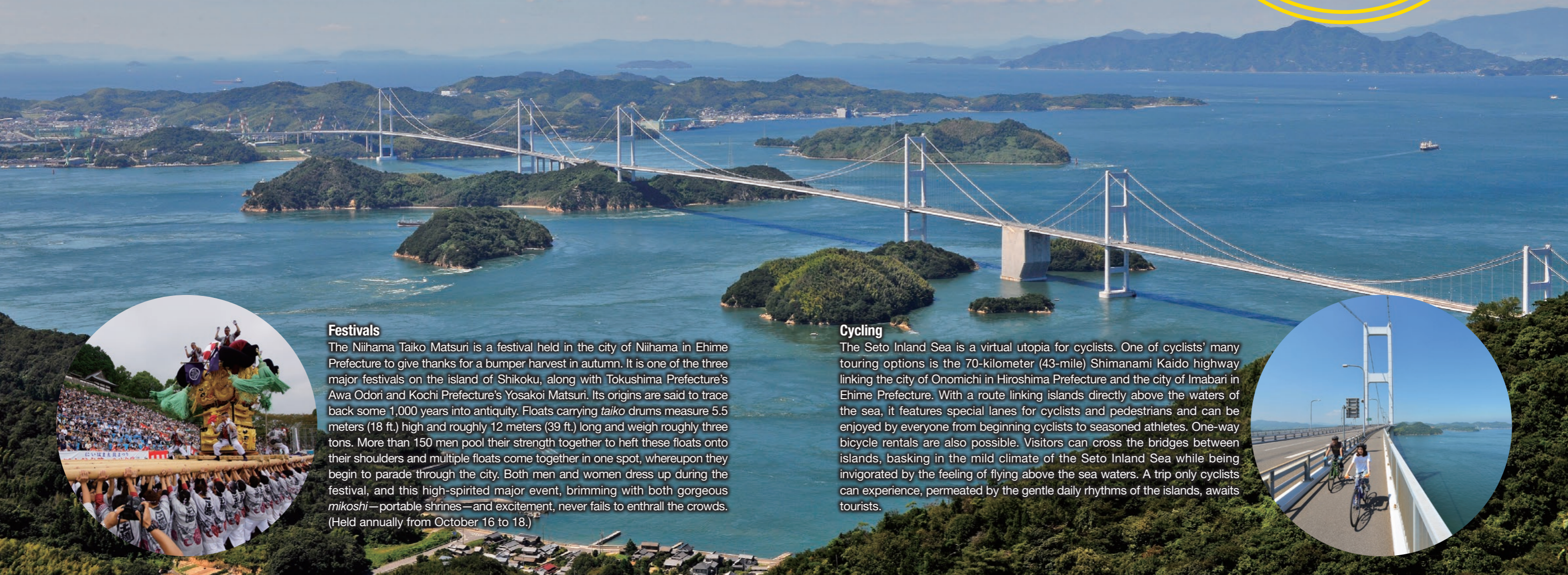


This
is
Japan

The Seto Inland Sea: An Enchanting and Tranquil Place

The Seto Inland Sea is surrounded by the three major islands of Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu in the Japanese archipelago. More than 700 islands dot the waters, which are as tranquil as a lake, forming scenery that is nothing short of breathtaking. Long bridges stretching from one island to another provide access to these islands and connect Honshu and Shikoku through three routes. An abundance of sumptuous seafood, traditional industries remaining on the islands such as pottery making and textile weaving, and welcoming inhabitants create an allure that attracts travelers with a magnetic charm. Some enjoy touring the area by boat while others cross the bridges to explore the area by car or by bicycle. The Seto Inland Sea is sure to delight you with never-ending discoveries during your visit.



Festivals

The Niihama Taiko Matsuri is a festival held in the city of Niihama in Ehime Prefecture to give thanks for a bumper harvest in autumn. It is one of the three major festivals on the island of Shikoku, along with Tokushima Prefecture's Awa Odori and Kochi Prefecture's Yosakoi Matsuri. Its origins are said to trace back some 1,000 years into antiquity. Floats carrying *taiko* drums measure 5.5 meters (18 ft.) high and roughly 12 meters (39 ft.) long and weigh roughly three tons. More than 150 men pool their strength together to heft these floats onto their shoulders and multiple floats come together in one spot, whereupon they begin to parade through the city. Both men and women dress up during the festival, and this high-spirited major event, brimming with both gorgeous *mikoshi*—portable shrines—and excitement, never fails to enthrall the crowds. (Held annually from October 16 to 18.)

Cycling

The Seto Inland Sea is a virtual utopia for cyclists. One of cyclists' many touring options is the 70-kilometer (43-mile) Shimanami Kaido highway linking the city of Onomichi in Hiroshima Prefecture and the city of Imabari in Ehime Prefecture. With a route linking islands directly above the waters of the sea, it features special lanes for cyclists and pedestrians and can be enjoyed by everyone from beginning cyclists to seasoned athletes. One-way bicycle rentals are also possible. Visitors can cross the bridges between islands, basking in the mild climate of the Seto Inland Sea while being invigorated by the feeling of flying above the sea waters. A trip only cyclists can experience, permeated by the gentle daily rhythms of the islands, awaits tourists.

