

JOURNEY TO OBAMA & WAKASA



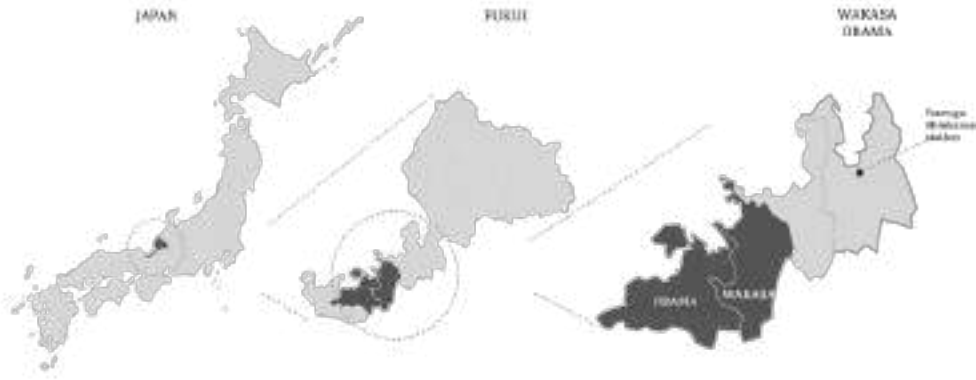
Curated Travel Product
Trade Manual
2025/ 2026



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Connecting Kyoto to the Sea



The Case for Obama & Wakasa

Located where mountains meet the sea, Obama and Wakasa have long sustained the cultural heart of Japan through food, faith, and exchange. Ancient temples, historic port towns, and living fishing traditions create a destination that feels grounded, authentic, and quietly profound.

Obama/Wakasa Connections

Kyoto □ 1.75 hours drive
Tsuruga Station □ 40 mins drive
Osaka □ 2.5 hours drive

Obama and Wakasa sit along the Sea of Japan coast in Fukui Prefecture, within easy reach of Kyoto while feeling far removed from its pace. The area is accessed via Tsuruga, a key Shinkansen gateway linking Hokuriku and Tokyo, and has long been connected to the former capital by the Saba Kaidō (Mackerel Road). Today, this historic corridor allows Obama and Wakasa to be included naturally in journeys through Kyoto, Kanazawa, and the wider Kyoto-by-the-Sea region—adding contrast, depth, and a practical waypoint without complicating the route.

Wakasa & Obama USPs

1. Kyoto's Historic Link to the Sea *The Saba Kaidō and the Flow of Culture*

Obama and Wakasa were historically connected to Kyoto via the Saba Kaidō (Mackerel Road), the primary route through which seafood and cultural goods were delivered to the capital. This relationship shaped the region's religious institutions, food culture, and town development. Today, the route provides a strong narrative backbone for itineraries linking Kyoto with the Sea of Japan.

2. Important Cultural Temples Without the Crowds *National Treasures in a Quiet Setting*

The region is home to a high concentration of ancient temples, Buddhist statues, and sacred sites designated as Important Cultural Properties. Unlike major urban temple districts, these sites remain calm and deeply rooted in local communities, allowing guests to engage with Japanese religious heritage without congestion or performative tourism.

3. Flexible Itinerary Including Kyoto and Hokuriku *Off-The-Beaten-Path, yet Logistically Viable (Golden Route Adjacent)*

Easily accessed from Kyoto and the Hokuriku Shinkansen corridor via Tsuruga, Obama and Wakasa add depth to itineraries without logistical complexity. The region also functions as a practical waypoint for travel between Hokuriku destinations and Kyoto by the Sea—an area that is steadily growing in popularity.

4. Historic Districts That Are Still Lived In *Preserved, Residential, and Unscripted*

Areas such as Nishigumi preserve the architectural character of historic port towns and former hanamachi districts. These neighborhoods are not open-air museums, but residential areas where daily life continues. This creates an atmosphere that feels genuine and uncurated, appealing to culturally sensitive travellers.

5. Outdoor Experiences Integrated with Culture *Active Travel with Human Connection*

Cycling routes through satoyama landscapes, sea kayaking from satoumi hamlets, and light hiking along ancient roads can be naturally combined with temple visits, local meals, and community interaction. Outdoor activity here is not isolated from culture, but woven into it—allowing travellers to move, observe, and connect at a human scale.

6. Food That Nourished the Capital *A Living Miketsukuni Tradition*

Obama and Wakasa were historically designated as a miketsukuni, supplying seafood, salt, and preserved foods to the Imperial Court in Kyoto. This legacy remains embedded in everyday life—from fishing practices and seasonal preparation to local dishes shaped by restraint and preservation rather than display. For travellers, food here is not a curated experience but an entry point into regional history, coastal livelihoods, and long-standing ties between land, sea, and capital.

Key Locations

Obama and Wakasa encompass a coastal port town, inland post towns, rural satoyama villages, temple precincts, fishing communities, calm inland seas, lakes, and heritage routes linking Kyoto to the coast, the region offers a rare balance of cultural depth, everyday life, and natural landscapes.



Kumagawa-juku

Kumagawa-juku is a well-preserved post town that once served as a key stop along the Saba Kaidō, the historic route linking Wakasa with Kyoto. Situated inland among satoyama hills, the town retains its Edo-period street layout, traditional townhouses, and quiet rural atmosphere.

Nishigumi

Nishigumi is a historic port-side district of Obama that reflects the town's maritime heritage and former prosperity as a trading hub. Its narrow streets, traditional wooden buildings, and remnants of the former hanamachi are well preserved, yet the area remains an unscripted, authentic residential neighborhood.



Mikata Five Lakes (Mikata Goko)

Mikata Five Lakes is a group of calm, contrasting lakes set among low hills and wetlands near the coast. Known for its layered scenery, changing light, and abundant birdlife, the area offers gentle walking, cycling, and viewpoints that encourage quiet observation and a slower pace in nature.

Yashiro

Yashiro is a small coastal settlement shaped by satoumi culture, where fishing, fish farming, and kelp cultivation support everyday life. Set along a quiet stretch of shoreline, the area provides a natural base for sea kayaking and SUP, allowing travellers to experience coastal Japan through direct engagement with the sea and local livelihoods.



Area Highlights: Unique Venues

Goshoen is a lovingly preserved former residence of a Wakasa sea captain, built to entertain guests when Obama flourished as a maritime trading town. Its architecture reflects a refined port-town aesthetic, with elegant reception spaces such as a tea room and a room designed for moon viewing. It offers a glimpse into the social life of Obama's seafaring elite and the role they played in hosting merchants, officials, and travelers.

Today, the building has been reimagined as a cultural space where visitors can relax and take in the harmonious surroundings. A coffee counter and lacquered chopstick boutique are housed within the main building, opening onto a large, carefully maintained garden. As approximately 80% of Japan's lacquered chopsticks are produced in Obama, an adjacent kura storehouse contains a small museum introducing this long-standing local craft tradition.



Cocoro is a high-quality, family-run bakery set in a restored traditional machiya in the historic Nishigumi district. The bakers use thoughtfully selected ingredients — including European-certified flours, natural leavening, and a wood-fired stone oven — to create French-inspired breads and pastries with a distinctive, handcrafted character.

Upstairs, guests can enjoy their bread or pastries with an organic coffee in a rustic yet tasteful Japanese-style seating space. Cocoro's combination of traditional architecture, natural light, and artisanal baking makes it a memorable, low-key stop that feels deeply rooted in everyday Obama life.



Area Highlights: Living Traditions



Nishigumi is a historic port-side district that developed to welcome sailors and merchants when Obama was a thriving maritime trading town. Centered around Sanchōmachi Street, the area has retained its traditional townscape, with wooden buildings, narrow lanes, and small temples that reflect everyday life in a working port community.

Many buildings remain private homes, while others now house cafés, bakeries, and guesthouses. The result is a quiet, lived-in atmosphere that feels authentic rather than staged, making Nishigumi well suited for relaxed exploration on foot.

Located along Obama's working waterfront, the **Fisherman's Wharf and Wakasa Obama Fish Center** offer a direct view into the town's contemporary fishing culture. Boats return with their catch in the early hours, and the surrounding facilities support the everyday flow of seafood from sea to table.

The Fish Center functions as both a wholesale and retail space used by locals and restaurateurs, creating an atmosphere that feels practical and unscripted rather than touristic.



Myōtsū-ji, founded in the 8th century, is set deep in a quiet mountain valley. The temple complex preserves a sense of calm and simplicity that reflects centuries of continuous worship. Its main hall and three-story pagoda are designated National Treasures, housing Buddhist statues of exceptional historical and artistic value.

Unlike bustling temple complexes in urban centers, Myōtsū-ji allows visitors to experience sacred architecture, nature, and history in close proximity, and at an unhurried pace.



Jingu-ji

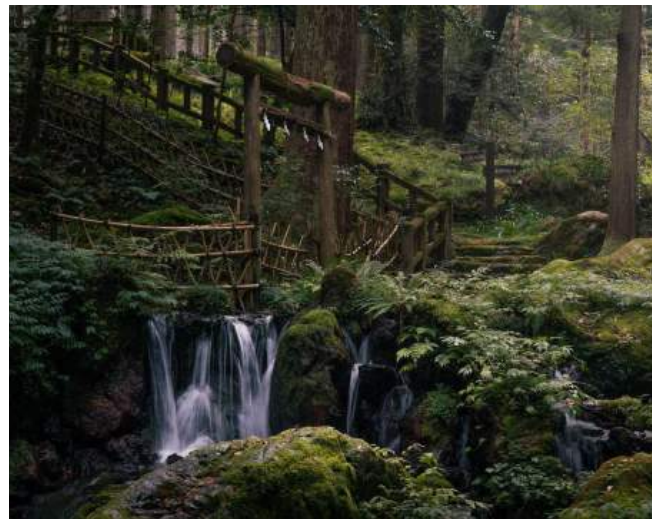
Jingu-ji is an ancient temple on the edge of Obama that uniquely blends Shinto and Buddhist traditions, with origins dating back to the early 8th century and links to Nara's religious history. The complex includes an important cultural property main hall and a sacred spring where water has been drawn for the Omizu Okuri water-sending ritual for over 1,300 years, linking Obama to Todaiji Temple in Nara.

Jingu-ji retains a quiet, contemplative atmosphere, with simple architecture and verdant surroundings that invite slow exploration. Its rare fusion of kami and Buddhist worship offers visitors a glimpse into Japan's layered spiritual heritage within a serene, natural setting

Area Highlights: Natural Wonders

Uriwari no Taki is a natural spring waterfall hidden within a forested valley in Wakasa, long valued for its clear, cold water. The spring flows steadily year-round, maintaining a constant temperature that once allowed locals to chill food and drinks naturally, giving rise to its name, "the melon-splitting waterfall."

Reached by a short walk through cedar forest, the site offers a cool, shaded environment well suited to quiet exploration, particularly in warmer months. More than a dramatic waterfall, Uriwari no Taki is experienced as a place of refreshment and stillness, reflecting the close relationship between natural water sources and everyday life in the region.



The Sotomo Cliffs are a dramatic stretch of coastline shaped by wind and waves along Wakasa Bay. Towering rock formations rise directly from the sea, creating a rugged landscape that contrasts sharply with the calm fishing ports and sheltered waters nearby.

The cliffs can be viewed from the water via sightseeing boats that depart hourly from Obama's Fisherman's Wharf, or reached on foot by a steep mountain trail descending to the coast. Whether approached by sea or land, Sotomo offers a striking sense of scale and exposure, while remaining quiet and lightly visited



A Close-Up Look at Obama's Working Fish Market

Witness the daily rhythm of Obama's fishing industry at the early-morning fish market auction held at Fisherman's Wharf. Unlike large wholesale markets where visitors observe from a distance, this intimate setting allows guests to get close to the action, listening as the auctioneer calls bids at lightning speed while buyers flash subtle hand gesture to secure seafood for local restaurants and regional distributors.

Earlybirds can also watch the unloading of the fish from the boats that pull up to the wharf. After the auction, tour the nearby Fish Center where the remaining catches are sold to locals and visitors. The experience offers an unfiltered look at working coastal life and provides a vivid introduction to Obama's living food culture, rooted in freshness, trust, and long-standing relationships between sea and community.



Your Host

Satoyama Trail Hiking



Set in the quiet satoyama landscapes of Kumagawa, this guided trail hike explores forested mountains and historic rural terrain once connected to Kyoto by the Saba Kaidō. Satoyama refers to the traditional border zone between village and mountain, where forests, fields, and human life have long been managed together since ancient times. Routes include gentle ascents through beech forests and ridgelines with open views toward Lake Biwa and Wakasa Bay.

Designed for beginners and first-time hikers, the experience focuses on pace, safety, and observation rather than physical challenge.



Your Host

Murata-san is an adventure tourism and long-trail coordinator, a certified mountain guide, and the founder of Plus Wild. He also serves as Executive Director of the Japan Long Trail Association and is a committee member of the JAPAN TRAIL initiative. In addition to his work as an outdoor guide, Murata-san is the head priest of a Soto Zen temple. His approach combines mountain guiding and Zen practice, creating experiences rooted in careful observation, coexistence with nature, and support for local communities.





Group Size	2-6
Duration	3 hours+
Notes	E-bike; distance customizable

E-bike Satoyama and Temple Tour

This guided e-bike tour explores Obama's satoyama landscapes through quiet countryside riding and visits to some of the area's most atmospheric temples and shrines. Satoyama refers to the liminal zone between village and mountain, where agriculture, forests, and spiritual sites have coexisted since ancient times. The tour highlights the historical role of temples and shrines—not as isolated monuments, but as places woven into farming communities, seasonal rituals, and the organization of village life.

Riding on premium e-bikes, guests move comfortably along narrow side roads, rice paddies, rivers, and hamlets while engaging closely with the surrounding landscape.



Your Host

Pursuing a childhood dream, Joshua left his native Maine after high school and moved to Kyoto, where he studied Japanese language and culture. After living in Buenos Aires and San Francisco, he returned to Japan in 2016 and has since worked in the tourism industry, including serving as Director of Inbound for the Obama Tourism Bureau. He now divides his time between Obama and Kyoto as an independent travel producer, tourism consultant, and guide. An avid cyclist and hiker, he also studies tea ceremony and Zen, interests that inform his approach to travel.



Sea Kayaking & Fishing in Wakasa Bay



Explore Wakasa Bay from the water on a guided sea kayaking and fishing experience that combines active travel with everyday coastal life. Using stable sit-on-top sea kayaks, guests fish directly from the kayak, typically with lure fishing and simple equipment suited to beginners. The experience offers a close, immersive perspective on the bay, with the chance to encounter a wide variety of seasonal fish in calm coastal waters.

The journey extends beyond the water to the satoumi hamlet of Yashiro, where sea and community remain closely connected. Depending on timing and conditions, guests may grill their catch together with local residents or enjoy a relaxed barbecue on a quiet beach. Offered as a half-day or full-day experience, this activity highlights satoumi as a living system—where fishing, food, and shared time by the sea form part of everyday life rather than a staged encounter.



Your Host

Muneki Itou is an outdoor guide, founder of Michi LLC, and a certified JSPA Basic Instructor. A lifelong lover of camping and fishing, he is especially passionate about kayak fishing. In January 2025, he established a base in the small coastal village of Yashiro in Obama City, where he creates opportunities for guests to experience the quiet excitement of fishing from the sea. His goal is to make Yashiro a place where people can connect with the ocean through kayak fishing.





The Essence of Sake

Tasting the Water Behind the Sake

Obama has long been known as a “water city,” where mountain runoff, springs, and groundwater shape everyday life and local industry. At Obama Shuzo, this guided experience focuses on shikomi-mizu—the brewing water that plays a decisive role in the character of sake.

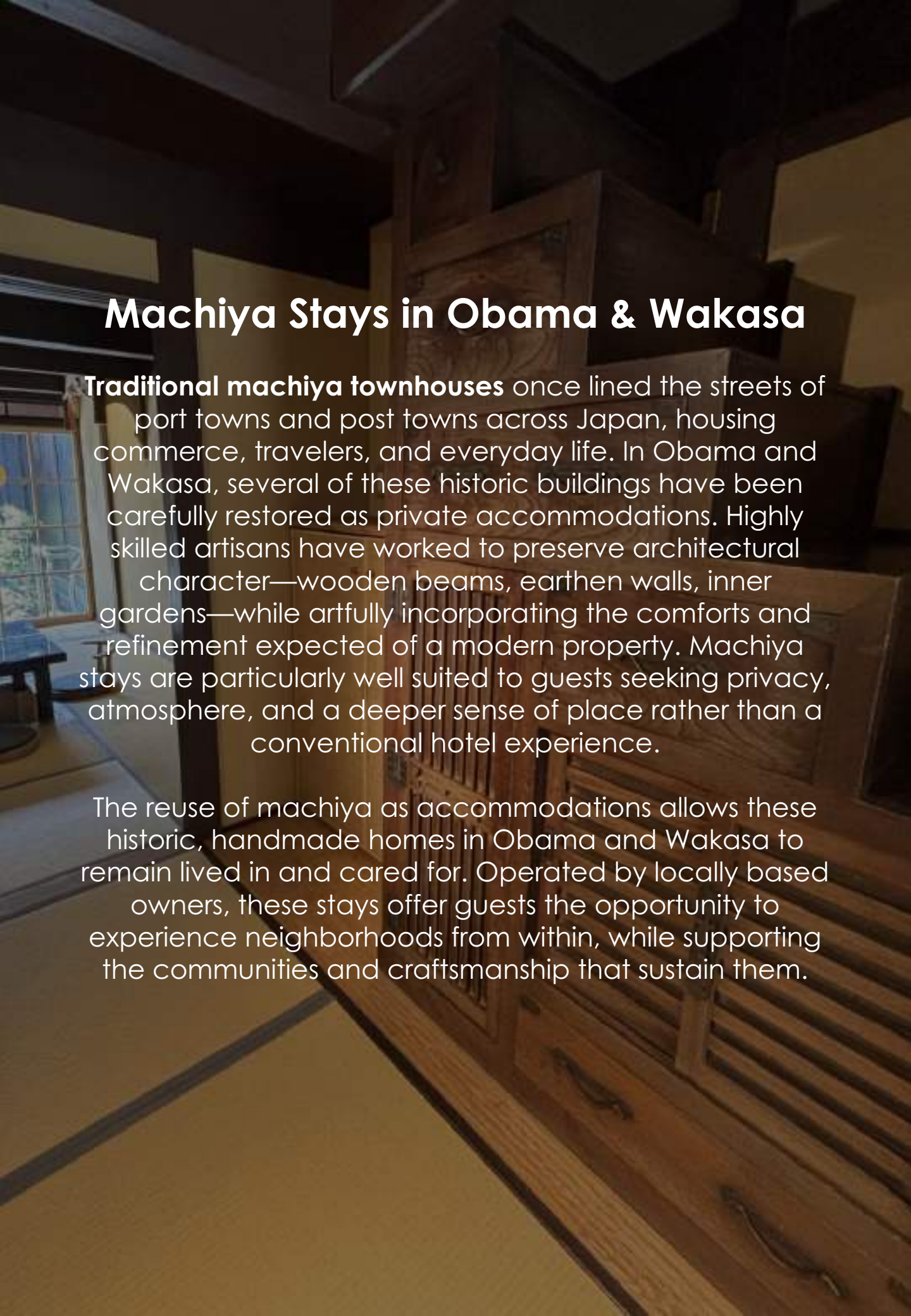
Guests begin by tasting three different local water sources, followed by a comparative tasting of sake brewed using each type. Led by the master brewer (tōji), the session explores how subtle differences in water influence aroma, texture, and flavor. A short brewery tour provides further insight into the production environment, offering a grounded introduction to the relationship between water, land, and craftsmanship in Wakasa.



Your Host

Obama Shuzo is a local sake brewery rooted in Obama's water culture and brewing traditions. Through guided tastings and small-group visits, the brewery shares a deeper understanding of sake-making that emphasizes natural resources, technique, and regional identity.



The background image shows the interior of a traditional Japanese machiya townhouse. It features dark wooden beams, sliding doors (shoji), and a tatami floor. The lighting is warm and natural, coming from a window on the left. The overall atmosphere is one of traditional Japanese architecture.

Machiya Stays in Obama & Wakasa

Traditional machiya townhouses once lined the streets of port towns and post towns across Japan, housing commerce, travelers, and everyday life. In Obama and Wakasa, several of these historic buildings have been carefully restored as private accommodations. Highly skilled artisans have worked to preserve architectural character—wooden beams, earthen walls, inner gardens—while artfully incorporating the comforts and refinement expected of a modern property. Machiya stays are particularly well suited to guests seeking privacy, atmosphere, and a deeper sense of place rather than a conventional hotel experience.

The reuse of machiya as accommodations allows these historic, handmade homes in Obama and Wakasa to remain lived in and cared for. Operated by locally based owners, these stays offer guests the opportunity to experience neighborhoods from within, while supporting the communities and craftsmanship that sustain them.

Obama Machiya Stay

Obama Machiya Stay offers a collection of restored townhouses located within Obama's historic districts. Each property is reserved for one group at a time, allowing guests to enjoy generous space, privacy, and a residential atmosphere. The interiors balance traditional materials with contemporary furnishings, making them comfortable for longer stays or families. Their central locations work well for walking exploration of Nishigumi and the waterfront, positioning guests directly within everyday town life.



Tsubakito Kotowa

Located in the historical district of Nishigumi, Tsubakito Kotowa is an intimate machiya accommodation that preserves the atmosphere of a traditional town residence while offering a carefully considered, high-quality stay. The interiors are thoughtfully composed, with artworks, ceramics, and furnishings selected

by the owner to create a calm, cohesive aesthetic. Natural light and spatial balance are emphasized throughout, giving the property a sense of quiet refinement rather than formality.

Yao Kumagawa

Yao Kumagawa are a collection of beautifully renovated machiya in the historic post town of Kumagawa-juku, once an important stop along the Saba Kaidō. The property emphasizes calm and simplicity, with design choices that highlight natural materials and the surrounding satoyama landscape. Its location makes it particularly well suited to cycling, hiking, and route-based itineraries connecting Kyoto and Wakasa, offering a quiet overnight experience rooted in the rhythm of a rural town.



Hike, Bike, & Paddle: A 2 Night, 3 Day Itinerary from Kyoto



Day 1 — Kyoto to Kumagawa

Depart Kyoto by car and travel north into Wakasa. After lunch in the historic post town of Kumagawa-juku, set out on a guided 3–4 hour hike along the Kumagawa Trail. The route passes through forested satoyama terrain and ridgelines, with panoramic views toward Lake Biwa and the Sea of Japan.

In the late afternoon, check in to Yao Kumagawa Machiya Stay. Dinner is served at the accommodation, featuring local and seasonal ingredients.



Day 2 — Kumagawa to Obama

After breakfast, begin a scenic cycle toward Obama along quiet country roads, passing rice paddies, rivers, and small hamlets along the Kita River. En route, stop at Uriwari no Taki to refill water bottles from the famed cold spring. Continue through the rural hamlet of Miyagawa, learning about satoyama life and traditional land use, before stopping for lunch along the way. Arrive in Obama in the afternoon and check in to your machiya accommodation.



Day 3 — Obama to Tsuruga and Beyond

Begin the day early with a guided visit to a traditional fish auction at Obama's Fisherman's Wharf, experiencing the fast-paced calls of the auctioneer and the hand-signal bidding of local buyers. Afterwards, enjoy breakfast at a bakery housed in a restored farmhouse in the historic district of Nishigumi.

Take a walking tour through Nishigumi, learning about the former geisha district and Obama's role in maritime trade during the era of Kitamaebune sailing ships. Later, transfer to a nearby fishing village for a sea kayaking experience in Wakasa Bay, including a picnic lunch on a secluded beach and a short village walk introducing satoumi coastal life.

In the afternoon, transfer to Tsuruga to continue onward by Shinkansen to Kanazawa or Tokyo, or return to Kyoto by limited express train.



Sake, Food, & Faith: A 2 Night, 3 Day Itinerary from Kyoto

Day 1 — Kyoto to Obama

Depart Kyoto by car and travel north into Wakasa. After lunch in the historic post town of Kumagawa-juku, continue toward Obama, stopping at Uriwari no Taki to experience the region's famed spring water.

Visit Myōtsū-ji, one of Wakasa's most important Buddhist temples, set deep in a forested valley. In the afternoon, stop for coffee at the restored kominka Goshoen and visit the adjacent kura museum introducing Obama's lacquered chopstick tradition and its role during the Kitamaebune maritime trade era.

Check in to your machiya accommodation with Obama Machiya Stay. Dinner is enjoyed at a local sushi restaurant.



Day 2 — Obama

Begin the day early with a guided visit to a traditional fish auction at Obama's Fisherman's Wharf, observing the fast-paced calls of the auctioneer and hand-signal bidding by local buyers. Afterwards, enjoy breakfast at a bakery housed in a restored farmhouse in the historic district of Nishigumi. Take a walking tour through Nishigumi, learning about the former geisha district and Obama's role as a port of call for Kitamaebune sailing ships. Continue with a satoyama-focused excursion, including lunch at a local restaurant, followed by a sake tasting at Obama Shuzo. Sample three styles of sake brewed using water from different local spring sources, highlighting the influence of water on flavor.

In the afternoon, visit Jingū-ji for a tea ceremony led by the head priest in an ancient and unique thatched tea house.



Day 3 — Obama to Tsuruga (Departure)

After breakfast at Cocoro, transfer to Tsuruga to continue onward by Shinkansen to Kanazawa or Tokyo, or return to Kyoto by limited express train.

