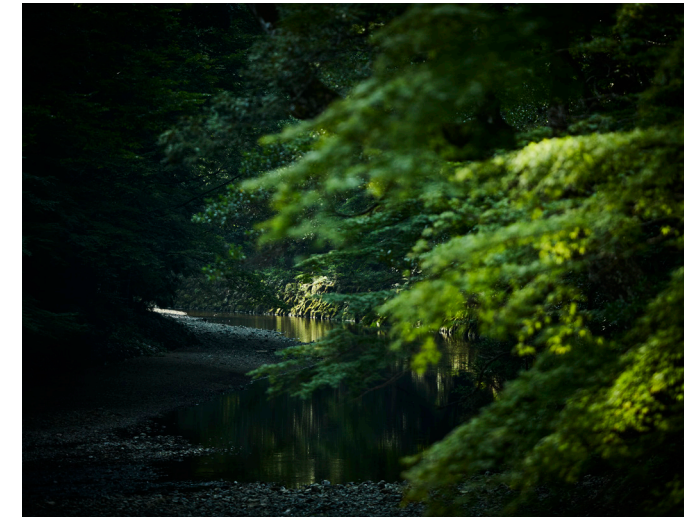


Isejima. Where life flows like the sea, in timeless cycles.

All around is the pure beauty of nature, mirrored in ancient forests, elemental rocks and blue waters long known for their pearls, oysters, abalone. Here, everything comes together – humans, nature, gods – at Ise Jingu, one of Japan's most important shrines. The ancient sanctuary anchors the micro-rhythms of daily life, through its perpetual renewal of rituals, myths and craftsmanship. For the people, the landscape, the shrine, Isejima is a place of ancient beauty and timeless abundance – forever renewing.

ISE JINGU 伊勢神宮

Sacred Cycles



Still. Ancient. Timeless. Reborn. The journey starts at Ise Jingu — the heartbeat of the region.

Steeped in thousands of years of rituals, mythology and craftsmanship, this serene forest-wrapped shrine is home to one of Japan's most important divinities: *Amaterasu-Omikami*, the sun deity and ancestor of the Imperial Family.

With roots stretching back over two millennia, this sacred shrine complex, positioned in perfect harmony with the surrounding natural landscape, stands as a timeless symbol of spirituality and renewal for Japan.

Today, the setting is no less enchanting. Forested mountains, clear river waters, arched bridges and towering *torii* gates give way to a deepening sense of stillness while wandering along sacred stone pathways beneath tall light-filtering trees. There are two main shrines — *Naiku* and *Geku* — plus a scattering of more than 125 sacred structures, some revering rocks in nature; others offering a sense of sanctity in crafted woodwork.

And at its heart is perpetual rebirth. Underpinning the essence of the shrine — and dictating the rhythm of life across Iseshima — is its legendary 1,300-year-old *Shikinen Sengu* ritual, which involves its main shrines being painstakingly dismantled and rebuilt every 20 years.

Ise Jingu's endless renewal — repeated every generation — is imbued with the sacred and the symbolic, mirroring Japan's inherent respect for the timeless cycles of humans and nature, craftsmanship and spirituality, life and death.



SATOUMI 里海

Timeless Tides



“I listen to the sea.”

Daisuke Asao is standing on a wooden rig, surrounded by the blue-green waters of Ago Bay, its edges wrapped in layers of forested mountains. And underneath him are thousands of oysters, which he is carefully cultivating by tapping into the intuitive guidance of his most trusted teacher: the sea.

Asao-san is not alone in his faith in the sea. Every element of life in Isehima is anchored firmly in the power of the water that flows around it, with one particular word capturing the essence of the region: *satoumi* — or “village seas.”

Isehima’s saw-toothed coastline of intricate coves and bays, shores and islets — dense, serrated, distinct — reflects a deep intertwining between water and land. This distinct geography creates not only a deeply scenic backdrop. It has fueled a living,

breathing landscape known as *satoumi*, an evolving ecosystem rooted deeply in an innate human respect for the power of the sea, inherited through generations of coastal communities.

Here, daily life flows in cyclical harmony with the shifting tides and the micro-seasons. This is tangible across the region, from the taste of its pure, fresh oysters and its longstanding history of pearl production to its ancient rituals and festivals connected to water.

Asao-san embodies this spirit of the sea. His days are spent tending to oysters, in a way that sensitively balances human touch with the wisdom of nature — from leaving them to naturally feed on rich phyto-plankton created from the surrounding mountains, to “consulting with the sea” over the best possible positioning and tapping into the power of tidal changes.





Pearls have also deeply shaped the region. It was in Isejima that the world's first cultivated pearl was created in 1893, sparking decades of booming pearl production across the region. While pearl farming has declined in recent years, Isejima remains synonymous with all things pearls, as it continues to nurture this unique heritage for future generations.

Testimony to this is Cova Kakuda, a small luxury retreat that continues the dialogue between sea, pearls and community. Spanning a former pearl factory on a scenic rocky inlet, this hidden sanctuary is home to serene contemporary seafront villas, with every element — architecture, materials, atmosphere — imprinted with the layered stories of Isejima's pearl heritage. Here, a new generation community continues to care for the sea, cultivating pearls along the shores, offering guests a quiet glimpse into this regional tradition.

Peppering the coast are also a number of family-run workshops and small ateliers sharing the history, techniques and stories of generations of pearl farming. It's a world that continues to connect Isejima to pearls — reflecting the region's longstanding harmony between humans and the rhythms of the sea.





AMA 海女

Women of the Sea

Heads wrapped in white cotton and weights around their waists, the women quietly drop off the side of boats and slip beneath the surface of the sea — before reappearing nearly a minute later, with baskets full of seafood.

For more than 3,000 years, women divers known as *ama* have plunged deep below Iseshima's ocean surfaces without breathing apparatus, seeking a cornucopia of sea treasures — shellfish, abalone, seaweed, pearls. Key is a breathing technique known as *isobue*, enabling extended periods of immersion. The legendary skill, strength and wisdom of generations of Iseshima divers are immortalized in

mythological tales and centuries-old poetry — and their continued existence perfectly embodies the region's sustainable spirit of *satoumi*.

Ama life is steeped in a sense of community. Divers gather in huts known as *ama-goya* before and after venturing into the sea, where ocean treats are cooked around an open fire. At its peak, there were around 6,000 *ama* in Iseshima, a number that has dwindled in modern times. Yet Iseshima remains the heart of Japan's *ama* culture, with divers — and the communities built around them — still living here today. Visitors are able to explore this world through boat trips, diving demonstrations and shared *ama-goya* meals.



KENJI YOSHIDA 吉田賢治

Sea Beauty

Floating, dancing and diving in swirls of white in a sea of blues: artist Kenji Yoshida has spent more than three decades capturing the beauty of *ama* divers in copperplate engravings. Otherworldly and atmospheric, his artworks are brought to life at his serene atelier, which is open to visits, just a short stroll from the sea. For Yoshida, his works aim to tap into the spirit and strength of white-clad *ama* divers — and express the intuitive synergy between humans and nature. “The sea is a window to Mother Earth,” he says. “*Ama* divers are a very special example of how Japanese people can co-exist in harmony with nature.”

A Taste of Iseshima



The foods and flavors of Iseshima mirror the region's deep spiritual heritage and layered landscape of seas, forests and mountains.

Picture baskets of fresh seafood, served in huts by *ama* divers; *wagashi* sweets crafted by centuries-old family makers; and countless traditional producers (from seaweed to *sake*) who for centuries, have respectfully supplied daily food offerings to shrine gods.

The sea is the source of countless gourmet treasures. Prized Iseshima delicacies include *Ise Ebi*



spiny lobster, fresh *awabi* abalone and *kaki* oysters. One of the most memorable ways to enjoy these treats? By visiting an *ama-goya* hut, where divers cook fresh catches on a sunken fire pit — the perfect place to soak up the flavors of the sea while talking to the *ama*, obtaining a rare and intimate glimpse into their lives.

Iseshima's *wagashi* sweets are another prized highlight. A trip to Ise Jingu is incomplete without a stroll along Okage Yokocho, a scenic stone-paved street with countless traditional wooden sweet shops and teahouses lining the approach to the shrine. Stop to enjoy *Akafuku mochi*, tasty soft rice cakes topped with sweet red bean paste, symbolizing offerings to the gods.

Countless other treats include *Ise Udon*, soft, thick noodles in a rich soy broth; tender *Matsusaka wagyu* beef, prized for its marbling; and Ise teas, such as the flavorsome deep-steamed *fukamushi* variety.

Explore

Pearl Cultivation

Around 1 hour

Isheshima was the first place in the world to successfully cultivate pearls – and today, remains globally recognized for its high-quality pearls. Visitors can harvest pearls, learn about the cultivation and create unique pearl accessories at facilities such as Shinju-no-sato and Pearl Miki.



Ama Boat Trip

Around 1 hour

Join an *ama* diver during a private cruise across Ago Bay. The special excursion on board a small charter boat includes a leisurely coastal tour followed by a private *ama* diving demonstration in the sea.



Shinto Journey

Around 3 hours

Dive deep into Ise's rich spiritual heritage with a unique Shinto journey. Activities include taking part in a special workshop making *shimenawa* sacred ropes followed by a ceremonial feast with prayers offered to gods and nature. The experience aims to reconnect visitors to Ise's 2,000-year-old rituals, the power of nature and the wisdom of Shintoism.

Sunset Cruise

Around 1 hour



Ago Bay is renowned as one of Japan's 100 best sunset spots. Enjoy this natural spectacle with an Ago Bay Sunset Cruise – as the sky turns vivid shades of orange, reflected across the still waters of the ocean.



Crafts Workshop

Around 2 hours

Isheshima is the birthplace of *gikakushi*, a traditional Japanese *washi* paper material resembling leather which dates back to the late 1600s. The craft was revived in recent years – and visitors can take part in a hands-on *gikakushi* workshop, using traditional techniques passed down for generations.

Access

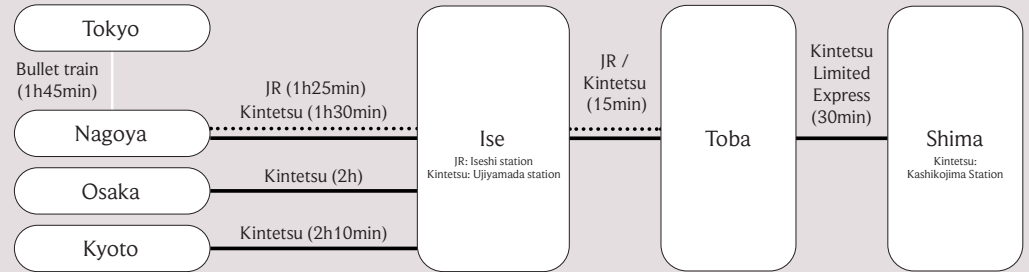
Visitors can travel to Iseshima via the Kintetsu and JR Lines from multiple major cities in Japan. From Tokyo, the travel time is close to four hours; from Kyoto, Osaka and Nagoya, it takes between two and three hours.

- Bullet train
- JR Line
- Kintetsu Line

X: Airport

- 01. Nagoya Airport (Prefectural Centrair Airport)
- 02. Chubu Centrair International Airport (Centrair Airport)
- 03. Osaka International Airport (Itami Airport)
- 04. Kansai International Airport

Private taxi service is available in Iseshima and from nearby cities. www.isheshima-taxi.jp/en



Contact

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