
Introduction to Sukumo

宿毛の紹介

Sukumo is a small port town on the westernmost coast of Kochi Prefecture and is a gateway to the beaches and islands within Ashizuri-Uwakai National Park. Sukumo was a castle town in the Edo period (1603–1867), and some historical homes from that era remain. Sukumo is the home of Enkoji Temple (founded in 724), one of the 88 temples on the Shikoku Henro pilgrimage route. It is one of the temples where the influential monk Kukai (Kobo Daishi; 774–835) spent time during the ninth century. Kukai is credited with bringing esoteric Buddhism to Japan.

The area is famous for its “*daruma* sunset,” when the setting sun takes on the elliptical shape of a traditional *daruma* doll. These sunsets are rare, and seeing one is said to bring the viewer luck. The best time to see this phenomenon is from mid-November to early February, when warm water vapor rising from the sea refracts the light of the setting sun. One of the best places to see a *daruma* sunset is from Kanyoto Park on the west side of Oshima Island, accessible by bridge from Sukumo.

The islands of Okinoshima and Ugurushima are the only inhabited islands in Kochi Prefecture. The waters around these islands host large colonies of table coral (*Porites heronensis*) and leaf coral (*Pavona decussata*) and are popular for snorkeling and diving. There are two ferries a day to the islands, departing from Katashima Port in Sukumo.

The Sukumo Municipal Museum of History in the town’s former samurai district has information about Sukumo’s history. A scale model of the town as it was in the Edo period shows how the area has changed. Displays with English signage trace the history of the town from the prehistoric Jomon period (10,000 BCE–300 BCE) to the present day. Across the road from the museum is the Hayashi Residence, the former home of Hayashi Yuzo, who served as a Minister of State in the Meiji era (1868–1912). Distinguishing features of the home include hidden stairways and lookout spots, reflecting the potential dangers of political life at the time. The home has been restored to preserve many of its original features, along with some modern additions, such as a cafe.
