



Tohoku's most beautiful volcanoes & sacred mountains

Bandai-Asahi National Park

The Travel Guide

Bandai-Asahi's Volcano Trail
(in Yamagata & Fukushima Prefectures)

About Bandai-Asahi's Volcano Trail



Goshikinuma, also known as "the Witch's Eye"



Mt. Adatarara's Numanodaira crater



Mt. Gassan's summit

A protected area of 1863.75 km² (719.598mi²)

Registered as a National Park in 1950 by the Japanese Ministry of the Environment, Bandai-Asahi covers a large area of Niigata (Iide mountain range), Yamagata (Dewa Sanzan and Asahi mountain ranges), and Fukushima (Azuma Mountain Range, Lake Inawashiro and Mt. Bandai) prefectures.

These natural areas are protected for their unique wildlife and plants. They are also renowned for their strong cultural and spiritual heritage and their rich history in the practice of shugendo (Dewa Sanzan), a mixture of esoteric Buddhism and Shintoism linked with ancient religions of mountain worship.

Hike the "Long Volcano Trail"

In this travel guide, we present several hiking courses through the Azuma and Dewa Sanzan mountain ranges, offering you more than 75km of hiking trails inside some of the most beautiful volcanoes and sacred mountains in Tohoku (Northeast Japan); but the actual Bandai-Asahi National Park covers more than 220km of hikeable trails!

To discover the other hiking courses not curated in this booklet, please refer yourself to the website of the Ministry of Environment:
<https://www.env.go.jp/en/nature/nps/park/bandai/>

Since volcanic regions are rich in natural hot springs, we also present several onsen (hot spring in Japanese) establishments where it is possible to bathe for the day or stay for the night.

Tours, activities and experiences

The Bandai-Asahi National Park Promotion Committee created this booklet as part of a governmental project of the National Tourism Agency in 2022.

Our committee collaborates with local travel agencies, administrations, private guides, and experience collectives to offer you a coordinated and rewarding trip to this area. To learn more about us, visit our website:

www.bandai-asahi.com





Mt. Issaikyo in spring

Venture on Bandai-Asahi's "long trail"

Bandai-Asahi National Park is the second largest national park in Japan in terms of land area, covering a vast area from the three mountains of Dewa, the Asahi mountain range, the Iide mountain range, the Azuma mountain range, Mt. Bandai, and Lake Inawashiro.

The area is easily accessible from urban areas and attracts many visitors as a recreational area where hikers can enjoy a wide range of activities such as mountain climbing, nature exploration, bathing in hot springs, and skiing.

About Bandai and Azuma ranges (Fukushima Prefecture)

Mt. Bandai is a volcano that led to the formation of more than 300 lakes and marshes, including Lake Inawashiro and Lake Hibara in Urabandai, due to repeated phreatic eruptions.

Mt. Issaikyo and its fumaroles and Mt. Adatarai's Numanodaira crater offer powerful volcanic landscapes. On the other hand, Mt. Nishi-Azuma in the Azuma mountain range offers an attractive mountain landscape of subalpine coniferous forests of Maries' fir.

About the Dewa Sanzan & Asahi mountain ranges (Yamagata Prefecture)

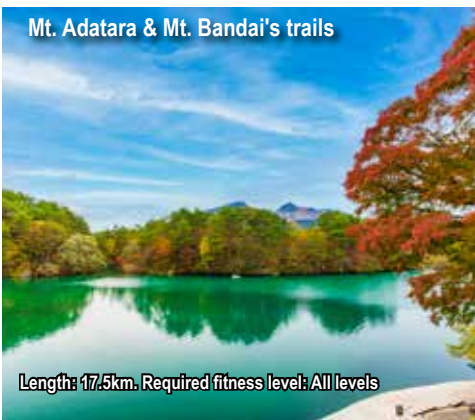
On the other hand, the Asahi mountain range, which the highest peak is Mt. Oasahi (1,870 m above sea level), is non-volcanic. The western side of the ridge is a gentle slope of periglacial terrain, while the eastern side is a steep slope formed by snow erosion. The rich forests in the foothills and mountainsides of this area nurture a wide variety of flora and are home to large mammals and prey birds.

About the Iide mountain range (Niigata Prefecture)

The Iide mountain range consists of 2,000-meter-high mountains, the main peaks being Mt. Iide (2,105 m above sea level) and Mt. Dainichi (2,128 m above sea level). The western side of the ridge is a gentle slope of periglacial terrain, while the eastern side is a steep slope formed by snow erosion. The foothills and mountainsides of the Iide mountain range are covered with pristine forests of ancient beech forests.

In this booklet, we have curated the hiking trails for the Azuma and Dewa Sanzan mountain ranges, but experienced hikers should definitely try themselves at the full "Bandai-Asahi long trail"! For more information: <https://www.env.go.jp/en/nature/nps/park/bandai/>

More than 200km of hiking trails among Yamagata, Niigata and Fukushima Prefectures :



Mt. Adatarai & Mt. Bandai's trails

Length: 17.5km. Required fitness level: All levels



Azuma range's hiking trails

Length: 37km. Required fitness level: Advanced



Iide range's trails

Length: 47.6km. Required fitness level: Expert



Dewa Sanzan & Asahi range's courses

Length: 119km. Required fitness level: Expert



SECTION 1 :

Discover

the Dewa Sanzan





Course # 1

Mt. Haguro

Difficulty level	★
Total length	2.6 km.
Time required	70 min.
Elevation gain/loss	+260 m.

Mt. Haguro is the central figure of the sacred mountains of the Dewa Sanzan. On the top of this mountain, you will find the Ideha-jinja shrine, which consecrates the three mountains' deities simultaneously. Before reaching the shrine, pilgrims must climb 2446 stone steps through a deep forest of four-century-old cedars (received ★ ★ ★ in the Michelin Green Guide) and visit the five-story pagoda, a National Treasure. This monument recalls the ancient Buddhist origins of the place. Considered a symbol of the present among the yamabushi priests of Dewa Sanzan, Mt. Haguro is the place where people pray for their happiness in this present life.

Places to see:



① Mt. Haguro's Five-Storeyed Pagoda

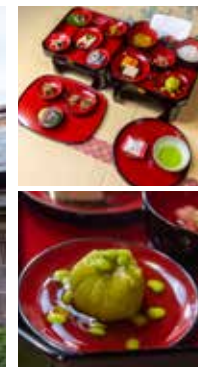


② Ideha-jinja shrine or Dewa Sanzan-jinja shrine (Sanjingsaiden)



③ Minamidani's Buddhist Retreat Vestiges (Matsuo Basho's retreat)

Place to eat:



④ "Saikan" Pilgrim Lodge & Dining

Saikan, a restaurant and pilgrim lodge located at the top of Mt. Haguro, was originally a Buddhist temple converted into a Shinto annex of the Ideha-jinja shrine in the 19th century. Customers can taste the Shinto version of "shojin-ryori" cuisine, a traditional vegan Buddhist cuisine. Please remember that because Saikan's cuisine is Shinto, fish is sometimes served. *On reservation*

Open for lunch from: 11:00-14:00

Reservations: By phone (+81 23 52 61 218).

Japanese only.

Average price for lunch: 3500 yen/person

Can adapt to special dietary restriction: Vegan, vegetarian : yes (request before arrival). Allergies : no. Halal: no.

Website: <https://www.tsuruokacity.com/restaurants/saikan>

Places to stay for the night:



⑤ Daishinbo Yamabushi lodging

A house run by the Hayasaka family following the Shinto tradition. Morning prayer foregoes breakfast at around 7 am. Shared bathrooms and Japanese futon bedding.

Average price for the night (2 meals included): 11,000 yen/person

Booking: <https://www.hpdsp.net/daishinbo/en/hw/hwp3100/hww3101.do?yadNo=348945>

Guided tours led by the yamabushi owner are possible.



⑥ Miyatabo Yamabushi lodging

An old pilgrim lodge run by the Miyata family following the Shinto tradition. The fire prayer is possible on request. Shared bathrooms and Japanese futon bedding.

Average price for the night (2 meals included): 10,500 yen/person, prayer included

Booking: By phone only (+81 23 56 22 268)

Can cater to vegans upon request.



⑦ Saikan Pilgrim Lodge

The lodge is located at the top of Mt. Haguro, connected to the Dewa Sanzan shrine. Shared bathrooms and Japanese futon bedding.

Average price for the night (2 meals included): 11,000 yen/person

Booking: By phone only (+81 23 56 22 357)

Can cater to vegans upon request.



Course # 2

Mt. Gassan

Difficulty level	★★
Total length	5.4 km.
Time required	130 min.
Elevation gain/loss	+570 m.

Mt. Gassan, the highest mountain of the triad culminating at 1984 meters (1.23 miles), is also the most symbolically important one in the practice of Dewa Sanzan's shugendo. Listed as a National Natural Monument, Gassan, also known as the "mountain of death," is home to around fifty species of endemic plants and about ten animal species, such as the Japanese weasel or the Japanese bush warbler. Seen as a symbol of the past in the yamabushi folklore, Mt. Gassan is visited by pilgrims to pray for the peace of the ancestors' souls. Just as the poet Matsuo Basho writes in one of his haikus, Mt. Gassan offers a breathtaking view of the sea of clouds that hovers above the Shonai region.



Gassan's summit as seen from the hiking trail from Mt. Yudono/Mt. Ubagatake



Places to eat & stay :



GASSAN CHOJO GOYA LODGE

Booking: By phone only
 (+81 90 87 81 77 31)
Average price for the night (2 meals included): 10,000 yen/person
Website (Japanese): <http://www.5c.biglobe.ne.jp/~gassan/index.html/>



BUSSHOIKE GOYA LODGE

Booking: By phone only
 (+81 90 87 83 95 55)
Average price for the night (2 meals included): 9500 yen/person
Website (Japanese): <http://bussyouike.travel.cocacn.jp/>

OFFICIAL HIKING SEASON:

July 1st - September 15th

(hiking still possible until mid-October)



MIDAHARA SANROJO LODGE

Booking: By phone only
 (+81 90 23 67 90 37)
Average price for the night (2 meals included): 9000 yen/person

GASSAN'S WILDLIFE & PLANTS



Course # 3

Mt. Yudono

Difficulty level	★★★★
Total length	5.2 km.
Time required	180 min.
Elevation gain/loss	-890 m.

Mt. Yudono is the last mountain traditionally visited in the Dewa Sanzan pilgrimage. Symbol of the future, it is here that believers come to pray for the reincarnation of their loved ones that passed away, hence its other name: the "mountain of love." As a major sacred site of esoteric Shingon Buddhism, Yudono gave birth to the majority of the "sokushinbutsu" mummies, those monks who mummified their bodies intending to attain Buddhahood. The hiking path to Mt. Yudono from Mt. Gassan is somewhat dangerous due to the long descending ladders on the way. Please hike with caution.

Places to see:



① Mt. Ubagatake



② Kaji-inari shrine



③ Yudonosan Senninzawa

Place to eat & stay:



④ Yudonosan Sanrojo Lodge

Yudonosan Sanrojo's Lodge offers pilgrims visiting the "mountain of love" to have a special kind of lunch. This lunch concludes the pilgrimage by ending the vegetarian spiritual diet, a concept called in Japanese shojin-otoshi ("to bring down the spirit"). Menus can therefore include fish: sashimi, grilled or marinated. Visitors should note that Yudonosan Sanrojo is a pilgrim lodge; accordingly, the sanitary facilities are shared. *On reservation.*

Open for lunch between: 11:00-14:00

Reservations: By phone (+81 23 55 46 131) or online

Average price for lunch: 2000 yen/person

Can cater to dietary restrictions: Vegan, vegetarian: yes. Allergies: no. Halal: no.

Website: <https://www.yudonosan-stay.com/>

Mt. Yudono's hike from Mt. Gassan, step by step:



① Depart from Mt. Gassan's summit



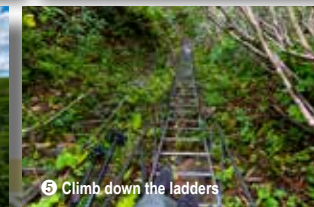
② Visit the Kaji-inari shrine



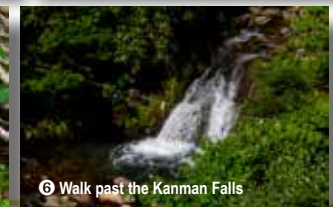
③ Turn right at the Ushikubi crossing



④ Turn right at the Kanauba crossing



⑤ Climb down the ladders



⑥ Walk past the Kanman Falls

Course # 4

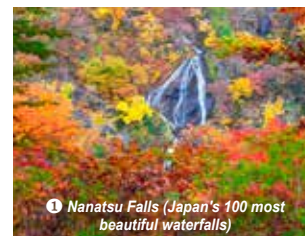
Rokujurigo Kaido's Pilgrimage

Difficulty level	★★★★★
Total length	24 km.
Time required	9-10 h
Elevation gain/loss	800 m.

Mt. Yudono can be reached through Mt. Gassan, but also by walking an ancient road called: the "Rokujurigo Kaido." The Rokujurigo Kaido is a path through a beech forest that initially connected the Shonai region to the city of Yamagata for over 1200 years. Through the centuries, it has been used for military, commercial, and political purposes. But the primary function of this millennial road was to offer pilgrims an access path to Mt. Yudono, hence its other name of "Yudono-michi" ("the path to Mt. Yudono"). Throughout this hike, you will discover Buddhist relics over 500 years old, waterfalls, and sacred trees. You will be able to visit three sokushinbutsu mummies in different temples. We recommend that an expert guide in the region accompany you if this is your first time.



Places to see:



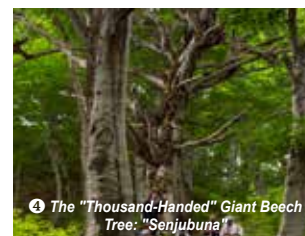
1 Nanatsu Falls (Japan's 100 most beautiful waterfalls)



2 Sokushinbutsu mummies temples Dainichibo, Churenji & Honmyoji



3 Beech tree tunnels "Ohonogi" & "Kohonogi"



4 The "Thousand-Handed" Giant Beech Tree: "Senjubuna"



5 Tamugimata Village's thatch-roofed houses



6 Buddhist relics hidden in the forest

Places to eat & stay :



4 Tamugiso & Nanakamadotei

Tamugiso is the name given to the family inn (minshuku in Japanese), which is attached to the soba restaurant called "Nanakamadotei." Nanakamadotei serves soba (buckwheat noodles), famous for the excellent taste of the Gassan water used to knead them. As a side dish, you will have the choice between tempura seasonal vegetables, soups, fried fish... Tamugiso's inn has traditional-style futon rooms for the night.

Opens for lunch between: 11:00-14:00

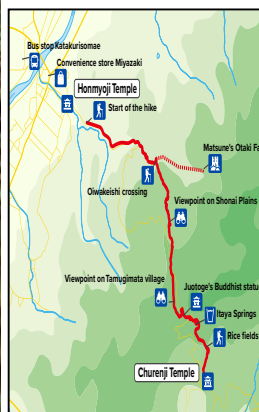
Booking: By phone only (+81 23 55 46 328)

Average price for lunch: 1500 yen/person

Can cater to special dietary needs: Halal: yes (upon request, 3 days before arrival)

Website (Japanese): <http://www.tamugiso.com/index3.html>

A pilgrimage cut in 4 main courses:



1. From Honmyoji to Churenji Temple

The perfect course to discover the two main sokushinbutsu mummies.

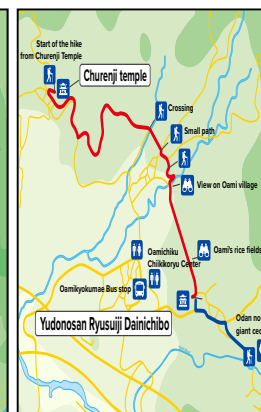
Length: 6.5km

Difficulty: ★★ ★

Required time: 2 hours and half

Nearest bus stop:

Katakurisomae かたくり荘前 (start)



2. From Churenji to Dainichibo

A calm stroll inside Oami village to visit another prominent mummy.

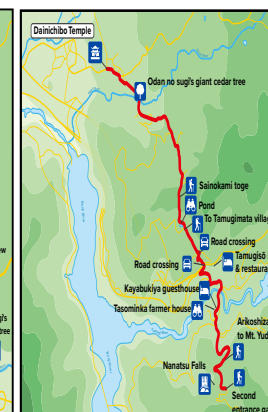
Length: 3km

Difficulty: ★

Required time: 30 minutes

Nearest bus stop:

Oami Yubinkyumae 大網郵便局前 (start)



3. From Dainichibo to Tamugimata

A descending hike to the thatch-roofed house village. Includes paved roads.

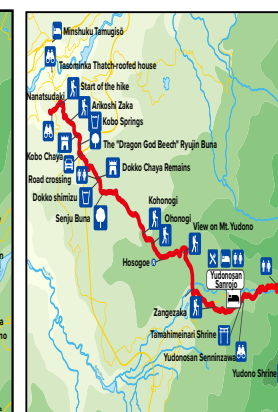
Length: 4km

Difficulty: ★★

Required time: 1 hour and half

Nearest bus stop:

Oami Yubinkyumae 大網郵便局前 (start)



4. From Tamugimata to Mt. Yudono

The main part of the pilgrimage inside the beech forest.

Length: 11km

Difficulty: ★★ ★

Required time: 4 hours and half

Nearest bus stop:

Yudonosan Senninzawa (end)



Shizu Onsen (Nishikawa Town)

① Gassan Pair Lift



Mt. Gassan can be reached from Tsuruoka City (from the "Gassan Hachigome" station), but it can also be discovered from Nishikawa Town. Not far from the hot spring village of Shizu Onsen, you will find the "Gassan Pair Lift" chairlift station, the perfect gateway to Mt. Gassan for those who do not wish to walk too much.

Open between: 8:00-16:30

Operating period: Early June to mid-October

Price: Two ways = 1100 yen, One way = 600 yen

Website: <https://www.gassan-info.com/en/>

② Tsutaya Ryokan

Shizu Onsen is a hot spring village that opened relatively recently at the foot of Mt. Gassan. Few people know it, but Mt. Gassan is actually a volcano that has been extinct for over 300,000 years. Despite the lack of volcanic activity, Gassan overflows with natural hot springs that have wonderful properties on the skin because of the water's rich content in sodium. We recommend discovering the benefits of Gassan water for the skin in Shizu Onsen, especially in Tsutaya ryokan, the pioneer establishment in the village. Intimate atmosphere, scents of dried wildflowers, outdoor baths overlooking the lake... Tsutaya is a little corner of paradise for pilgrims who wish to relax after an exhausting hike.

Average price for night (2 meals included): 20,000 yen/person

Website: <https://gassan-tsutaya.com/>



Dewa Sanzan's pilgrimage:

A journey to the heart of Japan's fundamental religions

Dewa Sanzan is a holy place of shugendo, a religion of nature worship based on the precepts of esoteric Buddhism (Shingon or Tendai branch depending on the area), according to which the mountain is a mandala that opens a gate to Buddhahood. It fused with Shintoism by venerating the Japanese deities (kami) and ancient nature worship beliefs that place the mountain as a provider of food and health because of its strong link to water resources and agriculture. The practitioners of shugendo: the yamabushi, perform long asceticism in the mountains to capture the powers of the different religions. For more than 1400 years, Dewa Sanzan has carried the popular beliefs of northern Japan and continues to maintain the yamabushi tradition of the Mts. Haguro, Gassan and Yudono.



Our activities in the Dewa Sanzan area:



① Yamabushi experiences

Dewa Sanzan has been considered a sacred place of shugendo for over 1400 years. The practitioners of this mystical religion, a mixture of Buddhism, Shintoism, and mountain worship, are called the yamabushi: "those who retreat in the mountains." Through hard training in the mountains, the yamabushi aspire to capture the force of nature, attain Nirvana, and summon the spirits of the kami to protect the region from all kinds of evil. Accompanied by a yamabushi from the Dewa Sanzan shrine, come and discover the yamabushi culture in Mt. Haguro or Yudono, wear the white robe of resurrection: the shiroshozoku, eat the shojin-ryori spiritual food, and learn the rituals of the yamabushi.

Operating time: 8:00-15:00

Address: Haguro Zuishinmon, Ideha Bunka Museum

Activity's average price: From 2 persons: 32,000 yen per day (interpretation included) per person.

Starting from de 5 persons: 19,000 yen per day (interpretation included) per person

Website: <https://www.yudonosan-stay.com/yamabushi/>

② "Shojin-ryori" cuisine class at Saikan

Saikan was once a Buddhist temple on Mt. Haguro. In the 19th century, the place was converted to Shintoism, and it is now part of the Dewa Sanzan Shrine. This is where the ritual meals for yamabushi ceremonies are made and where most pilgrims to Mt. Haguro come to rest for the night. In this building with more than 400 years of history, you can learn how to cook Dewa Sanzan's shojin-ryori, this spiritual food that allows ascetics to purify their bodies and bring in the forces of nature. Chef Shinkichi Ito will introduce you to the staple ingredients of this vegetarian cuisine, their properties on health, their cooking techniques, and the main recipes of Dewa Sanzan's shojin-ryori, like sesame tofu or mountain plant tempura.

Address: Saikan, Haguro Sancho

Activity's average price: Starting from de 3500 yen/person (interpretation included)

Website: <https://fr.tsuruokacity.com/product-page/shojin-ryori-cuisine-class-at-saikan-2-hours>



③ "Sasamaki" mochi cooking class in Oami

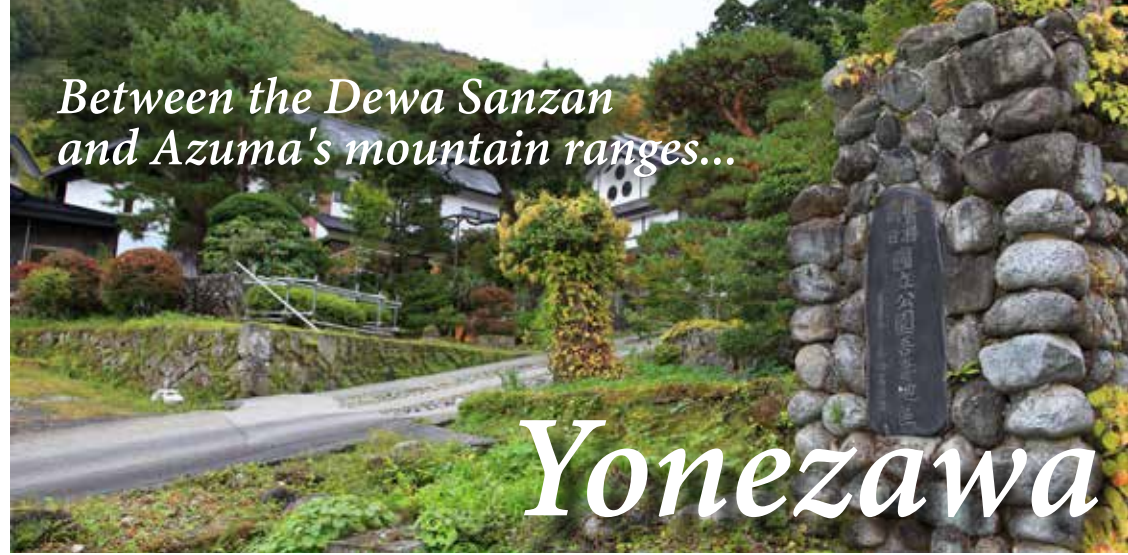
Oami village is known for containing the flagship mummy temples of Mt. Yudono: Churenji and Dainichibo. These two temples have long protected Mt. Yudono from any outside religious influence. This ardent religious passion for Shingon Buddhism propelled the practice of Buddhist mummification: sokushinbutsu, around Mt. Yudono in the 17th century. More than 11 out of 17 mummies in Japan were born around Mt. Yudono! One of the key practices of sokushinbutsu asceticism is wood consumption (moku-jiki). In the region, wood has been known to have antioxidant properties for a long time. Monks aspiring to mummify their bodies consumed wood to protect their bodies from decay after death. From this knowledge, the region's inhabitants used wood to extend food's expiry date. This is how the recipe for "sasamaki" was born. These gelatinous mochis are wrapped in bamboo leaves, and the rice has been marinated in ash water. The ash makes the rice very basic and resistant to decay. Have the village grandmothers teach you how to make sasamaki and uncover the mysteries of moku-jiki.

Address: Oami Community Center

Activity's average price: Starting from 3500 yen/person

Website: https://en.shoko-travel.jp/detail_FE0130.html

Between the Dewa Sanzan and Azuma's mountain ranges...



Yonezawa

Yonezawa is at the junction between Yamagata prefecture and Fukushima prefecture. It is the ideal city to make a halt between Dewa Sanzan and the Azuma range and recharge your batteries in one of the "8 onsens of Yonezawa" (*Yonezawa hachiyu 米沢八湯*); eight charming spa villages that boast small traditional ryokan with intimate exterior baths inside nature. Our recommendation: Shirabu Onsen and its rustic thatched-roof establishments. While in Yonezawa, you can't miss the "Yonezawa beef": one of the three best wagyu in Japan!



① Yonezawa's beef: "Yonezawa-gyu"

Yonezawa beef is a highly-regarded variety of "wagyu" (Japanese beef). It is one of the "three best wagyu in Japan" (*nihon sandai wagyu 日本三大和牛*). Grilled, marinated, or sashimi, Yonezawa beef cuisine is excellent because of the meat's unrivaled tenderness. Visitors can expect Yonezawa-gyu to be served during a stay in one of Yonezawa's eight onsen villages. We recommend you visit Yonezawa's beef farms with a local farmer and learn the secrets behind the great taste of this juicy meat.



② Shirabu Onsen

Shirabu Onsen is located in the Southern part of Yonezawa, and has welcomed visitors for more than 700 years. Most ryokans propose exterior baths that give a fantastic view of the surroundings' rich environment: waterfalls, reddened foliage in November, white monkeys... A little piece of paradise within the Bandai-Asahi National Park. Shirabu Onsen is one of Yonezawa's "Eight Iconic Onsen".

Water characteristics: rich in calcium, source temperature at 60°C (140°F)

Website: <http://www.shirabu-higashiya.com/en/>



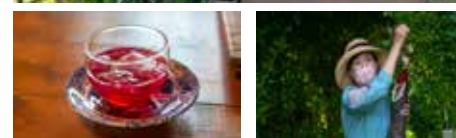
③ Farming activities : Satoyama Sommelier

This charming workshop in the middle of the forest, near Shirabu Onsen, is run by Mika Kuroda, an ex-Tokyoite who was a former air hostess and who left the capital to come to settle in the Yonezawa region to reconnect with nature 20 years ago. Since then, Mika's workshop has led many activities for visitors so they too can learn to reconnect with nature: organic vegetable harvesting sessions, cooking classes, wooden objects creation workshops, walks in the forest... With Mika, everything is possible!

Website: <https://satoyama.roselane.jp/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MikaKurodaJAPAN>

Type of activities: cooking classes, harvesting/planting, farming experiences, hiking, wooden object creation workshops



SECTION 2 :

Discover

Azuma's mountain range (and more!)



Course

5

Nishi-Azuma Sky Valley & Mt. Higashi Daiten

Difficulty level	★★★★
Total length	25.5 km.
Required time	32 hours
Elevation gain/loss	1740m.

The Nishi-Azuma Sky Valley is a 25-km long mountain road connecting Shirabu Onsen in Yonezawa City and the north shore of Lake Bandai in Fukushima Prefecture. Mt. Nishi-Azuma is the highest peak in the Azuma mountain range. The mountain is covered with virgin coniferous forest and presents a subarctic aspect. This hiking trail covers Shirabu Onsen, Mt. Nishi-Azuma, Mt. Higashi Daiten down to the Goshikunuma marshes (Jododaira area, see course n°7).

The contrast between the deep red of Japanese white ash and poison ivy, the yellow of downy birch, and the green of *Abies sachalinensis* is particularly beautiful during the red foliage season.



Highlights of the hike:

1 Mt. Nishi-Azuma & its shrine



Mt. Nishiazuma is crisscrossed with beech trees and native firs (*Abies mariesii*). After passing the highest point, the fir trees on the way get smaller and fewer and leave a splendid view on the alpine flower fields nearby. Among the flower species the hikers can expect to see from July to September, there are *Geum pentapetalum*, *Nephrophyllidium crista-galli*, *Eriophorum vaginatum*, *Primula nipponica*, *Coptis trifolia*, and many others. Despite the whole hiking trail being rather smooth (for a 2000 meter high mountain), the path past the peak is quite rocky and unstable to follow; please watch your steps. The Shinto shrine at the top: The Azuma-jinja shrine, is recognizable with its rocky walls and floating flags.

2 Yaheidaira's marshes



The Yaheidaira marshes are the highest marshes on the Azuma mountain range, and home to many alpine flower species. However, its environmental richness was once endangered. In 2008, a large local project of nature restoration took place in the marshes to collect seeds of the pond's endemic plants such as *Moliniopsis japonica*, *Carex michauxiana* var. *asiatica*, *Juncus kamschatcensis* and many others. The 22 participants of the project grew the seeds, multiplied them and replanted them in the area to help their propagation after the plants almost ceased to exist in the area due to rock erosion. The marshes are located near two lakes: Meigetsu-ko and Myojo-ko, and a mountain hut called Meigetsu-so.

3 Mt. Higashi-Daiten



Located in the central part of the Azuma mountain range, it borders Yonezawa City and Inawashiro Town. The summit is covered with coniferous forests of *Abies sachalinensis* and other conifers. The mountain is a shield volcano with an average slope of about 8 degrees. This mountain divides the Azuma mountain range into east and west. On the northwestern face is a large marshy plateau: Yaheidaira. The area is also known for its abundance of alpine flora such as *Drosera rotundifolia* (Round-leaved sundew), *Eriophorum vaginatum* (hare's-tail cottongrass), *Andromeda polifolia* (bog-rosemary), and *Veratrum stamineum* (hellebore).

4 Ningyo-ishi's rocky plains



Ningyo-ishi is an open spot that follows a steep path in the forest, from where you can have a view on the surrounding plains. The area is very rocky, with two giant rocks standing in the middle that are said to be the embodiment of two human entities.



Course # 6

Mt. Adatarara

Difficulty level	★★★
Total length	12 km.
Required time	7 hours
Elevation gain/loss	+810 m.

Mt. Adatarara is an active volcano that culminates at 1699 meters above sea level (1.05 miles). It is one of Japan's 100 most famous mountains and is particularly renowned for its diverse vegetation. Its orange landscapes, active fumaroles, and the many nearby onsens make it a crucial element of Fukushima Prefecture's landscape. Although most of Mt. Adatarara's tracks can be easily completed by beginners, there are specific courses prohibited to nonexperts because of toxic gas emissions, and the presence of a certified guide is obligatory. So, are you ready for the adventure..?

Places to see :



① Adatarara's crater: Numa no daira



② Nihonmatsu city



③ Red foliage in autumn

Where to eat & stay :



④ Dake Onsen

Dake Onsen is the gateway to Mt. Adatarara. In 1981, Dake Onsen became an independent "micro-state" called: Nikoniko kyowakoku ("the Smile Republic"), whose borders surround the hot spring village, with its own currency and constitution. In 2006 the microstate was attached to Japan and no longer exists today, but this sweet memory remains in the hearts of the inhabitants, who always show a warm smile, proof that the name of the once microstate was well chosen. Dake Onsen offers many tourist activities, such as mountain biking, sake tasting sessions, private concerts in the village's izakaya, and historical tours.

Water characteristics: sulfur baths, source at 68°C (154°F)

Website: <https://www.city.nihonmatsu.lg.jp/page/page002724.html>

Our recommendations in Dake Onsen:



Hanakanzashi

Hanakanzashi is a luxury-class ryokan/hotel which also hosts the Adatarara Visitor Center.

Booking: By phone (+81243-24-2110) or through their website

Average price for the night: 30,000 yen/person

Average price for the night: Please verify directly with the owners.

Website: <https://hana-kanzashi.com/>



Adatarara Shizen Fureai Center

Adatarara Shizen Fureai Center is a mountain lodge that organizes outdoor activities.

Booking: By phone (+81243-24-2226)

Average price for the night: 10,000 yen/person

Average price for the night: Please verify directly with the owners.

Website: <http://www.adatarafureai-c.jp/>



Course # 6^{alt.}

"Extreme Onsen": Numajiri Onsen

Difficulty level	★★
Total length	3.4km.
Required time	2h35min
Elevation gain/loss	+285m.

The "extreme onsen" is a nickname given to the hiking path leading to the Numajiri Onsen's source (between Nakanosawa Onsen and Dake Onsen). As its name suggests, it is not a path to be taken lightly! The emission of toxic gases poses a real danger for uninformed hikers. Therefore, this hiking trail is only achievable in the company of an expert guide to avoid any risk. But once you reach the final stage of the hike, you will be able to dive into the big open-air sulfur onsen in the middle of nature, a rare opportunity in Japan!



Activities in Dake Onsen:



① Mountain biking

The owners of Mt. Inn's onsen hotel propose mountain bike sessions near Dake Onsen's village. Before riding through the forests around Dake Onsen, you'll be treated to a bike-handling lesson. Your guide will give you a wireless headset through which you can communicate in English along the way. *Reservation needed.*

Booking: Online or on site
Activity's average price: Please verify directly
Website: <https://mt-inn.jp/en/>



② Bar-hopping and sake tasting

Dake Onsen's izakaya (traditional Japanese bars) should not be missed if you spend the night in one of the village's ryokan. Come and savor the best local sakes made from Mt. Adatar's pristine water, the best craft beers, and the "gyoza crowns" (enban gyoza), crispy gyoza served on a round plate that are the pride of Fukushima Prefecture.

To book one of our bar-hopping sessions:

<https://www.tohoku-local-secret-tours.jp/>

③ Dake Onsen's historical tour

It is said that it was General Sakanoue no Tamuramaro who discovered the hot spring village in the 9th century. In 1903, a massive fire ravaged the town. It was rebuilt a few years later but went bankrupt in 1923. In 1948, a businessman, aware of Dake Onsen's potential, decided to undertake the renovation work. After repairing nearly 4000 pipes from the source in the village, Dake Onsen's ryokans were able to relaunch their activities. It became a microstate in 1982: the "Smile Republic."
Discover the secrets of this astonishing onsen village, characterized by its warm atmosphere and the solidarity of its residents.

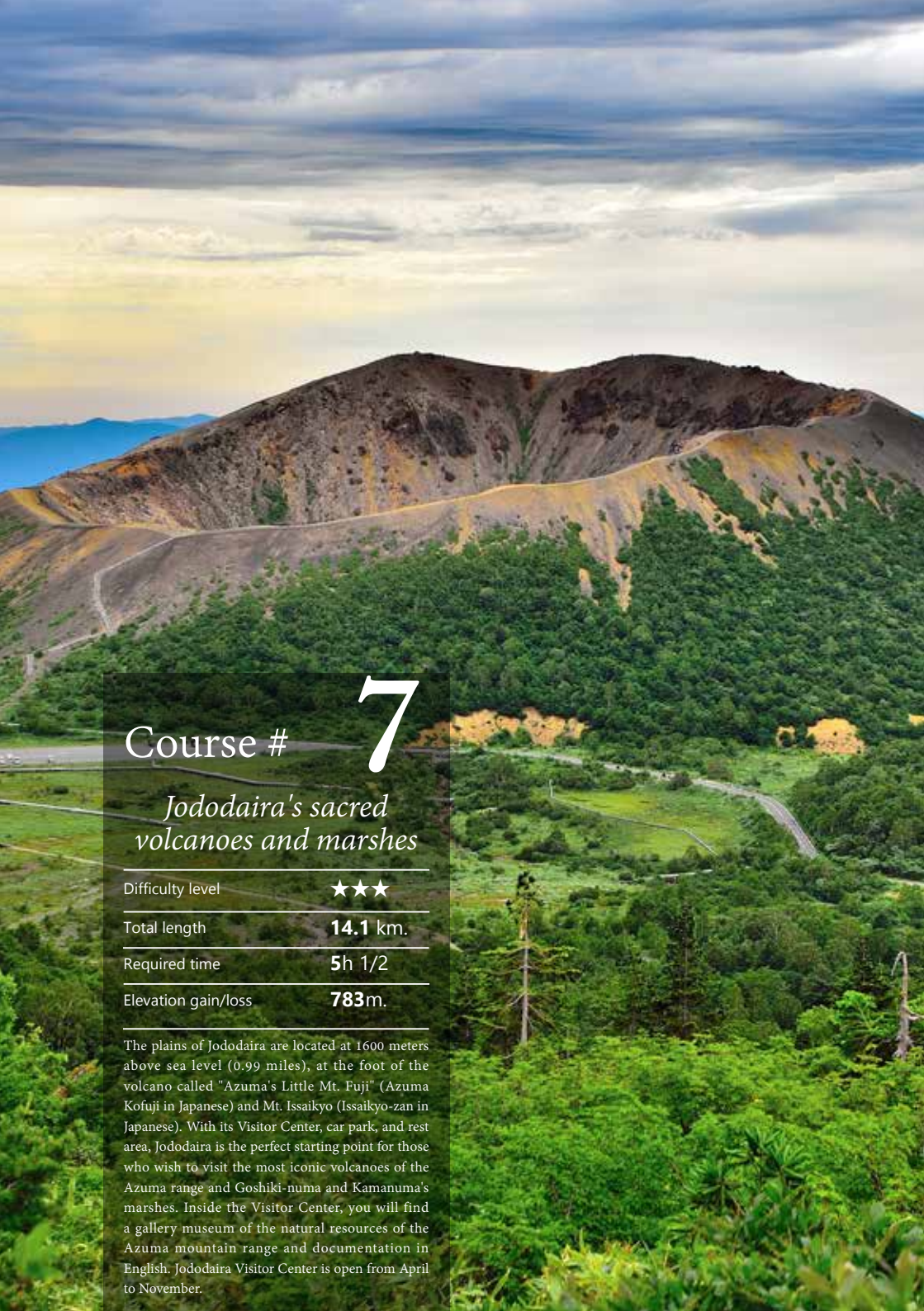
Operational hours: 8:00/14:00
Booking: By phone or through their website
Price per person : Please verify directly with Mt. Inn's owners
Website: <https://mt-inn.jp/en/>



The Yumori : "Protectors of the Onsen"

The village of Dake Onsen is supplied with hot water from Mt. Adatar. Several kilometers separate the volcano from the hot spring town, and hard maintenance work is necessary so that the ryokans never run out of hot water. Those who ensure the pipes are always in good condition, even in winter when ice and snow must be cleared away, are called the yumori ("onsen protectors"). The men of Dake Onsen village pass down this highly important task from generation to generation. In winter, the paths are so dangerous that the yumori risk their lives so the water can still flow in the village. Come to Dake Onsen and meet these brave men, discover the work of the yumori and talk with them over a glass of hot sake in one of the region's izakaya!





Course # 7

Jododaira's sacred volcanoes and marshes

Difficulty level	★★★
Total length	14.1 km.
Required time	5h 1/2
Elevation gain/loss	783m.

The plains of Jododaira are located at 1600 meters above sea level (0.99 miles), at the foot of the volcano called "Azuma's Little Mt. Fuji" (Azuma Kofuji in Japanese) and Mt. Issaikyo (Issaikyo-zan in Japanese). With its Visitor Center, car park, and rest area, Jododaira is the perfect starting point for those who wish to visit the most iconic volcanoes of the Azuma range and Goshiki-numa and Kamanuma's marshes. Inside the Visitor Center, you will find a gallery museum of the natural resources of the Azuma mountain range and documentation in English. Jododaira Visitor Center is open from April to November.

Highlights of the hike:



① Azuma's "Little Mt. Fuji" (Azuma Kofuji)

Azuma's Little Mt. Fuji (Azuma Kofuji) is the emblematic volcano of the Bandai Asahi National Park, standing at 1707 meters above sea level (1.06 miles high). This active volcano is often hit by strong winds. Make sure you bring a windbreaker jacket with you and good hiking shoes to have a better grip on the ground. Located just a few meters from Jododaira Visitor Center, it is the ideal first step of Jododaira's hiking course. A hiking trail goes around Azuma Kofuji's huge crater and is easily achievable even for beginners (beware of strong winds).

Website: <https://www.f-kankou.jp/en/discover/nature/358/>
Distance from Jododaira : 5min/10min.



② Mt. Issaikyo (Issaikyo-zan)

Just by its name: "Issaikyo-zan" ("the mountain of all the Buddhist sutras"), it is easy to understand how much this volcano is imbued with Buddhist history. Some legends report that the monk Kukai himself hid the sutras in this mountain, hence its name. Mt. Issaikyo is still active. You will be able to see fumaroles here and there. Remains of Shinto shrines scattered throughout the mountain are a reminder of how strong the Azuma Mountains' nature worship was until the end of the Edo period (17th-19th centuries).

Website: <https://www.env.go.jp/park/bandai/guide/joudodaira/english/course/course03.html>



③ The Five-Colored Marsh (Goshiki-numa)

Also called "Witch's Eye" (majo no hitomi), this magnificent caldera of a brilliant blue is best appreciated from the summit of Mt. Issaikyo. From mid-May to late August, many species of endemic alpine flowers bloom along the hiking trail.

Warning: not to be confused with the "Goshiki-numa lakes" around Lake Inawashiro and Mt. Bandai.

Website: <https://www.pref.fukushima.lg.jp/w4/fgr/en/perfectview/p05/>
Distance from Issaikyo-zan : 90min.



④ Kamanuma's marshes

This scythe shape of this marshland gave it its name of Kamanuma ("the scythe marsh"). It is actually part of Higashi Azuma volcano's caldera covered with water. In summer, the landscapes are covered in brilliant green grass, but in autumn, the grass turns red, and the bushes take on red colors, landscapes that are called: "kusa-momiji" in Japanese (the "red grass foliage").

Since the Higashi Azuma volcano is still active and the swamp is located at the potential eruption site, it is necessary to remain vigilant for volcanic gas emissions.





Takayu Onsen



Tsuchiyu Onsen, Yumori Ryokan's entrance

The entrance gate to the Azuma range : Takayu Onsen



The baths in the hot spring village of Takayu Onsen are renowned for their power to "cure afflictions in ten days." The source's water, which contains sulfur, hydrogen sulfide, aluminum, and calcium, is said to have calming properties for people suffering from burns, skin injuries, rheumatism, high blood pressure, eczema, psoriasis... It is said that the healing Buddha called "Yakushi" himself opened the place over a millennium ago. These healing properties are the reason why for over 400 years, pilgrims have come to Takayu to relieve their ailments and relax their aching bodies exhausted by the Azuma pilgrimage. Due to its proximity to Jododaira, you will find many expert guides specializing in the Azuma mountain range.

Public bath "Attakayu" open between : 9:00-21:00
Number of ryokan/hotels: 9
Distance from Jododaira: 15 km. (25 min. by car)
Website: <http://www.takayuonsen.jp/en/>

Our recommendations:



Adachiya Ryokan

Find in this ryokan the most beautiful outdoor baths (rotenburo 露天風呂) in the region. Adachiya has rooms with Western beds for those who want an alternative to Japanese futon mattresses.

Booking: By phone (+81235-26-1218) or through their website
Average price for the night (2 meals included) : 20,000 yen
Daytime bath price : 1000 yen/person (towel rental not included)
Website: <http://www.adachiya.jp/>



Sansuiso Hotel

The pride of this luxury ryokan resides in the magnificent outdoor baths near the waterfall behind Sansuiso, surrounded by lush nature and its traditional gardens teeming with Japanese fish. The hotel also offers bike tours.

Booking: Online
Average price for the night (2 meals included) : 19,000 yen
Website: <https://www.sansuiso.jp/en/>



The final step of the hike: Tsuchiyu Onsen

① Footbaths and craft beer

Tsuchiyu Onsen is more than 1400 years of history. According to legend, the Shinto god Oomunachi no Mikoto discovered the hot spring by opening a hole in the ground. The baths in the establishments of this thermal village are rich in bicarbonate and sulfur, which makes them particularly effective on skin conditions. Why not enjoy Tsuchiyu's good water in one of the village's foot baths, a cup of amazaké (non-alcoholic rice beverage) in hand, and a pint of craft beer in the other...? We show you the way and the best beers to taste!

Tsuchiyu Onsen website: <https://www.tcy.jp/en/>
Bar-hopping reservation website: <https://www.tohoku-local-secret-tours.jp/tourinfo/4506/>



② Kokeshi painting workshops

It is said that the very first kokeshi were made in Tsuchiyu Onsen. These decorative wooden dolls were brought back as gifts from a trip to an onsen in northern Japan. Come and discover one of Tsuchiyu's kokeshi craft shops, learn the different patterns and peculiarities of kokeshi from each region, and paint your own kokeshi with traditional tools!

Website: <https://www.f-kankou.jp/en/experience/tours-workshops/433/>



Around the Azuma range...



Abukuma Highlands, Fukushima Prefecture

Fukushima's delights



"Gyoza crowns" (enban gyoza)

If you visit Fukushima, you must taste the "enban gyoza." Gyozas are Japanese ravioli stuffed with minced pork and chives. Enban gyozas are gyoza fried in the pan altogether and served on a round plate, making them deliciously crispy. Our favorite enban gyoza flavor? The curry gyoza!

Where to eat?

Tsuchiyo Onsen, near Fukushima station, Dake Onsen... The best thing is to follow us, and we'll take you there!



Mt. Adatarara's sakes

Fukushima sakes have the particularity of being well-rounded with a hint of acidity. Our recommendation? The sake called "Senko nari" or the sake from the "Oku no matsu" brewery, which uses the excellent water from Mt. Adatarara.

Where to taste?

Take part in our bar-hopping sessions at Dake Onsen, and we will bring you to the best sake bars around.



Ramen soups

Fukushima is known for the quality of its ramen, especially the famous "Kitakata ramen" on the Aizu-Wakamatsu side. But we'd also love to recommend Dake Onsen's soy ramen!

Where to eat?

Narikoma, Miuraya, Kitchen Farm Danran...



① Mt. Bandai & Inawashiro Lake

How can we talk about Bandai-Asahi National Park without mentioning Mt. Bandai?

This volcano is still active and culminates at 1816 meters above sea level. It is one of Japan's 100 most famous mountains and has been registered as a National Geopark since 2011. The last eruption dates back to 1888. Its shape is recognizable among a thousand: formed by two peaks, Mt. Bandai presents a large curve in the middle that resembles a moon crescent. The mountain's plains and nearby Lake Inawashiro are also part of Bandai-Asahi National Park.

In this booklet, we do not cover Mt. Bandai's hiking trails or Lake Inawashiro area, but we strongly encourage you to get information about the region from the link below:

Hiking season open between: May - October (winter sports activities available during the snowy season)
Nearest train stations: Bandai-machi, Inawashiro
Distance from Fukushima city: around 90 min.
Website: <https://www.urabandai-inf.com/en/>



② Mr. Abe's Bonsai : "Abe Bonsaiya"

The Abe family has been making bonsai for 90 years at the foot of the Azuma mountain range in the city of Fukushima. Mr. Abe was granted special permission from the government to collect oak seeds from the Bandai-Asahi National Park to cultivate his bonsai trees. Mr. Abe is committed to replicating the natural beauty of the oak growing in Bandai-Asahi Park. The strong winds that blow around Jododaira cause the oak trees to adapt and adopt extreme shapes, so the trunk does not break under pressure. This is what Mr. Abe tries to reproduce in his art, which he named: "Kukan Yubi" ("the beauty of space").

By carefully pruning the branches and needles of his oak trees by meticulously twisting the trunks and branches, Mr. Abe manages to transcribe the oak's beauty, strength, flexibility, and capacity to adapt to the environment of Bandai-Asahi.

Mr. Abe offers visitors the opportunity to participate in bonsai creation workshops and enjoy the view of his creations at home.

Open between: Reservation needed

Address: 960-2262 Fukushima Prefecture, Fukushima City, Zainiwasaka Furuyashiki 10-1

Phone number: 024-591-1638

Email: peach-bonsai@space.ocn.ne.jp

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/kukanyubi>

Activity's average price: Starting from 3500 yen/person

Website: <https://peach-bonsai.wixsite.com/kukanyubi/bonsai-abe>



Animals that can be spotted in Bandai-Asahi National Park:



Japanese Serow
カモシカ

The Japanese serow is a goat-antelope species designated as a "Special National Living Natural Monument". This protected animal inspired the creation of the Forest Spirit character in the movie Princess Mononoke. You will be able to spot them along the Rokujurigo Kaido route.



Japanese Giant Flying Squirrel
ムササビ

The Japanese giant flying squirrel is particularly present near Mt. Haguro or along the Rokujurigo Kaido. During prehistoric times, the flying squirrel was an essential food source for people in northern Japan.



Japanese Macaque
ニホンザル

The Japanese macaque is very present in northern Japan. You can come across them around Mt. Yudono or Lake Inawashiro. Although very cute in appearance, the wild macaque can be very aggressive. Do not approach under any circumstances.



Japanese stoat
オコジョ

The Japanese stoat (mustelid *erminea nippon*) is a mustelid that loves to sneak between rocks. With a bit of luck, you can see them in rocky mountains like Gassan or Jododaira. In winter, the stoat swaps its brown fur for a pretty white coat that blends with the snow.



Japanese Black Bear
ツキノワグマ

The Japanese black bear is present throughout the island of Honshu, which proliferates especially in depopulated areas. The Japanese black bear is fearful of nature and typically avoids humans but may attack if surprised. To avoid taking the bear by surprise, always make noise when hiking in the forest.



Rhacophorus arboreus
モリアオガエル

In Japanese, its vernacular name is: "the green forest frog." This adorable frog has the particularity of mating at the top of trees. Females lay large, slimy sacs containing their eggs at the end of branches. You can easily observe them in Mt. Haguro during July.



Japanese Bush Warbler
ウグイス

The singing warbler, "uguisu" in Japanese, is one of Japan's "Three Emblematic Birds". Its distinct singing voice, transcribed "ho ho ke kyo" in Japanese, is reminiscent of the words of the lotus sutra, making the bird a symbolic messenger of Buddhism.



Japanese Kingfisher
カワセミ

The Japanese kingfisher is a small blue bird that lives near waterholes. Its shimmering colors have given it the sweet Japanese nickname "flying jewel." You'll be more likely to spot the Japanese kingfisher near Lake Inawashiro.



Narcissus Flycatcher
キビタキ

The narcissus flycatcher is one of the iconic birds of Fukushima Prefecture. The male displays a bright orange belly, while the female is a more neutral color. The male's singing becomes very particular during the mating season. You should be able to hear it in Jododaira.

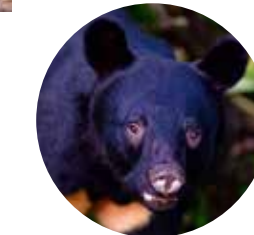
Your security is our priority



Bandai-Asahi National Park is full of beautiful wild animal species. However, do not give in to the temptation to approach the animals if you come across them! Stay at a distance, don't make sudden movements or loud noises, and don't touch them under any circumstances.

Avoid carrying smelly food to avoid attracting bears, wear light-colored clothing to avoid attacks by Japanese hornets, and if possible, always travel in groups to deter animals from charging you.

Beware of the Japanese black bear!



Pay particular attention to the Japanese black bear, which is very present in the forest. The Japanese black bear is a fearful animal that naturally flees humans when they are aware of their presence. However, they tend to attack by reflex, out of surprise.

To avoid an attack, always make sure to make noise when walking to let bears know you are on the way. We highly recommend wearing a bear bell and buying a bear-special pepper spray.



The ideal outfit in Bandai-Asahi:



Our expert English-Japanese guides in Bandai-Asahi:



Keisuke ICHINOSE

Keisuke is a trekker who explored many hiking trails worldwide, eager to introduce visitors to his favorite areas in Bandai-Asahi. Passionate about photography, he will show you the best places to take the best shots.



Mitsumasa GOTO

Mitsumasa is a tourist expert specializing in Miyagi and Fukushima Prefectures who travels many hiking trails all over Japan as part of his job (now one of his hobbies too!). Azuma has no secrets for him!



Sara MILLOT-ITO

Sara has been working since 2017 in the tourism management of Tsuruoka in Yamagata Prefecture. She specializes in the Dewa Sanzan region but is also a big fan of Fukushima. Sara can also guide in French.

To learn more about our guiding/interpretation services:

www.bandai-asahi.com



BANDAI-ASAHI NATIONAL PARK ACCESS MAP

TOURIST INFORMATION

1 Dewa Sanzan area

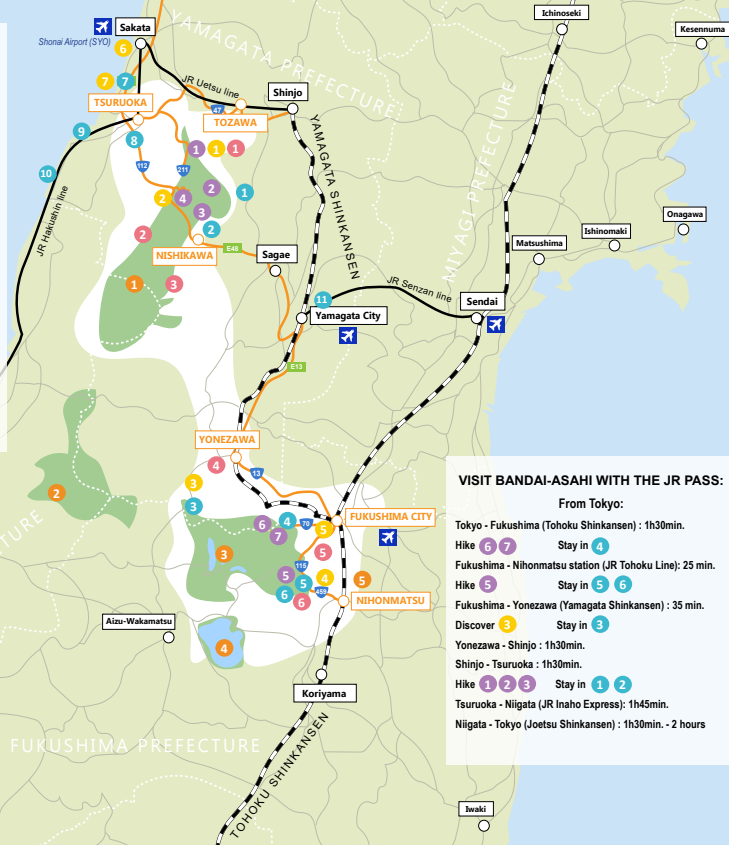
Tsuruoka Tourist Information Center

Location: FOODEVER 1F (in front of Tsuruoka Station, 997-0015 Yamagata Prefecture, Tsuruoka City, Suehiromachi 3-1)
Tel: 0235-25-7678 (English spoken)
Email: tsuruoka@degam.jp
Web: www.tsuruokacity.com

2 Azuma area

Adataro Nature Center

Location: Inside Hana Kanzashi Ryokan (964-0074 Fukushima Prefecture, Nihonmatsu city, Dake Onsen 1-104)
Tel: 090-7171-0350
Email: adataro.nc@gmail.com
Web: https://www.okatoyama.com



VISIT BANDAI-ASAHI WITH THE JR PASS:

From Tokyo:

Tokyo - Fukushima (Tohoku Shinkansen) : 1h30min.

Hike 6 7 Stay in 4

Fukushima - Nihonmatsu station (JR Tohoku Line): 25 min.

Hike 5 Stay in 5 6

Fukushima - Yonezawa (Yamagata Shinkansen) : 35 min.

Discover 3 Stay in 3

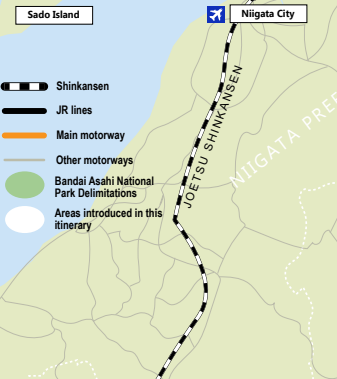
Yonezawa - Shinjo : 1h30min.

Shinjo - Tsuruoka : 1h30min.

Hike 1 2 3 Stay in 1 2

Tsuruoka - Niigata (JR Inaho Express): 1h45min.

Niigata - Tokyo (Joetsu Shinkansen) : 1h30min. - 2 hours



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- 3 Sansai mountain plants cuisine
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