

48 Hours in IYA VALLEY

**A guide through the
breathtaking sights of Western
Tokushima's untouched Iya Valley**

Tokushima Prefecture is known for its coast. The whirlpools of the Naruto Strait gave swirled fishcakes their name, and the Awa-Odori Matsuri of Tokushima City draws over one million tourists every summer. With accessible bridges to Honshu and port towns for ferries, the coast is an ideal gateway to the Shikoku region.

Western Tokushima offers another kind of experience. The inland is full of mountains and deep valleys carved over time by emerald waters. Instead of summer festivals, the Miyoshi Yokai (ghost/goblin) Festival celebrates the ghouls of folklore. The valley is known for its solitude—once the hideout for the defeated Heike clan after the Genpei War (1180–1185).

There is so much to discover in this rural, rugged escape. One could easily spend weeks getting lost along the meandering river and mountain roads. But even when pressed for time, there is still a way to appreciate the beauty and adventure in a self-guided tour. Here is an itinerary for 48 hours in the Iya Valley.



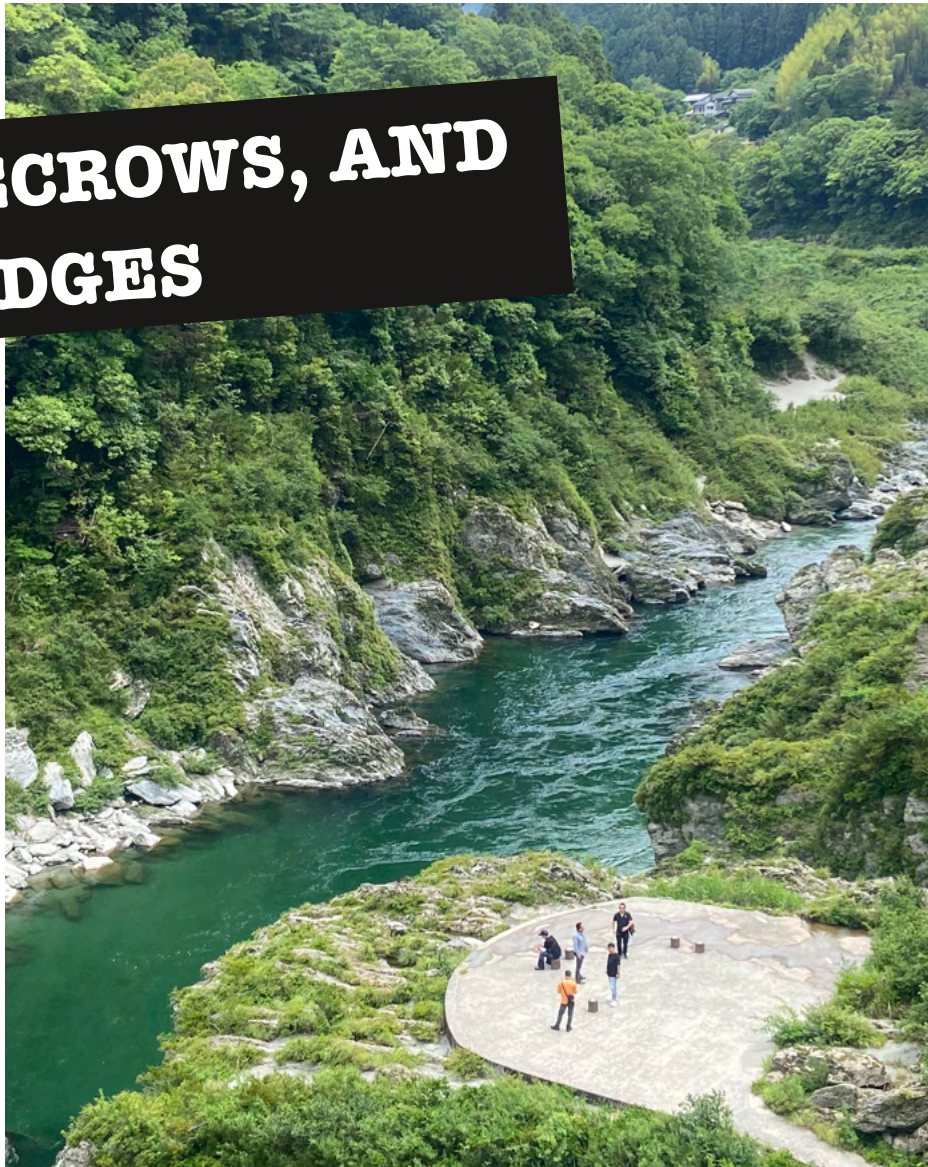
DAY ONE: YOKAI, SCARECROWS, AND SWAYING BRIDGES

For day one, get a dose of history and culture from Iya Valley's iconic curiosities.

Lapis Oboke

Your first stop will likely be Lapis Oboke Michi no Eki (roadside station). A great base for touring the area, this roadside station has all the usual aspects of a rest area but with a few Iya Valley-specific additions.

The cafe, for starters, offers both captivating views of the gorge and dishes made from locally-sourced wild game and produce. Then, inside the main area, there's a yokai museum and geology exhibit. Both give a glimpse into the lively culture and deep history of the valley and its formation.



Oku-Iya Double Vine Bridges

There are a few mountain vine bridges, or kazaurabashi, throughout the Iya Valley. Their history dates back to the defeated Heike clan, as the cuttable vines offered a quick escape from enemies. Now, the swaying bridges are a heart-pounding experience for visitors and seeing at least one is a must.

The two Oku-Iya bridges are deep in the valley, making for a less tourist-heavy experience. Next to the smaller of the two, there is also a wooden cart suspended by ropes. Originally used to transport goods across the water, visitors can try pulling themselves across for an added challenge.



Nagoro Scarecrow Village

Next stop, Nagoro. In 2003, Tsukimi Ayano began repopulating her dwindling town with life-size scarecrows. Now, while a handful of living people live in the town, over 200 scarecrows call it home.

While it's a stark look at depopulation's impact, it's also a heartwarming creation inspiring nostalgia for an unknown past. Taking time to roam around the scarecrows going about their day—playing games, going to school, working in fields—it feels like you, too, are a part of the display.

DAY TWO:

THATCHED ROOFS, STATUES, AND RIVER BENDS

Travel the mountain roads to see all of the best views in the valley before ending with a zip line through the canyon.

Ochiai Overlook

Take the morning to stop at the Ochiai Village and observation deck. Built into a 390-meter mountainside, Ochiai Village is a nationally recognized historical area due to its traditional architecture.

The still-occupied village is dotted with thatched roofs, stone walls and terraced farms. The overlook spot is on the opposite from the village itself, providing a Ghibli-esque scene of the entire village as it goes about its day.



Statue of a Peeing Boy

The famous peeing boy statue sits alone high on the winding roads amongst a beautiful backdrop of Iya Valley. The bronze statue was erected in 1968 in honor of the local tradition for boys to dare the cliff face in order to urinate with a view.

While the statue was likely built to deter any more people from risking their lives to pee, getting to the statue still feels daring even by car or bus. The curves are tight and the highway, Route 32 or the old “Iya Highway,” is mostly one-laned, making the journey there just as memorable.

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