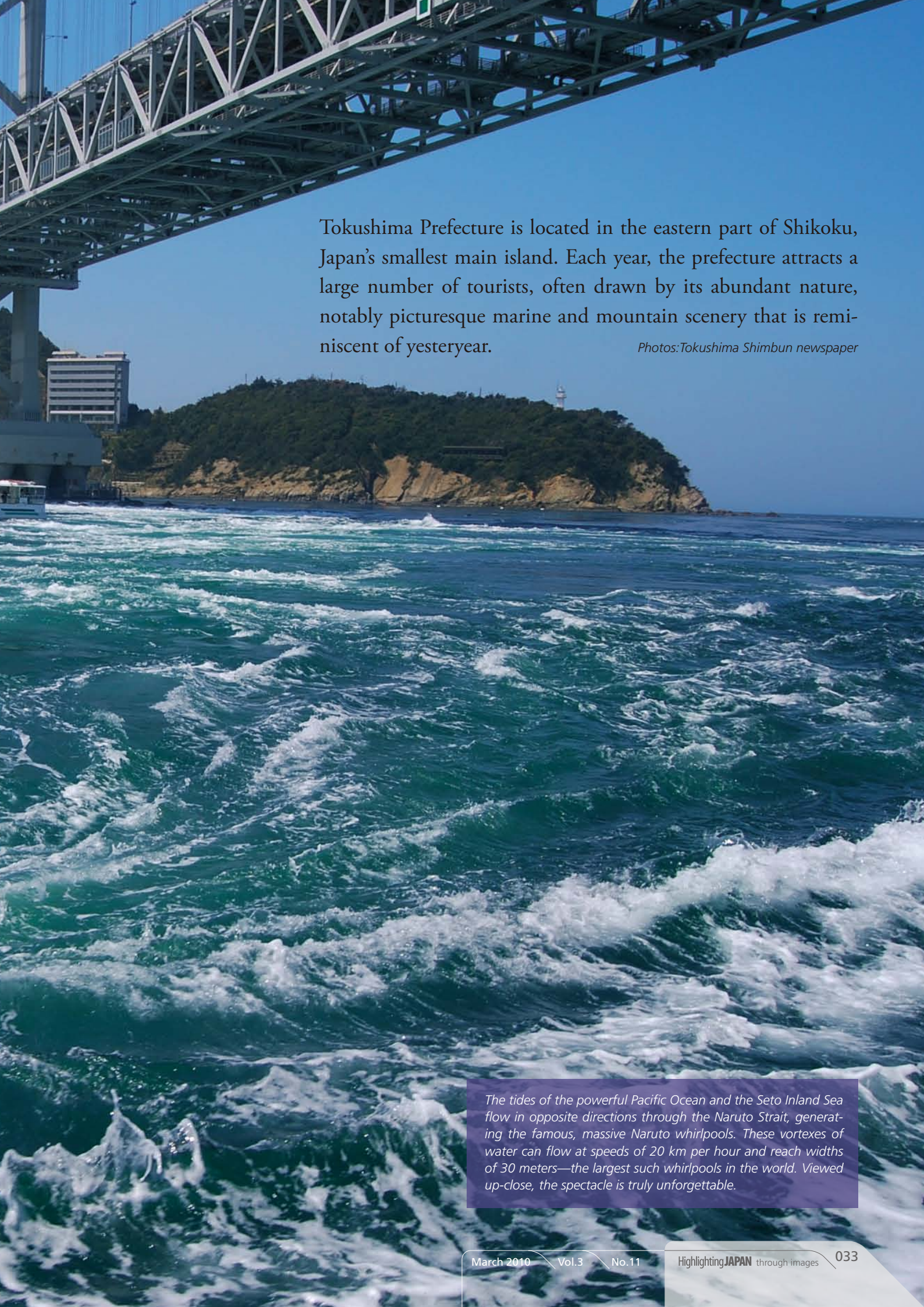


NATURE  Tokushima

THE DAZZLING NATURE OF TOKUSHIMA: STUNNING VISTAS, GIGANTIC WHIRLPOOLS





Tokushima Prefecture is located in the eastern part of Shikoku, Japan's smallest main island. Each year, the prefecture attracts a large number of tourists, often drawn by its abundant nature, notably picturesque marine and mountain scenery that is reminiscent of yesteryear.

Photos: Tokushima Shimbun newspaper

The tides of the powerful Pacific Ocean and the Seto Inland Sea flow in opposite directions through the Naruto Strait, generating the famous, massive Naruto whirlpools. These vortexes of water can flow at speeds of 20 km per hour and reach widths of 30 meters—the largest such whirlpools in the world. Viewed up-close, the spectacle is truly unforgettable.



Oboke and Koboke are valleys carved at over time by the rapids of the Yoshino River. Famous for its steep cliffs and the most violent whitewater rapids of any river in Japan, this area is a favorite destination of fans of whitewater rafting. Every April and May, koinobori carp streamers gathered from around the country are hung across the gorge.

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Mt. Tsurugi Quasi-National Park is located in western Tokushima Prefecture. The 1,995-meter Mt. Tsurugi, the second-highest peak on Shikoku, is the centerpiece of the park. The summit of the mountain offers visitors a spectacular panoramic view of the Seto Inland Sea and Awaji Island, which separates Shikoku from Japan's largest main island of Honshu. The Iya Valley is a precipitous mountain cliff line that stretches some 10 kilometers along the winding Iya River as

it flows from its source—Mt. Tsurugi. Come fall, the forest canopy erupts into a colorful tapestry of leaves that offers visitors a superb spectacle completely blanketing the area—from the bottom of the valley to the towering mountain ridges.

The Iya Kazura Bridge spans the upstream reaches of the Iya River. The bridge, designated an important national cultural asset, is known as one of Japan's three most unique bridges. It is a suspension bridge built with a

vine that is known as *kazura* in Japanese. The 2-meter-wide bridge stretches 45 meters across the river at a height of 14 meters, squeaking and shaking as a visitor dares to set foot upon it.

Oboke and Koboke are valleys located in the upstream region of the Yoshino River in western Tokushima Prefecture. Both valleys were carved over eons by the strong torrent of the Yoshino River. The Oboke and Koboke valleys, featuring a large number of gigantic and bizarre rock formations, are also famous as one of the preeminent rafting sites in Japan.

Another stunning natural attraction in Tokushima is located in the Naruto Strait, a narrow waterway between Awaji Island and the eastern part of the prefecture. The strait is home to the famous Naruto whirlpools—numerous powerful whirlpools that are caused by the tides. Spring and autumn tides bring a gigantic whirlpool with a diameter of up to 30 meters, drawing hordes of tourists who gawk at the incredible spectacle. Further down the coast to the south of the prefecture is Muroto-Anan Coast Quasi-National Park, which boasts a long and beautiful ria shoreline and extremely clear waters.

Last but not least are the many historic Buddhist temples in Tokushima Prefecture. Of the temples that make up the 88-temple Shikoku Pilgrimage, 23 are located in Tokushima Prefecture and *Henro* pilgrims, often clad in traditional white garb, can be seen making the rounds of these temples in Tokushima's pastoral countryside.



A foreign tourist gingerly crosses the Iya vine bridge.



Young men shoulder one of eight taiko drum platforms as they walk along the coastline as part of the Hiwasa-hachiman Shrine's autumn festival in Minami Town, Tokushima Prefecture.



Each year some 30 or so sea turtles come to lay eggs along the Ohama Coast of Minami Town.

 On the Internet

<http://www.awanavi.jp/english/>