

5-Day Rural Kyushu Bike & Gourmet Tour



Welcome to the Aso-Kuju National Park! Located in the center of Japan's southwestern islands, this national park stretches from Kumamoto to Oita Prefecture. Aso-Kuju's volcanic landscape with its dynamic scenery and unique culture is home to Japan's largest active volcano, which sits proudly in the middle of a massive caldera. At Satoyama Journey, we specialize in experiences that introduce the lives of the people who have cultivated these harsh lands and carved out a way of living that coexists with the volcanoes. We use E-bikes to breeze through the hills and mountains while enjoying the deep forests, the vast highlands, the majestic volcanoes, and the rustic villages of rural Japan. Meet the people who live here and connect across language barriers by putting your hands into the soil together. Learn of the deep wisdom of the "satoyama"-culture, a culture of living in harmony with nature, reaping its blessings while protecting it for future generations. This trip will be an adventure that goes far beyond simply enjoying the splendid nature of rural Japan. It will be a chance to delve deep into another way of life and connect with people you would have never met otherwise! Let's go!

Itinerary at a glance

- Day 1 – Arrive at Kumamoto(or Fukuoka) airport, transportation to Tsuetate onsen (D)
- Day 2 – Explore tsuetate onsen and cycle through rustic mountain villages (B,L,D)
- Day 3 – Farm-to-table experience and cycling the highlands and down into the caldera (B,L,D)
- Day 4 – Cycle up the volcano through restricted areas, all the way to the crater (B,L,D)
- Day 5 – End of tour and transportation (B)

Highlights:

- Cycle through varied landscapes displaying the different aspects of Aso
- Enjoy intense cycling in the dynamic landscapes close to the active crater
- Visit lovely Japanese mountain villages and interact with locals
- Authentic farm-to-table experience together with local farmers
- Experience the different onsen (hot spring) areas of Aso

Location:

The Aso area of Kumamoto prefecture is distinguished by a massive caldera formed through volcanic activity and offers dynamic landscapes. What makes this area unique is that people have cultivated and live inside of the still active volcanic caldera.



Main Activity:	Cycling
Difficulty:	3
Availability:	Recommended from April - May and from August - October
Tour Duration:	4 Nights 5 Days
Pax:	Minimum 2 Maximum 8
Price per person:	JPY 243,000~281,000 (incl. taxi from airport)

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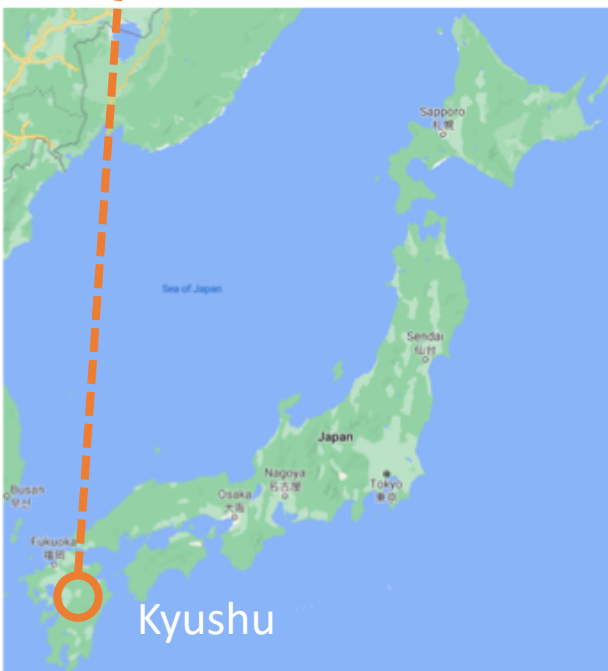
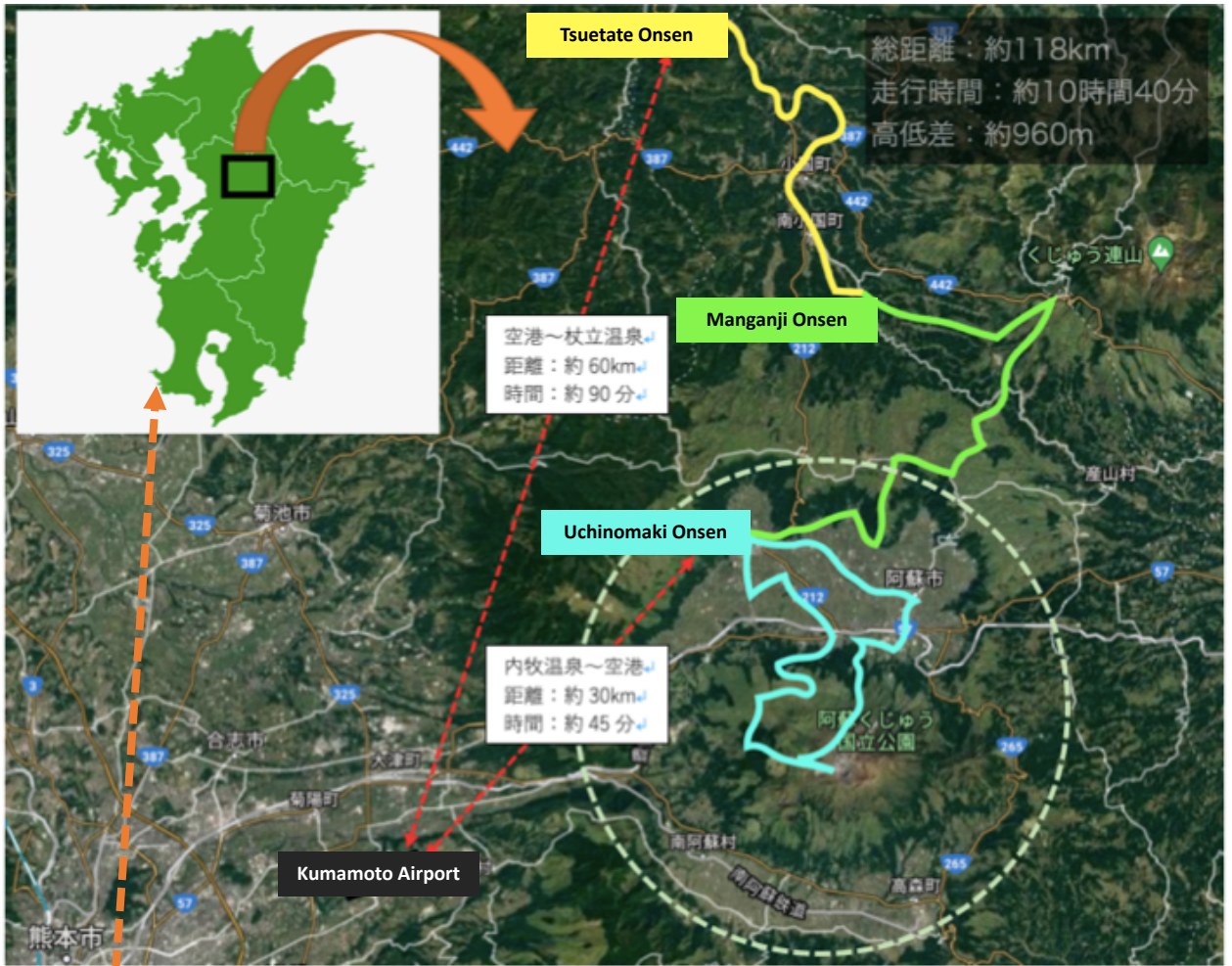
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Route map



Yellow: DAY 2
Green: DAY 3
Blue: DAY 4

Total distance: 118 km
Approx. cycling time: 11 hours
Elevation difference: 960 m

Day-by-day Itinerary

Day 1 – Arrival at Kumamoto airport, enter Aso!

You will arrive at Kumamoto airport and around 15:00. After a short introduction we will board our transportation and head towards Aso. On the bus you will be briefed about the area and the upcoming days.

Our first destination will be the ancient hot spring area Tsuetate Onsen. This hot spring area has been nestled in this valley between Oita and Kumamoto for over a 1000 years. Before cars were invented, this hot spring area with its healing qualities used to be a haven for travelers to refresh and recuperate before crossing through the steep hills and valleys of the Aso area.

We will also begin our journey here and we will start by checking in at Komeya Bessou around 17:00, a Japanese inn that values tradition while also pushing the boundaries of innovation. There will be time to freshen up in the onsen before dinner.

Dinner will be had at the accommodation from 18:30.

Accommodation – Komeya Bessou | Ryokan | Japanese room with ensuite | Onsen
Included meals – Dinner (At the hotel)



Day 2 – Explore Tsuetate Onsen & cycle through rural mountain villages

Today the adventure starts for real! Firstly, together with a local guide, we will explore the rustic back streets of Tsuetate onsen that retain the post-war era feeling of the Showa period in Japanese history. At once, you can feel the volcanic presence with natural white steam rising all around the small town. Through walking, we will find hints that unveil why this area excelled as a resting spot for weary travelers. Before leaving Tsuetate Onsen, we will enjoy a steamy lunch made by cooking local ingredients using the volcanic steam that seeps out all around town.

Once recharged and ready to head out, we will saddle up on our partners for this trip, our bikes. Leaving Tsuetate Onsen behind us, we will set our aim at the Aso volcano and start the journey. This first day we will bike through the hilly areas on top of the north rim of the caldera. Here we will pass through forests and small villages scattered throughout the mountains of the Oguni area. This area has some of the oldest human fossils found around Aso, indicating that people have lived here for at least 30,000 years. Their lifestyle might have changed drastically, but through our cycling, we will see how it has developed and how it still is a process that keeps changing and growing.

We arrive at Manganji Onsen, the oldest settlement of what currently is known as Minamioguni Town, around 16:30 and check it in at our hotel, Shizu no Yado. The dinner will be had at a small local restaurant specializing in local cuisine.

Activity① - Town exploration | Distance – 1 km | Time – 1.5 hours

Activity② - Cycling | Distance – 23 km | Time – 2.5 hours | Elevation – 210 m

Accommodation – Shizu no Yado | Ryokan | Japanese room with ensuite | Onsen

Included meals – Breakfast (Hotel), Lunch (Outside), Dinner (Local restaurant)



Day 3 – Mountain Village Cycling & Farm-to-Table Experience

On our third day, we will mount our bikes and keep exploring the rural landscapes and idyllic mountain villages as we head towards the north rim of the caldera’s highest point, the Senomoto Highlands.

On our way, we will stop by the idyllic “Gonbei Village,” a small campsite and B&B run by an older married couple. Here we will enjoy an interactive farm-to-table experience that will introduce an authentic Japanese lunch, the way that they would eat it themselves. Get past language barriers as you put your hands in the soil, harvest vegetables, cook, and enjoy a relaxing time in the atmospheric setting with our lovely hosts.

After enjoying a lovely time at Gonbei Village, we will keep climbing towards the vast grasslands that stretch out at Senomoto Highlands. As we reach the top, we will start to see our final goal, the majestic Aso volcano towering in the distance. From here on, we will cycle through the stunning grasslands of Aso that seem to flow like waves on a sea, reminding us that the landscapes once were shaped by the pyroclastic debris that flowed out from the volcano covering the lands.

Finally, we begin our descent, going down inside the vast caldera. In contrast to many calderas around the world, the Aso caldera is a bustling and flourishing world where you can find everything from forests and rice fields to roads and railways. Here, we will also find our accommodation for the night where we expect to arrive at 16:30.

Activity① - Cycling | Distance – 45 km | Time – 4 hours | Elevation – 480 m

Activity② - Farm-to-table experience / Harvesting, preparing, and enjoying a authentic Japanese lunch | Time – 2.5 hours

Accommodation – Sozankyo | Ryokan | Japanese-western room with ensuite | Onsen

Included meals – Breakfast (Hotel), Lunch (Farm-to-table), Dinner (Hotel)



Day 4 – Full Day of Volcano Cycling!

The climax of the tour is just before us. Get ready to see an active volcano up close! It is finally time to ascend the volcano! Today, we have a full day of intensive cycling on and off-road, uphill and downhill!

We will leave the hotel at 07:00 and enjoy an early breakfast at Mt. Tango. Rice, fish, pickles, vegetables, egg roll, and more, packed in a beautiful bento-style lunchbox made from bamboo leaves.

At 9:00, we will start our cycling from the 2000-year-old Aso shrine. Today we will make full use of our e-bikes as we ride an uphill course that will take us through forests and limited pasturelands until we reach the rocky and otherworldly areas around the volcano. Lunch will consist of an Akaushi beef and rice bowl that we enjoy outside in the open grasslands. Akaushi is the name of the local "Wagyu," a brand guaranteeing top quality. Famous wagyu brands include the internationally popular Kobe beef.

Recharged with energy, we will continue our adventure, but this time, mainly downhill! Feel the speed of the bicycles as you breeze through stunning landscapes while stopping along the way to explore points of interest, such as a restricted lava tunnel! We will keep riding our bicycles all the way to the hotel, where we are estimated to arrive around 16:30.

To celebrate our last evening together, we will enjoy dinner and drinks at an izakaya (Japanese pub) in the atmospheric Uchinomaki Onsen area.

Activity① - Cycling | Distance – 50 km | Time – 5.5 hours | Elevation – 750 m
Accommodation – Sozankyo | Ryokan | Japanese-western room with ensuite | Onsen
Included meals – Breakfast (Hotel), Lunch (Lunch box outside), Dinner (Local restaurant)



Day 5 – Transfer to Kumamoto Airport/Fukuoka Airport, farewells

The final day will be a simple day with a relaxing morning, transfer to the airport and farewells.

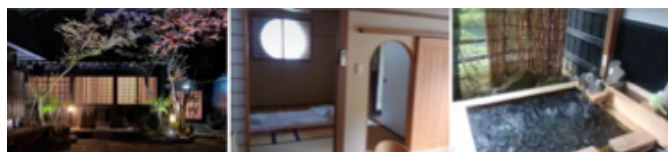
We will check out from the hotel at 10:00 and the transportation leaves at 10:30, so make sure to be prepared. The estimated time of arrival at the airport is 12:30 (might vary slightly depending on the destination). Your guide will see you through all the way to the airport where we will say our heartfelt farewells. Thank you for taking part in our tour and we hope to see you soon again!

Accommodations

Day 1 - Traditional Japanese Onsen Inn

Komeya Bessou

4162 Shimojo, Oguni, Aso District, Kumamoto 869-2503



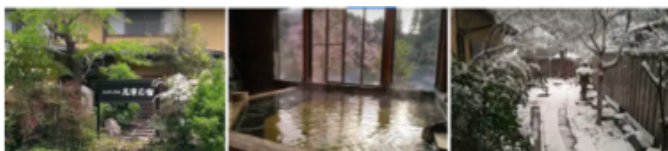
Relaxed riverside guesthouse offering simply furnished rooms, some with open-air baths.

Japanese-style shared room with ensuite (Private room available at a fee).

Day 2 - Traditional Japanese Onsen Inn

Shizu no Yado

2321 Manganji, Minamioguni, Aso District, Kumamoto 869-2402



Atmospheric family run inn located in a small rustic mountain village. Known for its great hospitality and relaxing open-air hot springs.

Japanese-style shared room with ensuite (Private room available at a fee).

Day 3, 4 - Japanese-Style Onsen Hotel

Sozankyo

3-star hotel

145-1 Uchinomaki, Aso, Kumamoto 869-2301, Japan



Polished lodging offering mountain views, dining & a bar, plus indoor & open-air thermal pools.

Western-style shared room with ensuite (Private room available at a fee).

Cycling elevation profile



DAY 2

Distance: 23 km

Time: 2.5 hours

Elevation: 277 m

Lowest point: 281

Highest point: 557



DAY 3

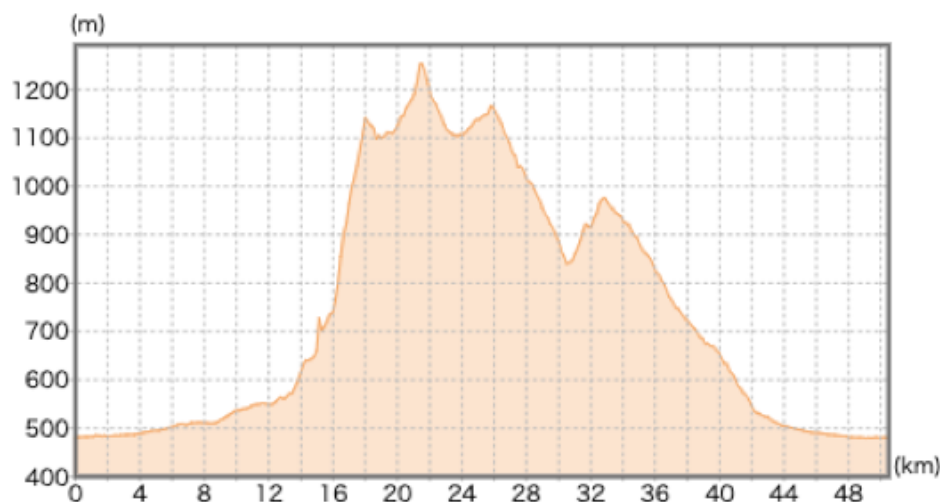
Distance: 45 km

Time: 4 hours

Elevation: 477 m

Lowest point: 478

Highest point: 955



DAY 4

Distance: 50 km

Time: 5 hours

Elevation: 773 m

Lowest point: 478

Highest point: 1251

What's included

- 4 nights accommodation, single occupancy basis (Due to limited capacity we may ask you to share a room with another guest of the same gender. In this case we will inform you in advance).
- 4 breakfasts, 3 lunches, 4 dinners
- Snacks and refreshments
- English speaking guide(s)
- Necessary basic equipment for activities (see detailed list)
- Transportation to and from airport

Not included

- Airfares
- Personal expenses
- Alcoholic drink with included meals

Please note that you will be asked to show your passport when checking into accommodation in Japan. It is a requirement for accommodation providers to take a photocopy of the passport of overseas guests.

We provide & What to bring

We provide

- Road bike/mountain bike/e-bike
- Cycling gear (helmet, gloves, knee/elbow-protection)
- Necessary tools for camping/building grass hut (sleeping bag available to rent)
- You will be asked to provide information regarding weight, length, etc

What to bring

The Japanese spring and autumn is usually hot, even in the mountains, but weather can change quickly, so remember to have clothing that can handle cold and rain. Especially waterproof gear is important to keep dry if the weather change suddenly.

Essentials

- Windproof/coldproof/waterproof jacket
- Waterproof shoes (shoes you don't mind getting wet)
- Cycle pants
- Sneakers
- Comfortable clothing for exercise
- Water bottle
- Sunscreen
- Sunglasses
- Travel insurance
- Passport
- Cash in Japanese yen. ATM might be few and many places only accept cash.

Recommended

- Gloves
- Water-proof bag
- Portable toilet
- Camera

About us



株式会社 S M O 南小国

SMO Minamioguni (SMO) is a company in the Aso area of Kumamoto that operates a small tour business called "Satoyama Journey." Our goal is to bring small groups of visitors on a unique journey into life in the Japanese countryside by introducing satoyama-culture, the Japanese way of living in harmony with the native woodlands and mountains.

Furthermore, we also pride ourselves on being a local company. At SMO, we work with a complete perspective on community development, including everything from operating the farmers' market to supporting local entrepreneurship. We might be a comparatively new contender on the market, but our goals and aspirations have no limits!

Guides

▶ Through-guide Max Wall

Mr. Max is born in Sweden but live and work as a certified interpretation guide in Japan. He is a versatile person who, in addition to guiding, also manage relations with providers, develop new content, write articles, and work with the local community. Apart from having passed the highest level of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test, he is certified as a social worker and in basic first aid. Max's goal is to revitalize the area and preserve local culture through responsible tourism.



▶ WakuWakuOFFICE AsoBeTai

Cycling guide for day 4. Mr. Yoshifumi Usui, previously part of Kumamoto's helicopter-based firefighting squad and the first team leader of the Aso mountain rescue team. He started AsoBeTai when he retired in 2015 and provides adventure activities including everything from trekking to climbing and bicycling. Furthermore, he also worked in the community as a volunteer for 30 years and works extra as a teacher of "self-rescue".



▶ TRIM COMPANY

Mr. Hashimoto Kota, born and raised in Minamioguni town, Aso area. He left Kumamoto once to work in Osaka but soon felt that the big city life didn't fit him and soon returned back home.

He has been a dedicated cyclist for many years and decided to start his own company to arrange cycle tours and rent gear in the Aso area.

Mr. Kota will act as supporting cycling guide and follow us along in the support car to provide support whenever necessary during day 2 and 3 of our trip.



Breakfast & Dinner

At some points in the itinerary, breakfasts & dinners are not specified. This indicates that we will eat at our accommodation. This is a common way of traveling in Japan, and the meals are often one of the most sought-after experiences.

The meal often comes as a set course menu or buffet, containing seasonal Japanese dishes served beautifully on separate plates. This is a great way to experience Japanese cuisine and offers a complete, healthy and varied meal.

If you have special requirements or simply wish to start of your day with something familiar like bread and coffee, let us know and we will do our best to cater to your needs!



What is an Izakaya?

Izakaya is a type of Japanese bar/restaurant. Drinking and eating often goes hand in hand at this type of establishment, but of course you can enjoy soft drinks as well. The menu is often varied including everything from raw fish to fried potato. The izakaya-style resembles the Spanish "*tapas*" where you order a variety of smaller dishes and share. The izakaya is a casual environment and a popular place for after-work drinking in Japan.

What is an *onsen*?

If you visit Japan, you are guaranteed to come across the word *onsen*. *Onsen* means "hot spring" and is an important part of Japanese culture. There are over 27,000 *onsen* in Japan and these natural hot springs are often known for their atmospheric locations and health benefits. Kumamoto ranks in at number 5 on the list of most *onsen* in Japan and approximately half of them are located in Aso area.

Onsen is a great part of Japanese culture and here are a few things to make your first experience into a smooth one.

- Bathing is done naked. Sorry, no swimsuit allowed and your towel can't touch the water.
- Make sure to wash your body before entering the bath to keep it clean.
- The baths are shared spaces so be respectful and don't disturb other guests.
- Remember to dry yourself before entering the changing room, no one likes floors!

If you feel hesitant about sharing baths or being seen by others, there are many *onsen* in Kyushu that can be rented privately at a cheap price!

Relaxing in an *onsen* is a wonderful way to finish a day of adventures! Enjoy!



What is a *ryokan*?

Ryokan is a traditional Japanese inn where you can enjoy Japanese cuisine and *onsen*. They are often run locally and staying at a *ryokan* is a good way to experience a part of Japanese culture. The rooms mostly follow typical Japanese design with tatami mats, partitions made from rice paper and futon mattresses for sleeping on the floor. Furthermore, you will be provided with a "*yukata*", a light version of the famous kimono, that you can wear anywhere inside the *ryokan*, and sometimes even outside!

We often use *ryokan* and similar accommodations during our trips to support local business owners. If you know that you might have problems sleeping on a futon or any other concerns, make sure to let us know when you make your booking.

Information and Requirements

Dietary Restrictions

Experiencing the local food is, in and of itself, an adventure and we believe from the bottom of our hearts that it will enrich your overall trip. However, we understand that this isn't possible for all visitors and in all circumstances. With this in mind, we are more than willing to cater for allergies, dietary restriction, or other special requirements. To enable us to do this efficiently, it is important that you inform us at once through the Booking Form. Once we have your information, we will do our best to accommodate your dietary needs. We do hope that you will be understanding and flexible since the rural areas we visit might have certain limitations to what they can provide. For example, if you require halal food, the substitute may be a vegetarian dish instead.

Furthermore, from our experience MSG and gluten-free food can be hard to find, especially in rural areas. If you are allergic to any of these, make sure to let us know and we will give you more detailed information on what kind of food that can be expected.

Emergency Response Plan

Making sure that your trip ends safely is one of our absolute top priorities. Which is why our guide is educated in first-aid and always carry a first-aid kit. We also always have stand-by staff who control distance to closest hospitals and can act quickly in case of emergencies. Furthermore, if weather conditions are judged to be a safety risk, we might adjust the schedule to ensure a safe experience.

Weather Conditions

Aso is located on a high altitude ranging from about 450 – 1600 meter above sea level. This means that the weather and temperature can change greatly during one single day depending on location and circumstances. The average temperature in July to September is usually around 29 – 23°C during the day and 19 – 14°C during night. This means that the climate is rather stable and the need for warm clothing is relatively low. With that said, the average precipitation is around 250 mm in Aug/Sep and 570 mm in July which is why it's **very important** to bring waterproof gear such as jacket and shoes.

Reservation & Cancellation Policy

Reservation

When we receive your booking through the form on our website, we will send you an email with a registration form where we ask you to fill in personal information such as contact details and dietary requirements. This is in order for us to be able to provide you with a safe and comfortable experience. Once we have confirmed your information, you will be sent a link to complete the deposit/payment in order to finalize your booking.

Payment Methods

We will send a booking confirmation by email with an invoice requesting a deposit.

*A 20% deposit is required to confirm the booking.

*The remaining cost (balance payment) is due 21 days before the start of the tour.

*Payment is acceptable by credit card or bank transfer:

A. Bank Transfer

* Please process the payment from your local bank in Yen.

* All transaction fees will be paid by the remitter.

B. Credit card

*We will send you a link with a form to fill in your credit card details

Cancellation

- Cancellation fees apply from 20 days prior to the starting date of the tour
- 20% of the tour price will apply 20 days prior to the starting date of the tour
- 30% of the tour price will apply 7 days prior to the starting date of the tour
- 40% of the tour price will apply 1 days prior to the starting date of the tour
- 50% of the tour price will apply on the starting day of the tour
- 100% of the tour price will apply after the start of the tour or if the traveler does not participate in the tour without previous notice