

Leave the crowded tourist spots behind for the charming seaside city of Obama in Fukui Prefecture, Japan! With this useful English guide in hand, explore the city's storied shrines and temples, learn about the Mackerel Road stretching towards Kyoto, experience traditional local crafts, immerse yourself in pristine nature, and eat your fill of the freshest fish and other delicious food – all here in Obama!



JOURNEY TO OBAMA

Connecting Kyoto to the Sea

Shrines and Temples | Historical Sites | Cultural Heritage | Rites and Festivals

Traditional Crafts | Scenic Spots | Lush Nature | Local Food

Wakasa Obama Tourism Association
Wakasa Obama Tourist Information Center

6-1 Ekimae-cho, Obama City, Fukui Prefecture, Japan
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<https://en.wakasa-obama.jp>





JOURNEY TO OBAMA

Connecting Kyoto to the Sea

OBAMA SIGHTSEEING MAP





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Ocean views, delicious seafood, rich history,
and a welcoming community...

That's
Obama!

The seaside city of Obama may not be as well-known as tourist hubs like Tokyo and Kyoto, but this historical port town has a lot to offer for visitors willing to venture a little ways off the beaten track!

Driving what is now known as the Mackerel Road or taking a train along the scenic Lake Biwa and the Sea of Japan will bring you to Obama City in Fukui Prefecture. It is a small city with a population of just under 30,000 people, and its inhabitants mostly make a living in the agricultural and commercial fishing industries. Local traditional crafts include lacquerware (especially chopsticks!), agate carving, and *washi* papermaking, while popular cuisine features winter crab, *kuzu manjū* sweets, bamboo-pickled sea bream, Yatabe green onions, *ume* plums, and a dizzying variety of mackerel! Seasonal tourism usually consists of beach lovers, autumn color chasers, and seafood connoisseurs, but Obama is worth visiting for its heritage and art as well.

After all, in earlier periods of history when Kyoto was still the capital of Japan, mountain routes to Obama were actually its primary mode of access to the sea. This went beyond just fishing, as Obama also served as the gateway to the Asian mainland. With foreign goods and travelers arriving from abroad to proceed down to Kyoto along with local staple foods such as fish and salt, Obama inevitably absorbed aspects of its trading partners' refined culture, some of which has survived to this day in the form of culinary traditions, architecture, hospitality customs, and festivals.

Keep reading to discover even more about this charming city by the sea!

When you think of major port towns in Japan, you might envision somewhere like Yokohama or Kobe, but until a few centuries ago you would have been thinking of Obama! Situated in Wakasa Province, now Fukui Prefecture, Obama was a bustling seaport that welcomed ships from mainland Asia, serving as an important hub on the trade routes that connected the city of Kyoto with the rest of the world. It was from Obama that the old capital received much of its seafood, carried by men traveling on foot over steep mountain roads. The main catch making its way inland was *saba* (mackerel), which eventually led to the name “the Mackerel Road”.

Wakasa Province was a *miketsukuni*, one of the provinces tasked with providing foodstuffs to the imperial court. But it wasn't only fish being transported along this highway! Metalwork, Buddhist statuary, books, emissaries, and even Japan's first elephant also made their way along Saba Kaidō! In turn, Kyoto's distinct culture made its way to Obama, and these routes to the sea were responsible for bringing religious, festive, and culinary traditions from the old capital that can still be observed in Obama.

Special Feature

Saba Kaidō

The Mackerel Road 鯖街道



One of the most lasting testaments of this exchange is Obama's high number of Buddhist temples. Normally you wouldn't see nearly as many in a rural area, let alone this amount of precious and well-preserved statues and other treasures! Another is the dining and entertainment district of Nishigumi, where *geiko* (what geisha are called in both Kyoto and Obama) performed for guests at luxury establishments serving elegant cuisine not usually seen outside the capital. Even Kyoto's famous Gion Matsuri festival has been paid homage in the form of Hōze Matsuri, a festival in Obama in which various neighborhoods showcase their floats and performances.

You won't be passing any porters rushing about on foot these days, but you can still explore Saba Kaidō! Izumi-chō, a fishmonger district in central Obama, has a plaque in the street that designates the "official" starting point of the old Mackerel Road, and if you pick up a handy map of the hiking trails, you can head out on a tough but rewarding journey through mountain forests and valley villages between Kyoto and Obama. Those less trek-inclined can still enjoy parts of Saba Kaidō by car, including some gorgeous views from the mountain peaks. Either way, you don't have to carry baskets of mackerel to do it!

Izumi-chō Shopping Street いづみ町商店街

〒917-0084 福井県小浜市小浜広峰
Obama Hiromine, Obama City



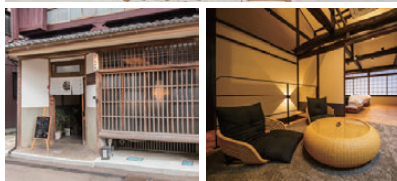
LOCATIONS

Obama has far more temples and shrines than most countryside areas on account of its history as a trading port. Each of these sites has something for visitors to enjoy, be it a lovely garden, ancient statues, or fascinating local legends.



Nishigumi District

小浜西組



One of Obama's main attractions is the old Nishigumi district and its scenic Sanchōmachi street. In Obama's bustling port days, sailors and passengers would leave their ships behind for the welcoming warmth of the restaurants, inns, teahouses, and other establishments that lined the streets leading into the city. A concentrated effort has been made to retain the classic architecture from that time, and although many of the buildings now serve as private residences, a variety of guesthouses, cafés, and restaurants are ready to treat visitors with the best of country hospitality.

The Nishigumi district is full of local flavor with its cafés, historical buildings, restaurants, temples, and much more! Take some time to explore on foot and see what you can discover along the way.

This area is convenient for tourists to stay in, particularly if they are traveling on foot. For a taste of what it's like to live in an old-time neighborhood, a local venture called **OBAMA MACHIYA STAY** has renovated several townhouses to the standards of modern convenience while retaining the overall architectural design of an Obama *machiya*. You can rent out the entire **Sanchōmachi Sanoya** property or book a room in the neighboring **Sanchōmachi Nagata** property, which also operates a cozy café out of the first floor. There will be no delay in starting your day when you step out straight into Sanchōmachi!

Wandering through the narrow streets, you'll notice that many buildings have the same decoration dangling near the door. Obama families follow a folk tradition of hanging *migawarizaru*, simple, stuffed cloth figures that represent monkeys, which are thought to protect the household from misfortune. Why monkeys? In Japanese, monkeys are called "*saru*", which happens to have the same pronunciation as the verb "to expel evil". There is even a small **Kōshin-dō** temple filled with handmade *migawarizaru*.

With lots of things to discover in Nishigumi, you won't go hungry either. In front of **Hachiman Shrine** is a former traditional sweets shop turned local bakery called **Cocoro**, ready with delicious pastries and savory breads. If you prefer fine dining and entertainment from an Obama *geiko*, the traditional *ryōtei* restaurant and teahouse **Harima** accepts reservations for meals as well as cultural experiences such as *shamisen* lessons, traditional party games, and rental kimono. **Hōtōrō**, an old luxury restaurant, no longer serves food, but they do open their doors on weekends and holidays to show off the traditional architecture and artwork inside and share the site's fascinating history.

Just as they did centuries before, let Nishigumi and Sanchōmachi lead you farther afield into the culture of Obama!

Sanchōmachi Sanoya Sanchōmachi Nagata

三丁町のや・三丁町ながた

〒917-0058 福井県小浜市小浜香取13、14
13 and 14 Obama Katori, Obama City

☎ 0770-56-3366

<https://www.obama-machiya-stay.com/>

Cocoro Bakery | 石窯パンの郷こころ

〒917-0052 福井県小浜市小浜男山39-2
39-2 Obama Otokoyama, Obama City

☎ 0770-53-0575

Open: Wednesday – Sunday, 9:30 – 17:00

<https://www.ishigamapancocoro.com/>

Ryōtei Harima | 料亭播磨

〒917-0058 福井県小浜市小浜香取3

3 Obama Katori, Obama City

☎ 0770-52-0362 (reservation required)

<https://www.harima-obamageisha.jp>

Former Ryōtei Hōtōrō | 蓬嶋楼

〒917-0057 福井県小浜市小浜飛鳥64

64 Obama Asuka, Obama City

☎ 0770-64-6030

Open: Saturday, Sunday, public holidays,

10:00 – 16:00



Myōtsū-ji Temple 明通寺

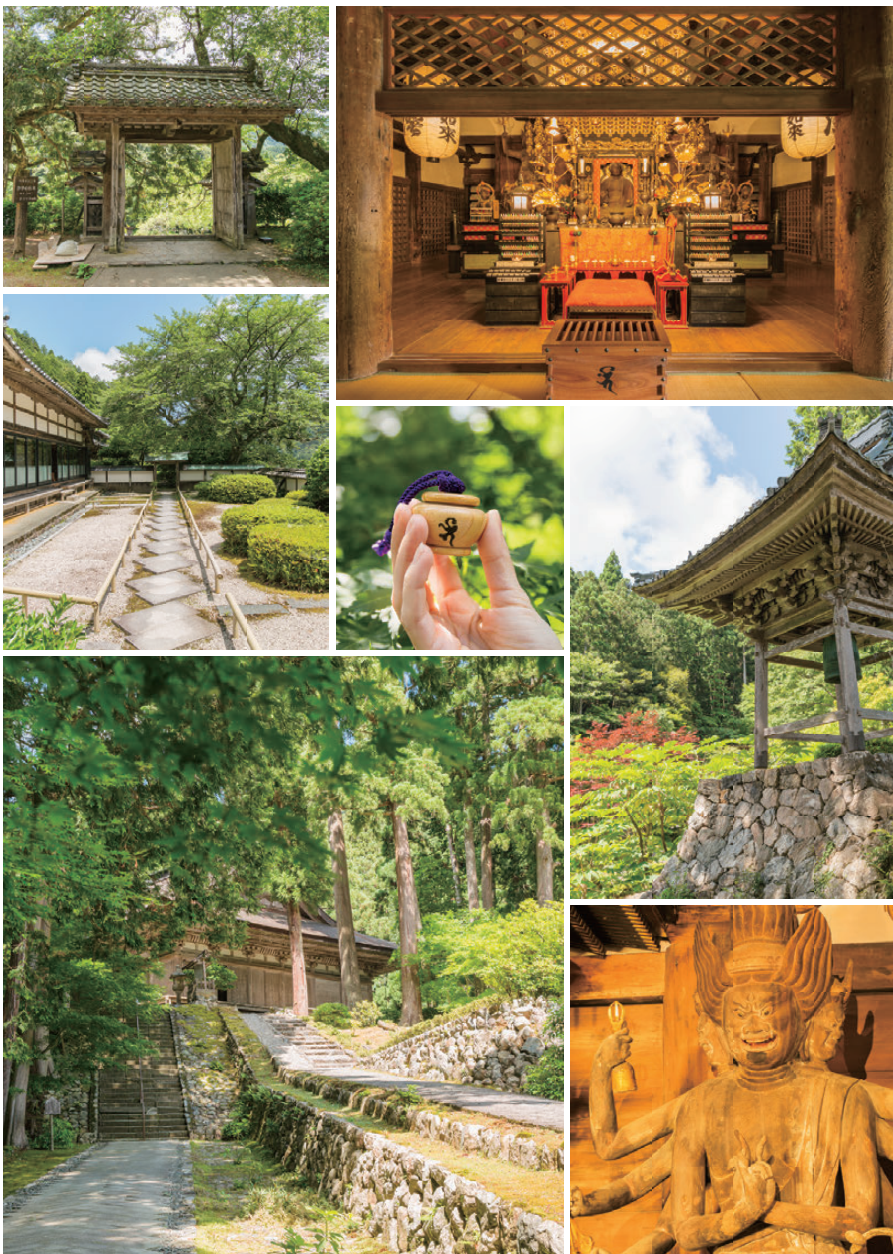
The most well-known temple in Obama City is undoubtedly Myōtsū-ji, a Shingon sect temple founded in 806. Situated at the base of a densely forested mountain covered in *hinoki* cypress trees, Myōtsū-ji still evokes the feeling of temples past, removed from the world and surrounded by nature so that monks could devote themselves solely to practicing Buddhism. Though the passage of time has reduced a once sprawling temple complex to relatively smaller precincts, the unadorned simplicity of the ancient wooden buildings makes for a quiet yet striking scene... and if there's a troupe of wild monkeys making their way through, maybe a little less quiet!



The first site you will encounter approaching Myōtsū-ji is the *sanmon* gate, a wooden structure from 1772 set atop a flight of mossy stone steps. Though the gate itself dates back to an Edo period reconstruction, the two guardians that flank the entrance had their wooden forms and furious expressions carved back in 1264. Just past the gate in a small courtyard you'll find the temple's bell tower, a side garden, and a grand weeping cherry tree that brightens up the precincts with soft pinks each April. More color can be found in one of the temple's three small ponds, home to large *koi* carp who would definitely enjoy some of the food on sale by the water if you choose to indulge them. And while it might not catch your eye at first, don't miss the peculiar broad-leafed and pink-stemmed *yuzuriha* tree marked with a little sign in that same courtyard!

Yuzuriha is specifically mentioned in Myōtsū-ji's records, which indicate that the temple was founded by the great general Sakanoue no Tamuramaro (758 – 811). Legend says that he received a divine revelation in a dream that led him to find a certain large *yuzuriha* tree in the mountains where a mysterious old sage made his home. Following the sage's advice to pray for peace throughout the land, Tamuramaro cut down the *yuzuriha* and from its wood carved three Buddhist statues to be enshrined in the temple hall he erected. The statues were of Yakushi Nyorai, the Medicine Buddha said to cure all ills, Gōzanze Myō-ō, known as the conqueror of greed, hatred, and foolishness, and Jinja Taishō, a guardian said to have aided the famous Chinese monk Xuanzang, whose pilgrimage to India was immortalized in the tale *Journey to the West*.





Versions of these statues created in the late 11th to 12th century can be seen as the principal objects of worship within Myōtsū-ji's main hall, with Yakushi Nyorai in the center, Gōzanze Myō-ō on his left, and Jinja Taishō on his right. Since you are allowed to walk through the inner sanctum, you can even examine the awe-inspiring wooden sculptures from up close! These three, as well as a statue of the Immovable Wisdom King Fudō Myō-ō kept in a separate building, are acknowledged by the Japanese government as Important Cultural Properties. If you understand Japanese, you can learn even more about the temple's history, its treasures, and its grounds directly from a monk while you are admiring the statuary.

All it takes is a look around to discover even more of Myōtsū-ji's priceless treasures! The main hall and the 22-meter-tall three-story pagoda beside it, both erected during reconstruction in 1258, are registered as National Treasures. Even though many people assume that Buddhist temples have always been built in austere, natural-toned woods, back in the day they were often covered in colorful lacquer, painted scenes from various sutras, and symbolic mandalas. Though the outside of both structures has indeed turned to weathered wood over time, the paintings and colors inside Myōtsū-ji's pagoda have been preserved remarkably well and can be viewed during special exhibition periods. This usually coincides with the autumn Tenkomori Obama Festa, but make sure to check in advance!

Before you leave, why not try a little prediction for your future? You may have noticed little red mustachioed dolls and small wooden pots scattered around on lanterns and rocks while exploring the grounds. The dolls actually represent the legendary monk Bodhidharma, and the pots are modeled after traditional medicine jars like the one held by Yakushi Nyorai. Sold for ¥300 and ¥600 respectively at the main hall or the ticket counter, each of these ornaments contains an *omikuji* fortune (in Japanese) inside. Some people choose to leave the figurines behind to populate the precincts, but you are more than welcome to take them home as a little reminder of your trip to this historical temple!



Myōtsū-ji Temple | 明通寺

〒917-0237 福井県小浜市門前5-21

5-21 Monzen, Obama City

☎ 0770-57-1355

Admission: 9:00 – 17:00, ¥500

<https://myotsuji.jimdofree.com/>

Visiting Myōtsū-ji gives a chance to temporarily escape from modern life and take a peek into the past. To quote a Myōtsū-ji monk: "We'd like people to feel that, no matter your religion, this place contains 1,200 years of history, carefully preserved and protected to this day."



Mantoku-ji Temple 萬徳寺



A quiet temple with rich history, Mantoku-ji experiences a surge in popularity in autumn but is worth visiting year-round. Its architecture, art collection, and magnificent garden make for a very satisfying excursion.

Mantoku-ji temple is most lauded for its garden, which is registered as a National Place of Scenic Beauty. Going through different names, addresses, and sect affiliations in over 800 years of history, Mantoku-ji served as a prayer temple for feudal lords and was recognized as the main Shingon sect temple in Wakasa Province during the Warring States period. In the mid-16th century, at the time of *daimyō* Takeda Nobutoyo, it was also a *kakekomi-dera* where women could seek shelter and eventual divorce from their husbands. Now located in the southeastern foothills of Obama, Mantoku-ji is an exquisite example of temple architecture that also boasts a variety of noteworthy artwork and gorgeous views.

The *shoin*, a thatch-roofed building located just inside the temple gate, contains several drawing rooms that offer a splendid garden view and host an interesting assortment of art. The overhead transoms that divide the main rooms are decorated with seasonally-themed Chinese ink paintings drawn about 250 years ago by Sakai Tadatsura, the 9th lord of Obama Domain. The *tokonoma* display area of the hall also features a collection of scroll paintings, Buddhist mandalas, and porcelain donated to the temple over the centuries, proof of the patronage it received from important clans in the past.

Mantoku-ji's famous garden, created in 1677, utilizes the natural slope of the temple grounds as a base for carefully placed stones and greenery behind a sea of pale gravel next to the *shoin* hall. Amongst the foliage you can also find the temple's bell tower, a tutelary shrine, and another small hall. Each season brings a different treat, be it the rare five-colored camellia tree in late winter, bright azaleas in spring, or vibrant maples and ginkgo in autumn. Mantoku-ji's garden is considered one of Japan's top 100 spots for viewing autumn foliage!

Past the garden and up a flight of maple-lined stairs is the temple's main hall, which enshrines a seated statue of Amida Nyorai, "the Buddha of immeasurable light and life". This ancient statue was carved in the late Heian period (794 – 1185) and is now a nationally designated Important Cultural Property. Other statues here include Dainichi Nyorai, the Immovable Wisdom King Fudō Myō-ō, and a hidden Horse-headed Kannon.



Mantoku-ji Temple | 萬徳寺

〒917-0242 福井県小浜市金屋74-23

74-23 Kanaya, Obama City

☎ 0770-56-2308

Admission: 9:00 – 17:00, ¥400

Before you go, make sure to take in the scenic view from the top of the stairs, overlooking the temple grounds as well as the village and the mountains spread out below.



Wakasahiko Shrine and Wakasahime Shrine

若狭彦神社・若狭姫神社



These shrines are home to two nationally recognized Important Cultural Properties: a Heian period *tachi* blade said to have been forged by the famous swordsmith Sanjō Munechika and a *norito* prayer scroll from 1303.

The preeminent Shinto shrines in Obama are Wakasahiko and Wakasahime, a complex of two shrines founded in the early 7th century in dedication to a divine married couple from Japanese mythology. The story goes that the god Hikohohodemi no Mikoto once went fishing with a hook he borrowed from his elder brother... only to end up losing it to a feisty mackerel. When he descended to the Dragon King's palace under the sea to look for the missing hook, he met the beautiful goddess Toyotama-hime, the Dragon King's daughter, whom he promptly married. Once the fishing hook was retrieved, the couple returned to live on the surface, and now the husband is worshiped at Wakasahiko Shrine, while his wife is venerated at Wakasahime. Historically classified as the highest-ranked in the province, these shrines remain a focal point of local celebration in the modern day, hosting weddings, prayers for newborn babies, and coming of age rituals.

As expected of their enshrined deities, Wakasahiko Shrine is most strongly associated with prayers for maritime safety and success in fishing, while Wakasahime Shrine is known as a place to pray for a safe and easy childbirth. Both shrines are built in the classic Shinto architectural style with minimal embellishments, almost blending into the forests that surround them. This feeling of oneness with nature is stronger at the slightly more remote Wakasahiko Shrine, but even Wakasahime, closer to the city and more frequently visited because of the shrine office, still feels tied to both forest and ocean. Ritual *sakaki* trees grow here and there throughout the grounds, locals still come to use the shrine well, and there are large wooden boat models on display that were once offered up by fishermen and merchants in prayer for the safety of their vessels at sea.



Wakasahiko Shrine | 若狭彦神社

〒917-0243 福井県小浜市竜前28-7
28-7 Ryūzen, Obama City
☎ 0770-56-1116
Admission: Free

The most striking natural feature both shrines have in common is their dramatic trees! Wakasahime Shrine's sacred tree is a venerable cedar that towers over the main sanctuary at a whopping 30 meters tall, while Wakasahiko Shrine boasts a pair of *meoto sugi*, "married cedar trees" that grew so close together their bases fused as one. Trees such as this are said to be charms for good luck in love, which is quite fitting when you think of the legend behind the shrine's founding!



Wakasahime Shrine | 若狭姫神社

〒917-0241 福井県小浜市遠敷65-41
65-41 Onyū, Obama City
☎ 0770-56-1116
Admission: Free



Haga-ji Temple 羽賀寺



Kannon is the Buddhist deity of compassion with 33 incarnations to guide and protect humans, and Jūichimen Kannon is said to have 11 heads so that she can see in all directions to find everyone who needs salvation.

According to temple records, in the year 716 a phoenix alighted on a paulownia tree in Obama, leaving behind some feathers. This was regarded as proof of peace throughout the land, and to commemorate the auspicious event Empress Genshō ordered the monk Gyōki to found a temple, which was named Haga-ji with the *kanji* characters for “feather” and “congratulations”. Its records, *Haga-ji Engi*, penned by Prince Masahito with a postscript by Emperor Go-Yōzei, are registered as an Important Cultural Property.

A Shingon sect temple, Haga-ji is renowned for the Buddhist statuary in its main hall, rebuilt after a fire in 1447. The most famous is Jūichimen Kannon (Eleven-headed Kannon), an Important Cultural Property said to have been carved by Gyōki in the image of Empress Genshō herself. Since it was originally kept away from public view, the colorful paint on the wood is remarkably well-preserved. If you lean in, you can still see the delicate patterns on the statue’s clothing! You’ll also notice that its right arm is disproportionately long, representing Kannon’s ability to reach out and save those in need. The richly decorated altar features carved phoenixes and paulownia crests as another reminder of the temple’s origins.

Statues of Bishamonten, the guardian of the north, a Jizō (Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva) said to bless couples with children, a Jizō believed to bestow a long life, and a thousand-armed Kannon originally venerated at another temple are also on display here. Buddhist sutras actually describe 33 incarnations of Kannon, and their depictions line the walls in a corridor behind the main altar. In a side chamber you’ll find two statues of 16th-century lords who contributed greatly to the temple’s reconstruction: Andō Chikasue and his son Akita Sanesue. At Haga-ji’s main hall you can also get its newly-designed *goshūin* (¥1,000), special seals inscribed with vermilion and gold ink and decorated with cute images of Jūichimen Kannon or its 33 incarnations. Half of the income is used for temple maintenance and half is directed towards disaster recovery assistance and community development.

Now nestled in the foothills northeast of the city center, Haga-ji was once one of the closest temples to the bustling Obama port, governing 18 sub-temples at the height of its power. Though today its appeal lies in its historical artifacts, don’t forget to savor the temple grounds! The precincts are particularly beautiful in summer when colorful hydrangeas bloom along the pathways.



Haga-ji Temple | 羽賀寺

〒917-0071 福井県小浜市羽賀83-5

83-5 Haga, Obama City

☎ 0770-52-4502

Admission: 9:00 – 16:00, ¥400



Jōkō-ji Temple 常高寺



Jōkō-ji temple is a must-see for fans of Japan's Warring States history. It was a chaotic period between the collapse of one shogunate and the rise of another, but it produced many fascinating historical figures such as Ohatsu.

Jōkō-ji is a Rinzai Zen temple revitalized through the efforts of Obama citizens driven to preserve the temple's rich history. Originally built in 1630, Jōkō-ji was founded by a widow named Ohatsu (1570 – 1633) so that she could take the tonsure and pray for the souls of her parents and her husband Kyōgoku Takatsugu, the feudal lord of Obama Domain. Under the name of Jōkō-in, Ohatsu entered the nunnery with seven loyal handmaidens, and at the end of their lives they were all buried in the temple cemetery overlooking Obama Bay.

However, Ohatsu didn't spend all her widowed life cloistered! Her pedigree as the niece of the famous Warring States general Oda Nobunaga allowed her to play an important role in national politics far beyond Obama. With her elder sister Yodogimi married into the Toyotomi clan and younger sister Gō into the Tokugawa clan competing over rule of the country, Ohatsu worked tirelessly to try and maintain peace between the two powers. Because of this her life has been well-studied by historians, and efforts have been taken to preserve and display the relics that remained at Jōkō-ji. These include a wall scroll portrait of Ohatsu, letters written in her hand, gifts from her sisters, and other documents that help tell her story. Japanese speakers even have the chance to listen to the head priest explain the significance of each display if he's available when you visit!

Because the main temple hall was rebuilt from the ground up in 2001, it shines with a relatively modern finish, drawing one's eyes to the sun rays pouring through a dramatic skylight. The *shoin* wing, however, is exactly what one might expect from a historical temple, decorated with ink paintings of nature scenes and Chinese sages. Sitting in these *tatami* mat rooms in quiet contemplation, you can enjoy a view of Jōkō-ji's rear garden undisturbed by crowds.

When it comes to seasonal beauty, though, Jōkō-ji is better known for what's out front! Situated beside the temple bell is a pond that overflows with gorgeous irises in spring, bringing a plethora of colors to the temple grounds. Make sure to admire the old main gate... but be careful passing through! The local train line runs between the gate and the stone steps that lead to it, which can make for quite the dramatic picture of "past meets present".



Jōkō-ji Temple | 常高寺

〒917-0055 福井県小浜市小浜浅間1

1 Obama Asama, Obama City

☎ 0770-53-2327

Admission: 9:00 – 16:00, ¥400

<https://jyoukouin.jimdofree.com/>

Special Feature

Happyakubikuni

The Nun Who Lived 800 Years 八百比丘尼



There is a certain legend found throughout Japan that tells the tragic tale of a woman who unwittingly became near immortal, doomed to wander the earth undying while everyone she loved passed into memory. Though many areas have their own accounts of these events, when told in Obama it goes something like this.

Once upon a time in the mid-7th century, a beautiful daughter was born into the wealthy Takahashi clan of Obama Domain. When she was sixteen years of age, her affluent father received a banquet invitation from a certain mysterious man in their village. Curious as to what he would encounter, the father visited the man's residence and was surprised to be greeted by a splendid manor full of servants preparing exotic dishes.

He was shocked, however, to see a mermaid amongst the fish on the cutting board. Surely they didn't plan on serving such a taboo meal? Despite the host's attempts to cajole him into eating it, claiming that it was a gift from the Palace of the Dragon King beneath the sea, Takahashi managed to avoid tasting the mermaid meat...

but could not rebuff the insistent offers to at least take some home. When he returned from the banquet, his daughter was quite curious about the delicious-looking meat her father had brought, and before he could stop her, she devoured all of the mermaid flesh.

From that day forth, the daughter ceased to age. As her parents passed away, as her husband and children grew old, she alone remained untouched by time due to the mermaid meat's power. Shaving her head and dedicating herself to the life of a nun, the eternally young woman set out on a journey throughout the country, preaching and planting camellias wherever she went.

It is said that after 800 years of wandering Japan in search of rest, the woman now known as Happyakubikuni ("the eight-hundred-year-old nun") returned to Obama. Coming across a coastal cave, she resolved to remain secluded there for the rest of her days until she finally managed to find peace, and no one has seen her since. The cave said to be the one where Happyakubikuni disappeared can now be found just beside the gate to Kūin-ji temple, marked with a signboard that tells her story, as well as a statue of the immortal nun surrounded by camellias that bloom white and pink in winter. In good weather, visitors are welcome to enter the shallow cave (for a fee) to explore and pay respects to the memorial monument within.



Kūin-ji Temple | 空印寺

〒917-0052 福井県小浜市小浜男山2

2 Obama Otokoyama, Obama City

☎ 0770-52-1936

Admission: 9:00 – 17:00, ¥400



NATURE

One of the great things about a rural community is its unspoiled natural beauty, which Obama has in spades. Whether you want the sparkling sea, breathtaking mountain views, or serene forest trails, this city has plenty to offer!



Sotomo Scenic Cruise

蘇洞門めぐり



There is nothing quite like the sea breeze in your hair, but no worries if you prefer a little less wind! The boats used for the Sotomo Scenic Cruise have both indoor and outdoor seating, as well as upper viewing decks.

Located as it is by the Sea of Japan, Obama offers a plethora of gorgeous ocean views. There are several docks, mountain drives, and observation points around the bay, but the best and most satisfying way for a tourist to take in the marine sights is the Sotomo Scenic Cruise. Setting out from the Wakasa Fisherman's Wharf, this boat ride lasts approximately 50 minutes and takes passengers along six kilometers of coastline, passing stunning rock formations, mysterious caves, a tall waterfall that empties into the sea, and a multitude of jagged cliffs along the way.

This area of the coast was already known for its scenic beauty back in the 18th century, even meriting depictions in famous landscape paintings. Over time, rock formations with the most interesting shapes earned names like the Sickie's Crook Rock, the Trading Ship Island, the Net-Strewn Rocks, and the Turtle Couple Rocks. Throughout the cruise, announcements prompt passengers to look at this rock or that while explaining the area's history and sights. The announcements are in Japanese, but English pamphlets and maps are available for tourists to follow along.

At the turnaround point of the cruise is the famous landmark, the Sotomo Arches. Carved from granite by the powerful waves, this eroded cave on the tip of the Uchitomi Peninsula greeted ships for centuries as a sign that they were nearing the end of their journey towards Obama. The Sotomo Arches are composed of two formations, Ōmon (Large Gate) and Komon (Small Gate). It can be difficult to gauge the size from aboard the ship, but the smaller of the two arches is actually as tall as three men! If you are lucky, on rare occasions the waters will be calm enough for the ship to dock in the small cove behind, allowing passengers to briefly disembark and admire the view from within.

Any good sailor will tell you not to underestimate the sea, so be aware that the Sotomo Scenic Cruise may change its main route or suspend services on days when the weather is poor or the waves are high. Most months have a boat scheduled to leave once an hour, but the winter schedule has more irregularities, so be sure to check before you go!



Wakasa Fisherman's Wharf 若狭フィッシャーマンズ・ワーフ

〒917-0081 福井県小浜市川崎1-3-2
1-3-2 Kawasaki, Obama City

☎ 0770-52-3111

Tickets: ¥2,000, children (6-12 years old): ¥1,000
<https://www.wakasa-fishermans.com/>



Tagarasu Terraced Rice Fields

田鳥の棚田

A popular photography spot in Obama is Tagarasu no Tanada, terraced rice paddies cultivated on a slope right next to the sea. Blue skies and colorful sunsets reflect gorgeously on the watery fields in mid-summer when the rice plants are young, and twice a year after planting and harvest the area is decorated with countless candles for a big light-up event.

〒917-0101 福井県小浜市田鳥 Tagarasu, Obama City



Miyagawa Sunflower Fields

恵のひまわり畑〈宮川地区〉

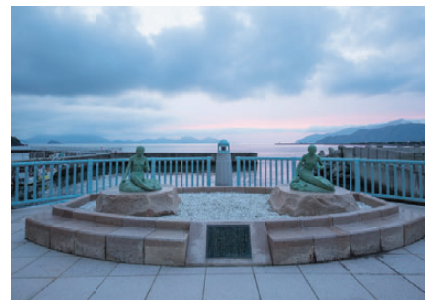
Summer in Obama is made even brighter with a visit to the Miyagawa sunflower fields! More than one million sunflower seeds are planted in five valley fields over the course of the season, and the hybrid sunflowers that grow here can reach a massive 30 centimeters in diameter. There is also an annual Sunflower Festival held in August that features many tasty treats, a farmer's market, and various community events.

〒917-0223 福井県小浜市加茂・竹長 Kamo and Takenaga, Obama City



Bay Views

The sea around Obama is beautiful no matter the time of day, but there's no denying that it is the loveliest during sunrise and sunset, when the rays set the sky and clouds alight with color. Some popular places to view the bay are the Mermaid Terrace, the Hoshi no Hiroba Park observation deck, and the Angel Line, a scenic driving route on Mt. Kusuyagadake.



Mermaid Terrace | マーメイドテラス

〒917-0068 福井県小浜市小浜日吉
Obama Hiyoishi, Obama City

Hoshi no Hiroba Park | 星の広場

〒917-0041 福井県小浜市青井33-1
33-1 Aoi, Obama City



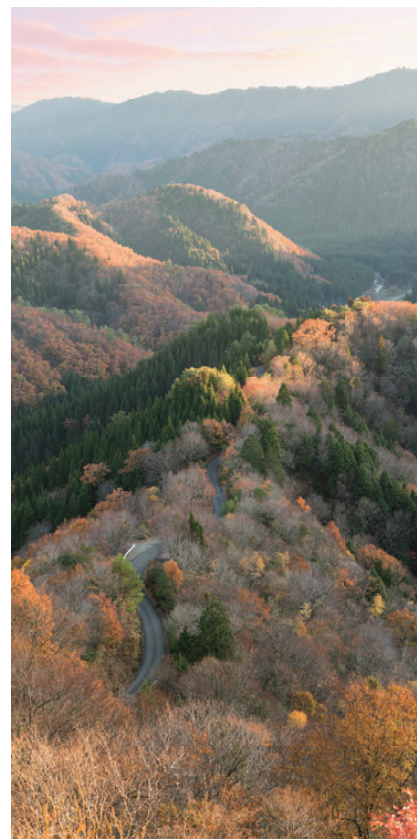
One of Japan's favorite autumn pastimes is *momiji gari*, "maple hunting" to take in the fall colors before they disappear and winter sets in. Offering both natural mountain scenery and cultivated gardens, Obama is a prime destination for viewing the autumn leaves without the crowds you might get in more central or urban areas.

Make the most of those crisp fall days and visit a temple early to enjoy the colors in the morning light! Mantoku-ji temple is quite popular in the area thanks to its gorgeous garden, but Wakasa Jingū-ji's teahouse surrounded by maples or Myōraku-ji's gate and main hall framed with bright leaves also make for charming fall scenes. If you prefer a wilder landscape, you can also drive up the Saba Kaidō road or the Angel Line for some breathtaking views from the mountain peaks.

Autumn Leaves



Whether in a carefully maintained garden or out in the wilds of the forests and mountains, you haven't truly experienced Japan if you haven't seen the exquisite beauty of its autumn leaves!



Myōraku-ji Temple | 妙楽寺

〒917-0028 福井県小浜市野代28-13
28-13 Nodai, Obama City
☎ 0770-56-0133
Admission: 9:00 – 17:00, ¥400

Saba Kaidō Scenic Area

鯖街道写真スポット

福井県道35号 久坂中ノ畑小浜線
上根来 針畑越え
Fukui Prefectural Road 35,
Kaminegori, Harihatagoe Pass

Angel Line | エンゼルライン

福井県道107号 泊小浜停車場線 久須夜ヶ岳
Fukui Prefectural Road 107, Mt. Kusuyagadake

Keshō Jizō

Painted Ksitigarbha Statues

化粧地藏



Throughout the traditional districts of Obama you may notice small wooden or stone shrines along the roads. While it is not uncommon in Japan to find roadside shrines dedicated to Jizō Bosatsu (Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva), the guardian of travelers and children, the tradition is particularly strong in the city of Obama. However, these *jizō* aren't the usual plain sort! A look inside the humble structures will reveal that the stone statues there are painted in colorful, cheerful hues, and thus they are fittingly called *keshō jizō*, "Jizō wearing make-up".

Every year during the Jizō Bon festival that takes place on August 23rd, children of the neighborhoods that are home to *keshō jizō* are entrusted with taking the statues to the sea and scrubbing them clean, after which they are repainted and put out for display with fresh cloth bibs. How to paint the *jizō* is up to the children, so some end up more realistic while others are more creative, ranging in color from browns and golds to bright rainbow stripes. Some children even use lacquer to decorate their *jizō* instead of paint!



Since Jizō Bon is a festival to pray for the health of children, the youngest members of Obama's community take center stage, parading around their neighborhoods or sitting at specially constructed little halls called *jizō-dō*, banging drums and ringing bells to call people to pray and make offerings. Naturally, these offerings most often come in the form of food, particularly sweets!

Even if you visit Obama outside of this festive season, the painted *jizō* statues are waiting to greet you as you make your way through the Nishigumi and Nishizu districts. Since Obama's *keshō jizō* tradition is livelier than in most other places, there are nearly forty shrines scattered about just these two neighborhoods! Each little shrine has its own legends and tales about the wishes and favors their *jizō* is said to grant.

The dedication of Obama's residents to this time-honored tradition of tending to the *jizō* can be seen every day, be it a neighbor with a broom, a mother and child giving a little offering, or an elderly woman setting up a vase of fresh flowers. As you explore Obama's charming streets, don't forget to stop by the small roadside shrines and peek inside to see which of the painted *jizō* is looking back at you!





FESTIVALS

Obama's annual event calendar befits its rich cultural heritage, with many festivals testament to the city's age-long connection with Kyoto and Nara. Both Shinto and Buddhist beliefs present themselves in various rituals, and visitors are welcome to observe and participate!



Omizu Okuri Ritual お水送り

A fire and water ritual with a uniquely rich and solemn atmosphere, Omizu Okuri is one of Obama's largest annual festivals, held in early spring on March 2nd. This ritual's name means "the sending of water", and its purpose is to "send" sacred water to the Wakasa Well underneath the Nigatsu-dō hall in Tōdai-ji temple for Nara's famous Omizutori ceremony on March 12th. One legend says that when the monk Jitchū built Nigatsu-dō in the 8th century, he called together all the gods to give their blessings in a great rite dedicated to the Eleven-headed Kannon. However, the deity Onyū Myōjin from Wakasa was so absorbed in his fishing that he almost missed the service. As an apology, he promised to give an annual offering of the purest water for Omizutori and made a spring appear at the spot. The spring water is said to originate from Unose in Obama.

The main host for the Omizu Okuri festival is Wakasa Jingū-ji temple, which traces its history back more than 1,300 years. Initially a temple-shrine in a syncretic fusion of Shinto and Buddhism, it was adjunct to Wakasahiko Shrine under the name Jingan-ji. Now it is a Tendai sect temple whose principal object of worship is Yakushi Nyorai, the Medicine Buddha, believed to also be an incarnation of Onyū Myōjin. The main hall and temple gate are both designated as Important Cultural Properties, and on the grounds you will find a lovely teahouse, an impressive sacred tree, and the well that supplies the water used in Omizu Okuri.



Rituals begin early at Shimonegori Hachimangū shrine and continue at Jingū-ji, but the first part that visitors can watch takes place in front of Jingū-ji's main hall from 13:00. In this service, priests symbolically fire arrows in four cardinal directions to repel vengeful spirits, and after that local *kyūdō* masters perform an offering of archery skills.

The next ceremony takes place at 18:00. A group of *yamabushi* (ascetic mountain monks) in white clothes with conch shell trumpets, sacred weapons, *gohei* wands, and a container of pure water from Jingū-ji's temple well enter the main hall, and the doors close behind them. The general public is not privy to what happens inside, but can hear the chanting of the head priest praying for the cleansing of karmic sins, peace throughout the land, and a bountiful harvest. With this rite, the well water attains holy qualities to become an offering to divine powers.



At the sound of conch trumpets, the light of a giant torch dispels the dark. One of the monks carries out a 7-meter-long torch, taking it to the farthest edges of the temple's gallery to purify the grounds, and then the priests and monks descend from the hall, heading towards the bonfire prepared in the courtyard. The rite proceeds with purifications by each of the sacred weapon keepers and a sutra chant by the water bearer, and a tall pillar of smoke rises up, quickly turning into a blaze.

All the participants light their torches from the bonfire, and around 19:30 a majestic procession departs towards Unose along the Onyū River, their way lit by stationary fires. Those who wish to actively participate instead of just observing can buy a torch for ¥1,500 and write their prayer on it before the ceremony starts, and thus the procession swells to more than a thousand people in total.

The Unose shoal at this time is a truly mystical sight with fire braziers placed here and there on the riverbank, orange flames reflecting in the flowing water. There is a second bonfire prepared in this location, and some time past 20:00 the torch procession files through the *torii* gate on the bank, and everyone takes their spots around the pyre. After another purification and a chant that calls together all the deities, the second bonfire also roars to life.

Around 20:30, a group of monks crosses the river to the opposite side. There, the head priest comes forward to the very verge of Unose's low cliff and makes a prayer accompanied by arcane hand gestures, followed by a reading of the water-sending scripture. Taking out a sacred sword, he performs ritual cutting motions to ward off evil spirits and finally pours the holy water into the river below as a culmination of the entire ceremony. In ten days, the water will reach the Wakasa Well at Nigatsu-dō for Omizutori. After another prayer chant backed by the rhythmic ringing of sacred bells, the monks return to the bonfire, where everyone concludes the ritual with sacred *sake*.

You can choose to be an observer or an active participant in this dramatic festival! For photographers, it may be best to stake out a spot aiming to catch a particular ritual, since both Wakasa Jingū-ji and Unose sites have a lot to offer. A word of advice: be careful of the flying sparks!



Wakasa Jingū-ji Temple | 若狭神宮寺

〒917-0244 福井県小浜市神宮寺30-4

30-4 Jingū-ji, Obama City

☎ 0770-56-1911

Admission: 9:00 – 16:00, ¥400

(main hall closed February 15th – March 5th)

Unose | 鵜の瀬

〒917-0246 福井県小浜市下根菜

Shimonegori, Obama City



Hōze Matsuri Festival 放生祭

Hōze Matsuri began more than 300 years ago, originating from a ritual of mercy that involved releasing captured fish and birds back into nature. A colorful parade of floats was introduced due to the influence of Kyoto's famous Gion Matsuri, and after merging with the local Hachiman Shrine's annual festivities it became what is now the largest autumn festival in the old Wakasa region. Rich and colorful festival floats, nimble dancers in *shishi* lion costumes, musicians playing *ōdaiko* drums in energetic rhythms, and sacred *kagura* performers move through the city, every act serving as dedication to the shrine's deity.

A total of 24 local neighborhoods take turns showcasing their floats and productions, with 12 going live each year. A brightly decorated *mikoshi* or a smaller portable shrine proudly travels the distance from its *otabisho* (temporary resting point) back towards the main shrine, and all the other participants of the parade visit Hachiman Shrine to pray and proceed on their way throughout the day. All of this makes Hōze Matsuri a great chance to see various traditional performing arts and all the features of a Japanese festival, and you shouldn't forget the food stalls!

Mikoshi

Only one *mikoshi* takes part in the festival parade, presented by the Katori neighborhood. The current version was assembled from parts harvested from two old Hachiman Shrine *mikoshi* and newer, shiny materials made possible through community donations. The *mikoshi* makes several trips between the stone *torii* gate and the wooden *torii* gate of the shrine, making a powerful dash along the last stretch. Some say it is because the deity does not want to leave the fun festival to go back home, but still decides to return in the end. On the way around the city, the carriers never simply pass a crossroad, instead moving the *mikoshi* forwards and back, left and right, and making three upward swings at the headquarters of each ward. On the second day of the festival, the head priest holds a special service in the square in front of the Machi no Eki Asahiza building. On years when the *mikoshi* is not in action, a smaller portable shrine takes its place.

Festival Floats

The *dashi* (festival floats) are two-storied and bear an obvious resemblance to those built for Kyoto's Gion Matsuri festival. Decorated with intricate wooden carvings, golden embellishments, carefully embroidered tapestries, and paper lanterns, each float has two drummers on the small "stage" at the front and flutists playing traditional songs on the upper level. Everyone practices very hard throughout the summer to be at their best for the festival days! Adult participants in colorful robes pull the floats along the route, fascinating the onlookers with their coordination. Pay special attention to the Asuka float for its unique kids' performance!



Shishi Dance

Groups of performers in *shishi* costumes and masks decorated with the longest and glossiest rooster feathers do a traditional dance accompanied by drums and flutes. Depending on the group, the *shishi* can be young or old, male or female, but they all dance spiritedly to every tune. This fascinating tradition dates back to the Meiji period, and visitors would be remiss if they didn't find time to admire the skills and passion of the dancers.

Ōdaiko Drums

Playing a traditional drum is more than just producing a compelling technical beat! It is also about posture, form and movement, the grip of the drumsticks, and colorful outfits. *Ōdaiko* drum performances are accompanied by bright umbrellas, swinging poles, and acrobatic tricks that are quite a show by themselves! Performers switch from the tiniest little girl to the most experienced drummer, and visitors get an opportunity to enjoy every rhythm.

Kagura

At Hôze Matsuri, *kagura* performers play a variety of songs on their drums and flutes, each neighborhood boasting its own traditional tunes and rhythms, plus a special song performed when they enter Hachiman Shrine with their dedications. Most of the *kagura* participants wear bright yellow robes and distinctive wide-brimmed hats draped in red and adorned with an assortment of dangling charms, and the small stages for the drummers feature traditional gilded roofs and red paper lanterns. Young girls from the Shirahige neighborhood solemnly perform Miko no Mai, a unique shrine maiden dance on the stage of Hachiman Shrine or Machi no Eki Asahiza, depending on the year.

Yatai Stalls

A colorful collection of food stalls along the Hamasandō and other streets leading to Hachiman Shrine offers a variety of savory and sweet festival foods, as well as chilled fruit, drinks, shaved ice, and innumerable other goodies. Entertaining games are also available for children and adults alike, and if you get tired, you can take a breather and recharge around Machi no Eki Asahiza for another turn of the festival fun!

There is so much to see at Hôze Matsuri! Make sure to pick up a festival pamphlet with a map and performance time schedule so you won't miss a thing!



Hachiman Shrine | 八幡神社

〒917-0052 福井県小浜市小浜男山10
10 Obama Otokoyama, Obama City

☎ 0770-52-1935

Admission: Free

<https://hoze-matsuri.jp/>



Special Feature

Obama Food Culture

小浜の食文化

Food plays a big role in Obama's community life, be it a family gathering around the table for dinner, elderly gentlemen chatting at the local pub, youngsters rounding up their favorite treats from festival stalls, or someone gone fishing off the pier in the early morning to land something fresh for breakfast.

It's no wonder that delicious food is a large part of what makes Obama such an amazing place to visit! Located on the coast of the Sea of Japan, the city is renowned for the freshness of its seafood, and in particular for its many ways of preparing mackerel! Apart from that, Obama boasts traditional dishes inherited through the connection to Kyoto, as well as tasty local vegetables and delicate sweets.

Obama prides itself on its historical food culture and has the credentials to back it up. In the past, it was part of a *miketsukuni*, a province tasked with sending food all the way to the imperial court. In addition to seafood, they also produced the ever-important preservation tool – salt!



Tourists today can get a crash course in Obama cuisine by visiting the **Miketsukuni Wakasa Obama Food Culture Museum**. It offers educational exhibits in both English and Japanese about traditional foods, Saba Kaidō (the Mackerel Road) that connected Obama and Kyoto, regional variations of some recipes throughout Japan, how Obama's famous dishes are made, and even more! The building's first floor contains a kitchen studio for cooking classes that can be booked in advance, and the second floor is a sprawling combination of gift shop and workspace where you can buy souvenirs, participate in workshops to try out local handicrafts, or both!



Located just a stone's throw from the Food Culture Museum is the **Wakasa Obama Fish Center**, where residents and restaurateurs alike do their shopping. Boats unload their catches early, and wholesale auctions take place pier-side with market vendors competing for boxed goods and individual fish. Small trucks zip between the pier and the market, and by eight or nine the vendors have an amazing haul to offer to anyone interested. You might think that buying raw fish isn't the best idea when traveling, but never fear! Several stalls offer a local specialty, *hamayaki saba*, an entire grilled mackerel on a bamboo skewer, and there are sushi and *sashimi* shops operating inside as well. If you are feeling more hands-on, you can even take your purchases across the lot to rent a charcoal brazier and grill whatever strikes your fancy. And after walking through the Fish Center, you're definitely going to feel like eating!



Miketsukuni Wakasa Obama Food Culture Museum

御食国若狭おばま食文化館

〒917-0081 福井県小浜市川崎3-4

3-4 Kawasaki, Obama City

☎ 0770-53-1000

Open: 9:00 – 18:00 (March – November),

9:00 – 17:00 (December – February)

Closed: Wednesday, December 28th – January 5th

<http://www1.city.obama.fukui.jp/obm/mermaid/index.php>



Wakasa Obama Fish Center

若狭小浜お魚センター

〒917-0081 福井県小浜市川崎2-5-1

2-5-1 Kawasaki, Obama City

☎ 0770-53-1530

Open: 7:00 – 14:00, closed Wednesday

A close-up photograph of three whole fish, likely mackerel, hanging vertically on wooden skewers. The fish are grilled to a golden-brown color with some charred areas. They are positioned over a surface covered with Japanese newspapers. The fish are arranged in a row, with the middle one slightly ahead of the others.

FAMOUS LOCAL FOOD

Bountiful catches from the Sea of Japan make Obama a seafood lover's paradise. Though it is best known for mackerel, you can enjoy a wide variety of other fresh fish, crab, and shellfish, as well as local vegetables and mouthwatering sweets.

Sabazushi

鯖寿司

Pressed mackerel sushi, or *sabazushi*, is popular all along the Saba Kaidō road, so you should definitely try it at the source! Lightly salted mackerel is filleted and pickled in sushi vinegar before the tougher skin is peeled away and the bones are removed. A wooden mold is then used to press the fish onto the sushi rice, with a thin piece of kelp on top or between them for garnish.



Kodai no Sasazuke

小鯛ささ漬

Mackerel isn't the only famous fish in Obama! The appetizing *kodai no sasazuke* is made from small sea bream filleted into slices and treated to a time-tested balance of salt and vinegar pickling to preserve the taste. When you crack open the distinctive cask you can eat the bamboo leaf-topped fish as is, or use it in sushi or soup!



Yopparai Saba

よっぱらいサバ

Fancy your fish served a bit tipsy? Try *yopparai saba*, literally meaning "drunk mackerel"! This special farm-raised brand of mackerel is fed *sake* lees with its food, resulting in a fish with more *umami* flavor, much weaker fishy odor, and a less oily texture. The best part is the added touch of *sake* to the taste and smell of the *yopparai saba*, whether served grilled or cut into the freshest of *sashimi*.



Kuzu Manjū

葛饅頭

How about some sweets to balance out the seafood? Obama is well-known for its *kuzu manjū*, a delicious treat associated with summer. *Manjū* usually consist of sweet red bean paste centers surrounded by a steamed yeast bun, but in this case exteriors are made from kudzu (Japanese arrowroot) starch, resulting in a clear, gelatin-like casing. The smooth flavor and watery texture make for a refreshing snack to enjoy between April and October.

Humans have struggled to find ways to preserve food well enough to make it through hard times and long winters since civilization began. Salting, curing, burying, pickling, smoking, canning, fermenting... Though many of these methods have faded into obscurity by now, Obama is home to a particular recipe of fermenting mackerel that has persevered for centuries, producing a popular dish and souvenir called *heshiko*.

The process of making *heshiko* begins in autumn with a fresh catch of mackerel, which is first prepped by being cut open and cleaned of organs and blood to fill the stomach with salt. The fish is then put into barrels and compressed, starting with a 2 kg weight on top that gradually increases as the mackerel is switched to fresh barrels, pressing out any excess liquids along the way. After a week or so of this treatment the salt is replaced with rice bran, and the mackerel goes back into the barrels with *togarashi* peppers to ward off insects and specially woven straw ropes around the rim to help seal the containers tight. Left this way for about a year, *heshiko* is ready to eat come next winter!

Heshiko is said to take its name from the verb "*heshikomu*", meaning "to push into". Back in the day local families stuffed mackerel into barrels this way to make their *heshiko* at home, but now most of Obama's *heshiko* is produced commercially. Some people still use the old-fashioned way, though, like Sasuke Morishita, a *heshiko* producer in Obama's Tagarasu district who is always ready to explain the traditional process and help introduce people to this classic flavor!

There are several popular ways to enjoy eating *heshiko*. Slices of *heshiko* pair well with *sake*, and it is quite tasty grilled, pressed into sushi, or as a topping for *chazuke* (green tea or broth poured over cooked rice). If you want to take things one step further, *heshiko* can also be made into a product called *narezushi* by washing out the excess salt, stuffing the fish with rice and *koji* malt, and letting it ferment an additional few weeks. Like many fermented foods, it has a taste people seem to either love or hate, but it is worth trying – especially since it's considered the primitive origin of the modern-day sushi we all know and love!



Special Feature

HESHIKO

へしこ





TRADITIONAL CRAFTS

Since ancient times, artisans in Obama have been able to perfect their crafts by skillfully incorporating techniques brought through foreign trade into their own. Particularly famous for lacquerware and chopsticks, Obama also prides itself on agate carving, *washi* papermaking, and traditional clay tile production.



Wakasa Lacquerware 若狭塗

The local lacquerware tradition is said to have begun on the cusp of the 16th and 17th centuries when craftsman Sanjūro Matsuura produced a design depicting the seabed of Wakasa Bay. This *Wakasa nuri* style flourished under the ruling Sakai clan, and highly skilled artisans continue the practice to this day. Cloth pasting and several layers of colored lacquer are followed by seashells, mother-of-pearl, eggshells, rice husks, and pine needles to create a pattern, further covered by more coats of lacquer. Polishing with progressively finer whetstones to bring the pattern to the surface is a process unique to Wakasa lacquerware.

Obama proudly produces at least 80% of Japan's lacquered chopsticks! *Wakasa nuri* chopsticks showcase a variety of techniques like the classic *raden*, where mother-of-pearl designs are coated with lacquer to be later revealed by polishing, *tsuishu* bringing out the multicolored layers of lacquer, and *kanshitsu* with dry lacquer powder sprinkled underneath for a slightly rough surface. Artisans make chopsticks with rougher ends to prevent food from slipping, an improved grip for a steady hold, and varied lengths for people of all ages. The Wakasa Chopsticks Industry Cooperative holds the Guinness World Record for the largest chopsticks: 8.4 meters long!

Wakasa Agate Carving 若狭めのう

Legend says that when Obama's Wakasahiko and Wakasahime Shrines were built back in the 8th century, a sea-faring people who worshiped two jewels of the tide settled in the area and made agate carving their trade. More official records mention Obama native Kihei Takayama, an optician's apprentice in Naniwa (Osaka), who brought a technique of making round agate beads back home in the early 18th century. It was later discovered that heat enhances the stone's color, and by the 19th century a wide range of techniques were developed to produce intricate works that have received recognition both within Japan and abroad. Drawing inspiration from each stone's natural pattern, artisans painstakingly cut and polish every piece, transforming rough stones into lovely animal figurines, Buddhist statues, incense holders, and stunning accessories.



Some of Obama's traditional crafts can be experienced at **Wakasa Kōbō** on the second floor of the Miketsukuni Wakasa Obama Food Culture Museum. Here you can polish your own chopsticks, try your hand at making traditional *washi* paper, or make an agate keychain or pendant with guidance from the masters of each craft.



Wakasa Kōbō | 若狭工房

〒917-0081 福井県小浜市川崎3-4

御食国若狭おばま食文化館2階

Miketsukuni Wakasa Obama Food Culture Museum 2F, 3-4 Kawasaki, Obama City

☎ 0770-53-1034

Open: 9:00 – 18:00 (March – November),

9:00 – 17:00 (December – February)

Closed: Wednesday, December 28th – January 5th

<http://wakasa-koubou.com/>

OBAMA CITY EVENT CALENDAR

January 6 – February 3

Kanshugyō Takuhatsu
(Winter Alms Gathering by Itinerant Monks)
• Hosshin-ji Temple

March 2

Omizu Okuri Ritual
• Wakasa Jingū-ji Temple, Unose

Late March – Early April

Cherry Blossom Festival
• Obama Park

Mid-April

(Year of the Rat, Year of the Horse)

Wakuri Mibu Kyōgen
• Saihō-ji Temple

April 29

Urayasu no Mai
(Dance for a Peaceful Bay)
• Wakamiya Hachiman Shrine

Late April – Mid-May

Japanese Doll Exhibition
• Obama Townscape Preservation Museum

May 2–3

Unpin Jishi, Oshiro Matsuri
(Lion Dance and Castle Festival)
• Obama Shrine

May 3–4

Nishizu Festival
• Tsurihime Shrine,
Tamatsushima Shrine,
Hiyoshi Shrine

May 5

Ō no Mai
(Dance of the King)
• Shiimura Shrine

Late May

Tanokami Matsuri
(Festival for the God of the Rice Fields)
• Onyū, Miyagawa,
Matsunaga Districts

Tagarasu Festival

• Tenman Shrine

June 30 – July 1

Suribachi Kuguri
(Earthenware Moxibustion Prayer)
• Hōun-ji Temple

Early July

Public beaches open for swimming

Mid-July

Atago Fire Festival
• Atago Shrine

Obama Gion Matsuri Festival

• Hiromine Shrine

July 28

Nagoshi Harae Summer Purification Festival
• Tsushima District,
Minatsukiharae Shrine

August 1

Wakasa Marine Pier Fireworks
• Shiratori Beach

August 4

Hashi Matsuri
(Chopsticks Festival)
• Hashi no Furusato-kan
WAKASA

Early to Mid-August

Miyagawa Sunflower Fields
• Miyagawa Area
(Kamo and Takenaga)

Mid-August

Matsu-age Fire Festival
• Takidani District,
Minamigawa Riverbeds

August 23

Jizō Bon Festival
• Obama, Nishizu Areas

Mid-September

Hōze Matsuri Festival
• Hachiman Shrine
Yosakoi Dance Festival

Early October

Onyū Festival
• Wakasahiko Shrine,
Wakasahime Shrine

October

Obama Food Festival

November

Fall Colors

TOURIST INFORMATION & HELPFUL CONTACTS

Wakasa Obama Tourist Information Center

若狭おばま観光案内所

〒917-0077 福井県小浜市駅前町6-1
6-1 Ekimae-chō, Obama City
Tel.: 0770-52-3844 Hours: 9:00 – 18:00
<https://www.wakasa-obama.jp/>

Obama Ekimae Police Box 小浜警察署 駅前交番

〒917-0077 福井県小浜市駅前町1-8
1-8 Ekimae-chō, Obama City
Tel.: 0770-52-1070 Hours: 24/7

Obama City Hall 小浜市役所

〒917-8585 福井県小浜市大手町6-3
6-3 Ōte-chō, Obama City
Tel.: 0770-53-1111
Hours: 8:30 – 17:15 (Monday – Thursday), 8:30 – 18:30 (Friday)
<http://www1.city.obama.fukui.jp/>

Obama Ōte-chō Post Office 小浜大手町郵便局

〒917-0078 福井県小浜市大手町2-17
2-17 Ōte-chō, Obama City
Tel.: 0770-52-4032 Hours: 9:00 – 17:00, Monday – Friday



MACHIYA TOWNHOUSE ACCOMODATIONS

OBAMA MACHIYA STAY

Tel.: 0770-56-3366
<https://www.obama-machiya-stay.com>



Sanchōmachi Sanoya 三丁町さのや

〒917-0058 福井県小浜市小浜香取13
13 Obama Katori, Obama City

Sanchōmachi Nagata 三丁町ながた

〒917-0058 福井県小浜市小浜香取14
14 Obama Katori, Obama City

Tangokaidō Taniguchi 丹後街道たにぐち

〒917-0053 福井県小浜市小浜大宮27-2
27-2 Obama Ōmiya, Obama City

Hachimansandō Miyake 八幡参道みやけ

〒917-0067 福井県小浜市小浜鹿島11
11 Obama Kashima, Obama City



ACCESS TO OBAMA CITY

From Kyoto

- Approximately 2 hours by train
Kyoto Station → Hokuriku Main Line → Tsuruga Station → Obama Line → Obama Station
- Approximately 2 hours by car

From Kansai Airport

- Approximately 3.5 hours by train
Kansai Airport Station → Airport Express Haruka → Shin-Osaka Station → Hokuriku Main Line → Tsuruga Station → Obama Line → Obama Station
- Approximately 3 hours by car

From Nagoya

- Approximately 3 hours by train
Nagoya Station → Hokuriku Main Line → Tsuruga Station → Obama Line → Obama Station
- Approximately 2.5 hours by car

From Tokyo

- Approximately 5 hours by train
Tokyo Station → Tōkaidō Shinkansen → Maibara Station → Hokuriku Main Line → Tsuruga Station → Obama Line → Obama Station

TRANSPORTATION

Rental Cars

- Toyota Rent-a-Lease 0770-53-1100
- J-Net Rent-a-Car 0770-64-5226
- Fujii Jidōsha Rent-a-Car 0120-206-022

Rental Bicycles

- Wakasa Obama Tourist Information Center 0770-52-3844
- Miketsukuni Wakasa Obama Food Culture Museum 0770-53-1000
- Machi no Eki Asahiza 0770-52-2000

Taxi Service

- Daiwa Kōtsū 0770-56-3333
- Mifuku Taxi 0770-52-1414