

Sacred Sites Draw Visitors from Abroad



Motonosumi Inari Shrine: Yamaguchi Prefecture

Nagato City in Yamaguchi Prefecture is situated about 100 minutes by car north of Yamaguchi Ube Airport. The Motonosumi Inari Shrine stands on a cliff facing the Sea of Japan and the entrance path to the shrine continues for more than 100 meters (330 feet) with 123 bright red *torii* (traditional shrine gates) set along it in an orderly manner.

White foxes, said to be messengers of the Shinto *kami*, or spirits, are the symbol of Inari shrines, which are a familiar presence to local people. They believe the *kami* of Inari shrines can make their businesses prosper and otherwise help them. Since March 2015, when Motonosumi Inari Shrine was selected by CNN as one of Japan's 31 most beautiful places, the number of overseas visitors to the shrine has suddenly increased. Perched on the main *torii* at a height of about five meters (16 feet), is a box into which visitors can throw coins and make a prayer. Despite the height of this target, many non-Japanese coins have made their way inside.



Koyasan: Wakayama Prefecture

Located about 90 minutes by car from Kansai International Airport, the sacred Buddhist site of Koyasan sits at an altitude of 1,000 meters (3,300 feet). Recently, more and more Westerners, especially French people, are visiting Koyasan, and non-Japanese visitors number more than 50,000 people a year. In 2015, Koyasan was included in *National Geographic Traveler* magazine's 20 go-now destinations.

The scholar-monk Kobo Daishi established Koyasan in 816, 1,200 years ago. There are 117 temples at the site, which is approximately 5 kilometers (3 miles) from east to west. The town appears to be like the grounds of one big temple, and monks make up more than 30% of the town's population of about 3,300. Koyasan is said to be one of Japan's most pristine and sacred places.

