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TOTTORI

The Land, The Lives, The Stories



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Unbeaten, Underrated, Unexpected: A Tottori Story

There is something about the breeze you feel when you first land in Tottori. It comes with a shade of tension from the unexpected, blended with the great expectations for what you're just about to set foot in. Tottori is full of nature-made allure — from its vast sand dunes and a mysterious deep-in-the-mountain temple that no historical sources can explain, to its endless resources for adventures and delicious local produce that stretches from everything from tender meat, giant (and oh, so sweet!) watermelons to creamy milk soft serve and persimmons that are so sugar-rich you'd almost think they're artificial. And yet, despite hiding all this under its thin veil, Tottori remains, still, mostly undiscovered to foreign travelers in Japan.

For those who dare to visit Tottori, however, this least populated prefecture in Japan, suddenly turns into a welcoming home away from home. It's the people who'd gladly open up to you on its streets, the laid-back way of life you'd find yourself being slightly jealous of, the immersed-in-life farmers who carry on undisturbed as you pass by. Tottori's charm lies in the small things in life we have come to appreciate more in recent years. It's a place you'll find yourself wanting to peel layer by layer until you figure out how to explain the spell it casts on visitors.

In this book, we have collected a selected combination of Tottori's many charms, from east to west, hoping that you will visit, explore and feel the prefecture. We hope that this book will help you pen a new story of Tottori — and find your own as you create it.

Welcome to Tottori — it's small, but it has much to offer.

Tottori, facing the Sea of Japan to its north and the Chugoku Mountains to its south, is a coastal region in southern Honshu neighboring the prefectures of Hyogo to the right and Shimane to the left. Easily accessible from Tokyo with daily 80-minute flights, Tottori is the least populated prefecture in Japan — and one of the least explored.

To those who aren't fully acquainted with Tottori yet, the prefecture is best known for three things: being so sparsely populated (less than Suginami Ward, one of Tokyo's residential wards) that there's more sand and mischievous *yokai* (mythical creatures) than humans; being the birthplace of some of Japan's best known manga and anime (think *Detective Conan*, *GeGeGe no Kitaro* and *A Distant Neighborhood*), and being the last of Japan's 47 prefectures to open a Starbucks store. The last one only happened in 2015.

Those who know Tottori better, however, will smile politely and tell you that while all of the above is true, there are some layers to each of them. Yes, the dunes spread as far as the eye can see, but the stars above them are equally infinite. The *yokai* are mischievous, but they can also be kind, compassionate and, most importantly, coexist with people. Their existence is immensely influenced by local superstitions, a characteristic common to the people of Japan's spiritual birthplace, San'in, which Tottori is part of. *Detective Conan*'s author, Gosho Aoyama, was born and raised in Tottori until his early youth, but he isn't the only mastermind the prefecture has raised: there was Shoji Ueda, the photographer who made the dunes his canvas and went to represent Japan at its best in Europe; the founders of Kirin Brewery and Asics, Chozo Isono and Kihachiro Onitsuka, respectively; Shigeru Mizuki, the father of *GeGeGe no Kitaro*, and dozens of other manga artists, including the legendary Jiro Taniguchi, author of *A Distant Neighborhood*, who grew up, struggled and left a legacy in Tottori. And while Tottori was indeed the last Japan prefecture to welcome the Seattle coffee chain, by the time the franchise had arrived, Tottori had already established a "competitive" brand called Sunaba — a play on words meaning "sand pit" that rhymes with how Japan calls Starbucks: "Staba."

By now, you've most likely discovered that these are all no coincidences. Tottori is a small prefecture with a big attitude, dry humor, a never losing spirit and countless potentials. It's also stunning all year-round.

In spring, the Utsubuki Park in Kurayoshi City is covered with over 4,000 cherry trees blooming over a peaceful, quintessential Japanese landscape. The sand dunes open the season for dynamic adventures, such as sandboarding, paragliding and fat biking. In summer, some 20,000 fireflies illuminate the Fukumaki mountainside forest, creating an otherworldly experience you can rarely see in Japan. The summer is also the season for the famous extra sweet Tottori watermelon, juicy Japanese pears and persimmons, and the hearty Iwagaki oysters, some of the country's largest. In autumn, the prefecture is changed into a tapestry of red, yellow and orange, starting from the majestic Mount Daisen, Tottori's undisputable shield. A hike along the Oshika Gorge or a visit to the Daisenji Temple are life-changing during this season. Then, at last, when winter comes, Tottori transforms into a winter wonderland, offering the best of winter sports opportunities in western Japan — skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing. And when one wishes to warm up, there's nothing like a soak in a hot spring and the taste of the sweet, succulent meat of snow crab, Tottori's most sublime winter delicacy.

Tottori is that kind of place — a well of surprises that awaits to be unleashed. If you dare to come along, we'll take you there, one picture, one story at a time.





ONE GRAIN OF SAND AT A TIME

The Tottori people have long believed that when life gives you sand, you make a natural wonderland. While the Tottori Sand Dunes in Japan (the largest are in northern Japan but are inaccessible to the public), they are the most welcoming and versatile. Spanning roughly 16 kilometers off the coast of the Sea of Japan and up to two kilometers wide, the dunes stretch visibly as far as the eye can see, creating an illusion of infinity, and with it, a sense of unprecedented freedom.

As soon as you reach the dunes, just a short drive from Tottori Sand Dunes Conan Airport, you'll feel this. There are painters with their canvases, relaxed camels and their patrons waiting for someone to take a quick ride, photographers of all ages and backgrounds pointing their lenses toward the dunes, paragliders flying high on the horizon, adventurers

testing their skills on bikes or sandboards on the dunes. You'll see students gathering for group photos as a momentum of their school trips and young children running carefree through the dunes. The sight of this all is a happy experience whenever you choose to visit.

Although the dunes are part of the San'in Kaigan UNESCO Global Geopark, an area designated as a national natural monument, some areas are open for (careful) adventures. From simple hikes to paragliding, sandboarding, sand sliding, fat-tire bike tours, and camel rides, there are numerous popular paid attractions that leave an unforgettable experience. The free attractions shouldn't be underestimated either — from counting your steps in the sand, summer or winter, to finding yourself in the dunes' middle of nowhere, the choices are as countless as the grains of sand.





PARAGLIDING

Offered in half-day and full-day tours, paragliding is one of the most sought-after adventures at the Tottori Sand Dunes. Taught by a team of top-level professional paragliders (among them is Japan's first hang gliding instructor), flying over the Tottori dunes is an unequalled experience. The few seconds you are in the air before landing back on the sands makes the heart pound and time stop in a near slow-motion, perfectly muted experience. The paragliding adventure comes with intensive hiking as well, thus allowing visitors to make the most of their experience.



FAT-TIRE BIKING

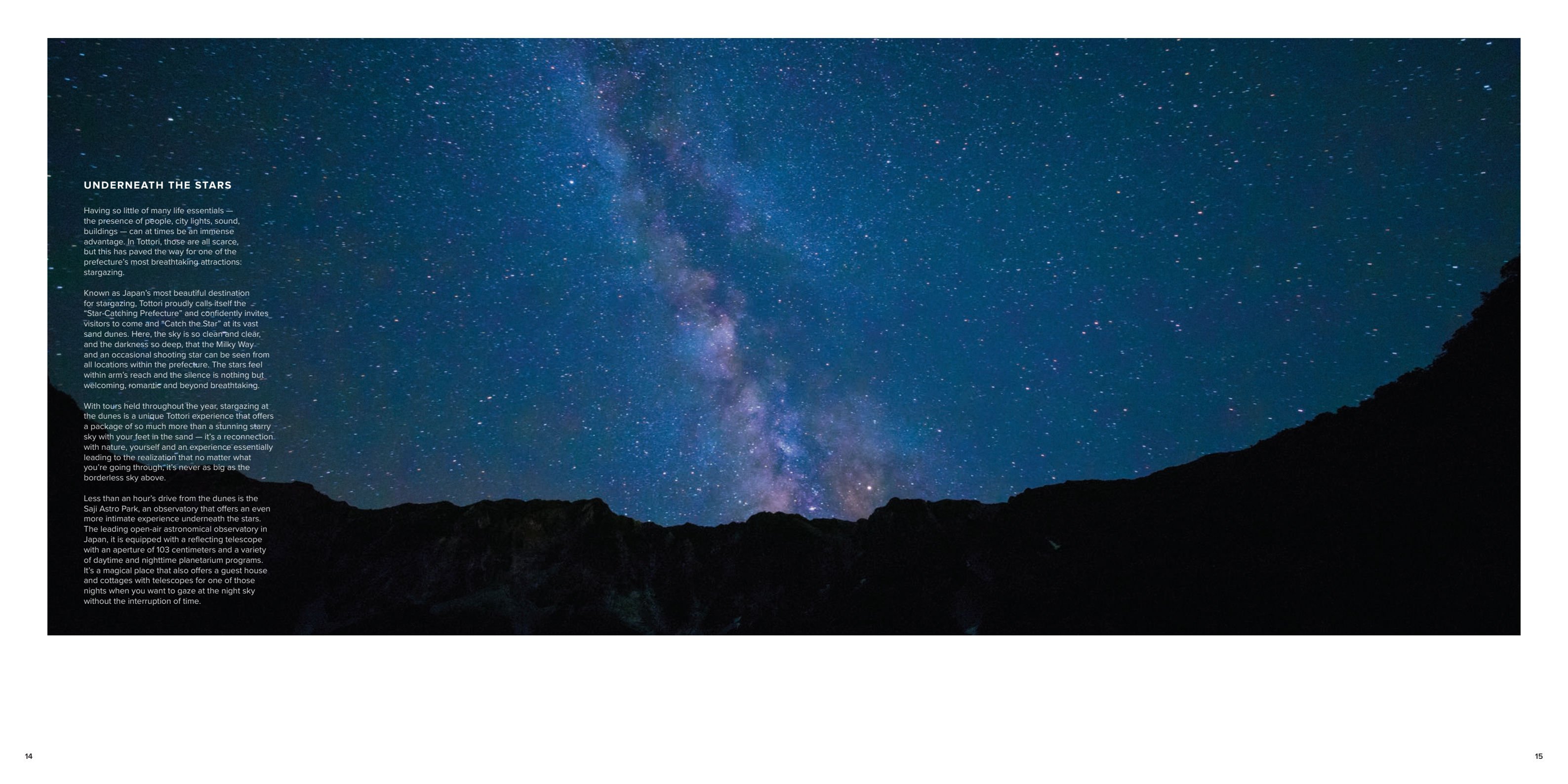
They look like regular bicycles, and with the dunes offering vast space to practice your riding skills, you'd think that fat biking is a piece of cake. But the moment you get on your bike, the realization that you can barely move that monster a centimeter ahead becomes very real. Fat biking on sand dunes is not for the faint-hearted nor for those who give up easily. But that's part of its charm — the harder you try, the better you become at it, and by the end of the tour, when you've completely mastered it (yes, you will), you have that indescribable feeling of accomplishment and self-pride. Taught by a friendly team of experienced instructors on a tour that takes visitors around the dunes and even helps them take exclusive no-filter photos at the perfect timing, the fat bike tour is one of the dunes' most memorable experiences.



SANDBOARDING

Available year-round where there's sand — and in Tottori, that's every day — sandboarding is nature's gift to all snowboard and surfer fans. Rent a sandboard and zip down the sand dunes as fast as you can all while taking in the crisp breeze and stunning view of the Sea of Japan spreading before you. For those refraining from dynamic sports and young children, sand sliders are also available for rent, offering an equally unique sand dunes experience.





UNDERNEATH THE STARS

Having so little of many life essentials — the presence of people, city lights, sound, buildings — can at times be an immense advantage. In Tottori, those are all scarce, but this has paved the way for one of the prefecture's most breathtaking attractions: stargazing.

Known as Japan's most beautiful destination for stargazing, Tottori proudly calls itself the "Star-Catching Prefecture" and confidently invites visitors to come and "Catch the Star" at its vast sand dunes. Here, the sky is so clean and clear, and the darkness so deep, that the Milky Way and an occasional shooting star can be seen from all locations within the prefecture. The stars feel within arm's reach and the silence is nothing but welcoming, romantic and beyond breathtaking.

With tours held throughout the year, stargazing at the dunes is a unique Tottori experience that offers a package of so much more than a stunning starry sky with your feet in the sand — it's a reconnection with nature, yourself and an experience essentially leading to the realization that no matter what you're going through, it's never as big as the borderless sky above.

Less than an hour's drive from the dunes is the Saji Astro Park, an observatory that offers an even more intimate experience underneath the stars. The leading open-air astronomical observatory in Japan, it is equipped with a reflecting telescope with an aperture of 103 centimeters and a variety of daytime and nighttime planetarium programs. It's a magical place that also offers a guest house and cottages with telescopes for one of those nights when you want to gaze at the night sky without the interruption of time.



AN HOURGLASS OF THE EPHEMERAL

The sand is a vast, endless resource, but here at The Sand Museum, nothing ever lasts forever. Opened to the public in 2006, The Sand Museum, located a short walk from the dunes, is the world's first indoor sand museum dedicated to sand sculptures. Once inside, visitors are guided through three floors of a magnificent world of sand (and water) that truly captivates the essence of sand carving art — rigorousness, dedication, meticulousness; a floating through time experience that only lasts a speck of time.

The Sand Museum holds an average of one large-scale exhibition annually, produced by Katsuhiko Chaen, the expert sand creator from Japan and a winner of multiple domestic and international prizes for his artworks. Inspired to invite creatives worldwide, The Sand Museum launched its now recurring "Travel Around the World with Sand" exhibition theme. Thanks to this endeavor, Tottori is now regularly visited by world-renowned sand artists from every corner of the world who gather here to create their time-limited masterpieces.

In early 2020, shortly before the novel coronavirus pandemic would spread in Japan, 17 artists from ten countries gathered in Tottori to create the museum's 13th exhibition, "Travel Around the World with Sand: Czechia & Slovakia," which featured 19 giant sculptures — each standing several meters in height and even more in width — inspired by folktale, event, tradition or social movements in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. At times when the world was reminded how simple pleasures in life — such as traveling — are ephemeral too, The Sand Museum, which opened the exhibition with several months of delay due to the pandemic, served as a place of comfort for travel-deprived visitors and a reminder that just like sand, nothing lasts forever — but that only gives us an excuse to live for the moment.

