

3 Yamaguchi, Japan 🌐

Savor the temples and the cuisine and skip the crowds

YAMAGUCHI

Full List



Architecture, History

Yamaguchi is often called the Kyoto of the West, though it's much more interesting than that — and it suffers from considerably less “[tourism pollution](#).” A compact city of about 190,000, it lies in a narrow valley between the Inland and Japan seas.

With its impeccable gardens and its [stunning five-story pagoda](#), Rurikoji Temple is a national treasure. The city's small winding lanes offer an assortment of experiences: pottery kilns like [Mizumoue](#), situated on the grounds of Toshunji Temple; chic coffee shops like [Log and Coffeebox](#), and older-style options like [Haraguchi](#); and wonderful counter-only shops that serve oden, or one-pot dishes. Just a 15-minute walk south is the hot-springs village of Yuda Onsen.

Given the tourist crush in Kyoto, Yamaguchi has also been offering a smaller scale — but no less historic — alternative to Kyoto's [Gion summer festival](#) for some 600 years. Yamaguchi's Gion Festival, which features parades, costumes and dancing, also takes place in July; 2024 will be its first year operating again at full tilt since the pre-Covid era.

— Craig Mod