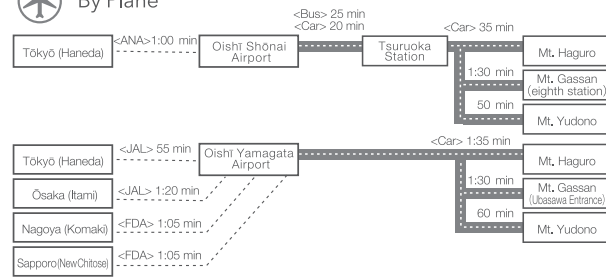


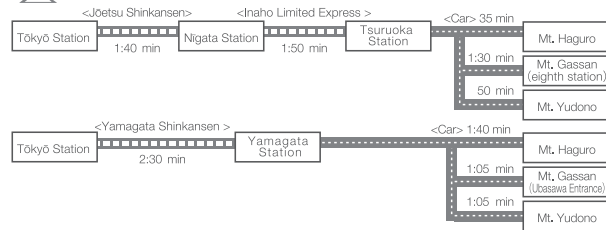
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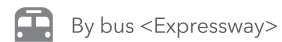
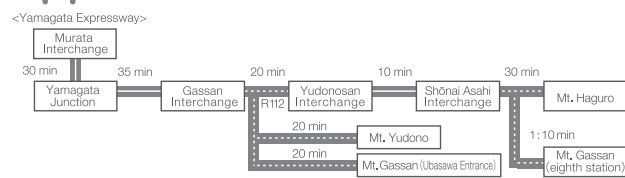
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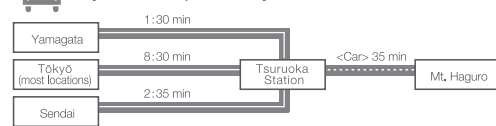
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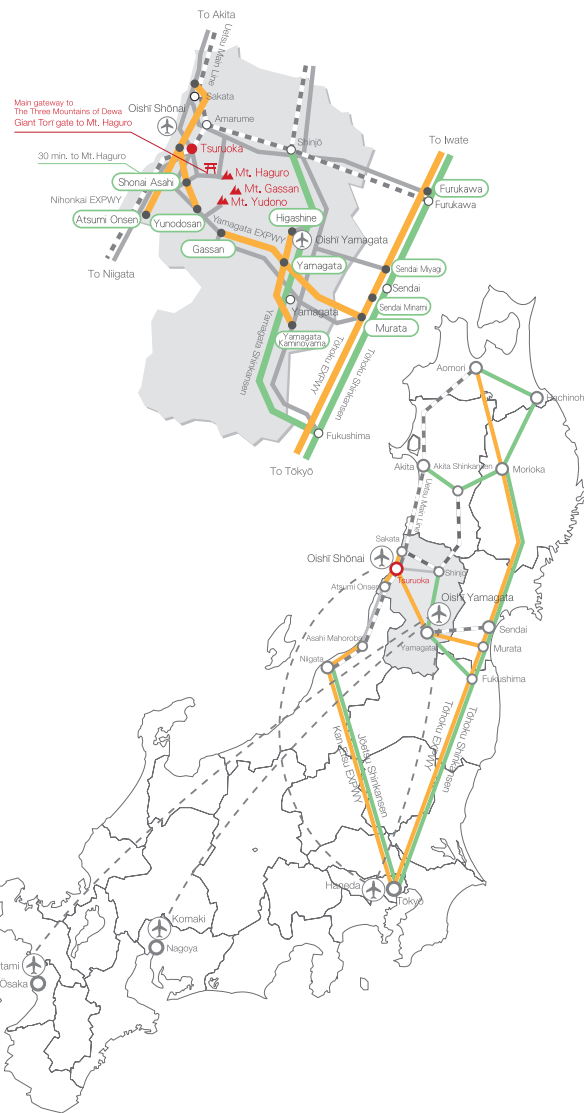
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Dewa Sanzan



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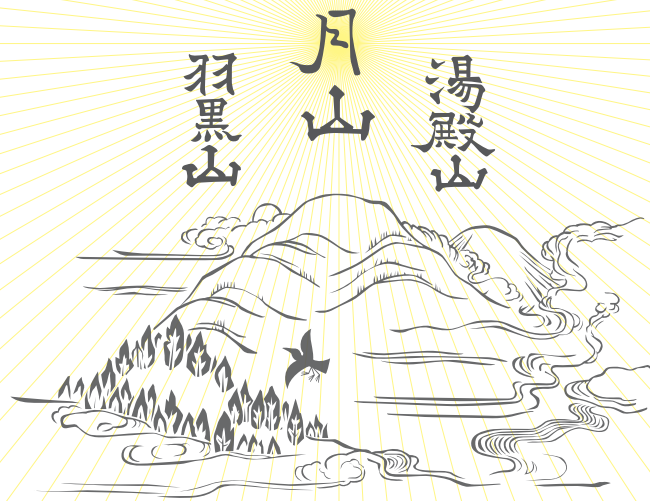
Association for Promotion of the Dewa Sanzan "Umarekawari no Tabi"

(Office: Tourism, Culture and Sports Department: Cultural Promotion / Cultural Property Division)

TEL. 023-630-3342

Website: <https://nihonisan-dewasanzan.jp/>





## The Three Mountains of Dewa

*“A Journey to Rebirth” Amid the Sacred Nature of Dewa Sanzan*

*The Three Mountains of Dewa  
have been worshipped since days of old.*

*The journey through Mt. Haguro, Mt. Gassan, and Mt. Yudono  
has come to be known as a passage through death to life: a pilgrimage of rebirth.*

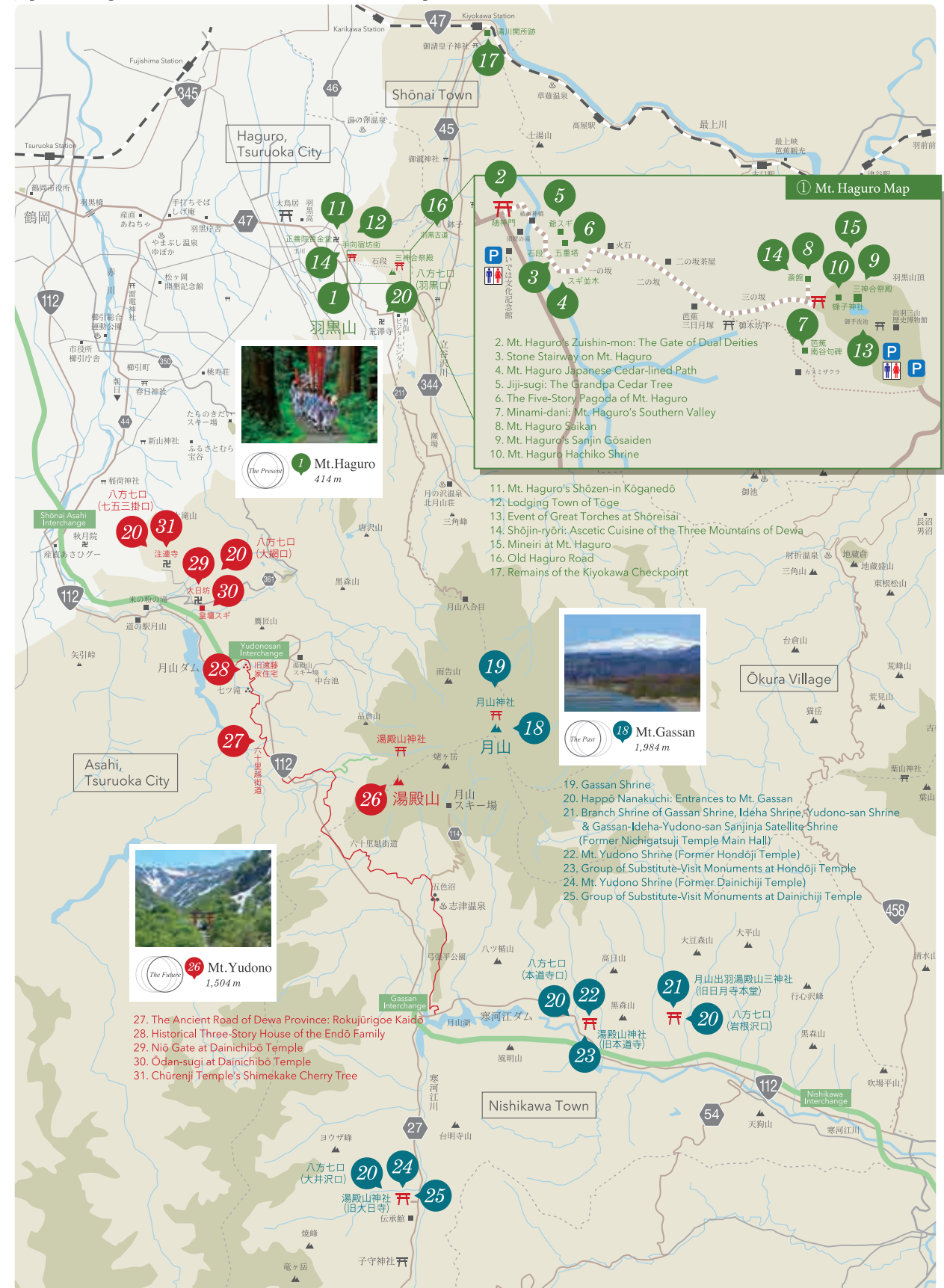
*Enveloped in their sacred aura  
We offer prayers to the spirits of the three mountains.*

*With nothing but the soul, bared.*

*A unique place  
To renew body and mind  
Full of strength for what tomorrow may bring.*

## Japan Heritage Site: Three Mountains of Dewa Area Map

※ The number is the number of the cultural property after the 5th page.





# Where Nature and Faith Draw Breath: A Journey of Rebirth

*Haguro Shugendō, a form of mountain asceticism, was born amidst the sprawling nature of the Three Mountains of Dewa in central Yamagata Prefecture. According to this faith, Mt. Haguro represents the present and the fulfillment of worldly desires; spirits come to rest under lofty and graceful Mt. Gassan, which represents the past; and Mt. Yudono represents the future, the hot water gushing from its sacred red boulder symbolizing the birth of new life.*

*Climbing the three mountains became popular among the general public as a pilgrimage of rebirth during the Edo period. This old Japanese tradition, ever supported by the local community, continues to link faith with the natural mountain environment to this day. The pilgrimage begins at Mt. Haguro's impressive torii gate, the border of the sacred area, and pilgrims enter the heart of the holy land once they reach Zuishin-mon, the Gate of Dual Deities. The cedars lining the stone stairway all the way to the summit seem to conceal the heavens themselves, leaving visitors in awe of nature's presence: its aura soaks body and mind, imparting renewed energy for the morrow.*



## The Journey of Rebirth's Origins

"The Three Mountains of Dewa," or Dewa Sanzan, is the collective name for Mt. Haguro (414m), Mt. Gassan (1,984m) and Mt. Yudono (1,504m). Mt. Gassan is the central peak, which boasts a beautiful ridge connecting it to both Mt. Haguro and Mt. Yudono.

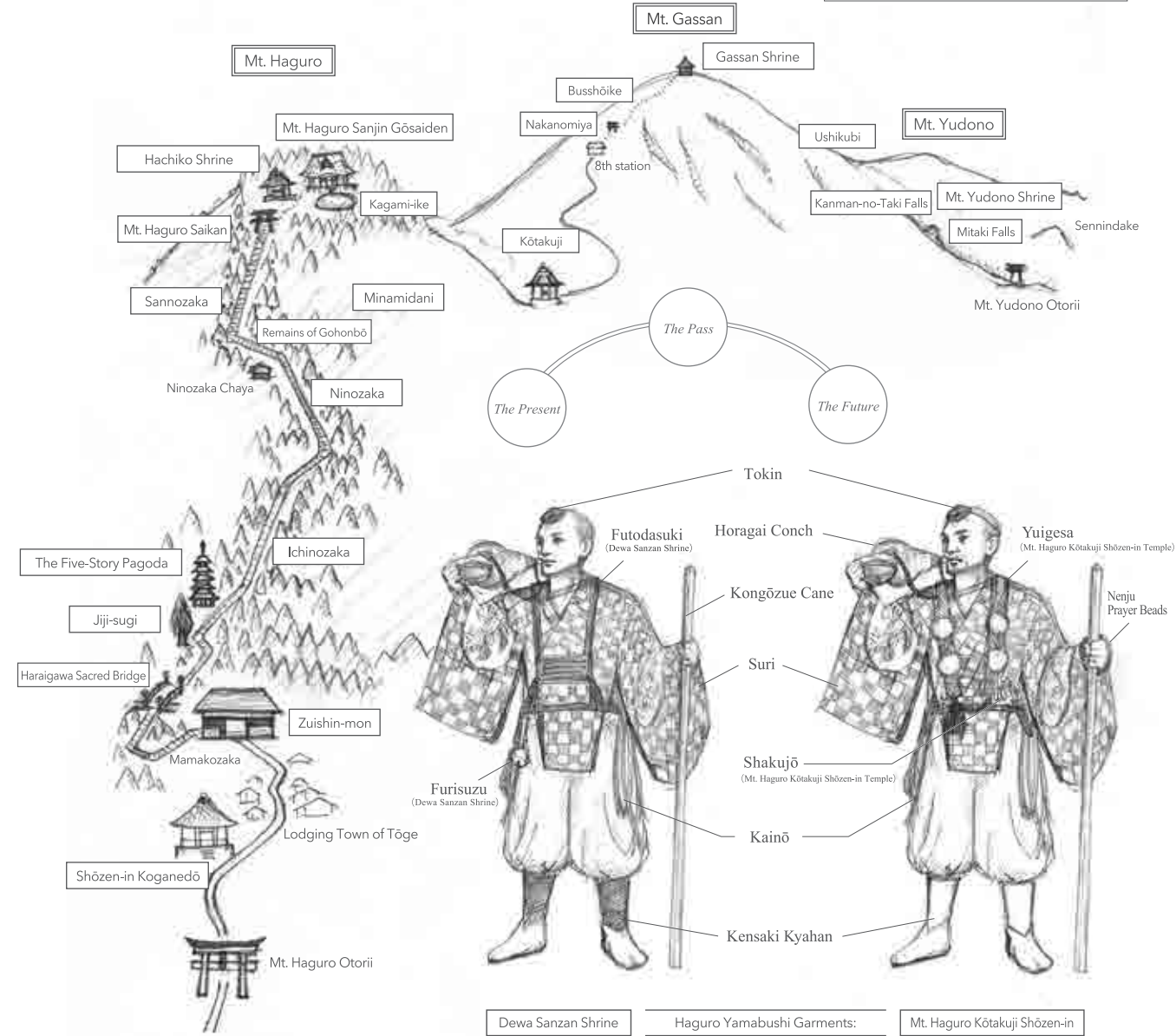
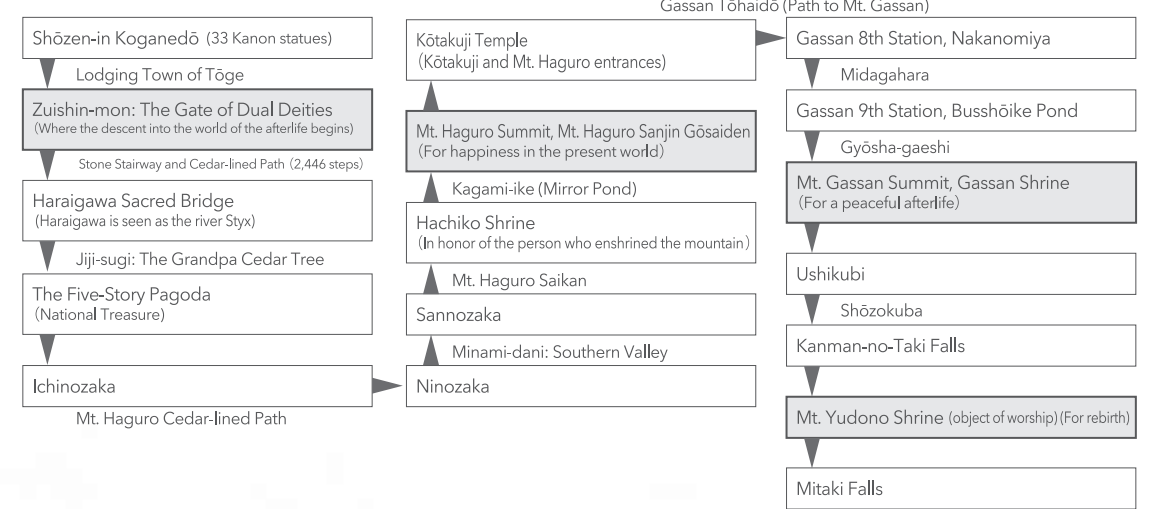
Mt. Haguro was enshrined by the son of emperor Sushun, Prince Hachiko, around 1,400 years ago, and is the center of Haguro Shugendō training. Shugendō is a form of mountain worship unique to Japan that combines nature worship with esoteric Buddhist elements. The main point of Haguro Shugendō is that it takes after the characteristics of the three mountains with Mt. Haguro (the mountain of the present) prayed to for happiness in the current life, Mt. Gassan (the mountain of the past) for a peaceful afterlife, and Mt. Yudono (the mountain of the future) for rebirth. The practice in which it is thought that while still alive you can be reborn as a new soul became popular among the public during the Edo period (1603-1868) as a way to reclaim youthful vitality, and was when the ritual — called San-kan San-do, or "three gates, three passages," in Haguro Shugendō — came to be known as a "journey of rebirth."

## Mt. Haguro's Aki-no-Mineiri Ritual: Beginning the Journey of Rebirth

Long ago, people believed mountains and gods were one and the same: holy lands where divine spirits reside, sacred places that nurture new life. For Yamabushi, the "mountain monks" who practice Haguro Shugendō, retreating to a holy place like a mountain is akin to burying the worldly "self" and returning to the womb. Yamabushi consider themselves deceased when they put on their white shiro-shōzoku garments, enter the mountains, and roam the "other world." They undergo hardships, celebrate becoming one with the holy mountain's spirit, and are reborn as new souls when they emerge from the mountains. Yamabushi training was originally a means of becoming sokushinbutsu (a "Buddha of the flesh" who reaches enlightenment while still alive) to use the spiritual power gained from the mountains to provide salvation to all living beings. Haguro Shugendō's Aki-no-Mineiri is the only death-and-rebirth imitation ritual of its kind that has survived to the present day.

In the current day there are two Aki-no-Mineiri Rituals performed each year: the Haguro Shugendō Aki-no-Mineiri performed by Dewasanzan Shrine that became a Shinto ritual during the late Meiji period following the policy to separate Shintoism and Buddhism, and the ancient Aki-no-Mineiri performed at the Mt. Haguro Shugendō Kōtakuji Shrine as it has been since before the separation of Shintoism and Buddhism that still retains the traditional Hōguhōtō ritual.

## Journey of Rebirth: Main Route







# 1 Mt. Haguro

Shōkanseon-bosatsu (The Buddha of Worldly Benefits)  
= Fudaraku-jōdo = The Present (Jōdo is the world of Buddha)  
Ideha-no-Kami (Guardian Deity of Dewa Province) and  
Ukanomitama-no-Mikoto (Deity of Crops)

## The Beginning of Rebirth

First enshrined by Prince Hachiko, Mt. Haguro is a Buddha (Shōkanseon-bosatsu) who saves people in the living world. It is the closest of the three mountains to civilization and is said to bring worldly benefits to the living; thus, it represents the present.

## 4 Mt. Haguro Japanese Cedar-lined Path

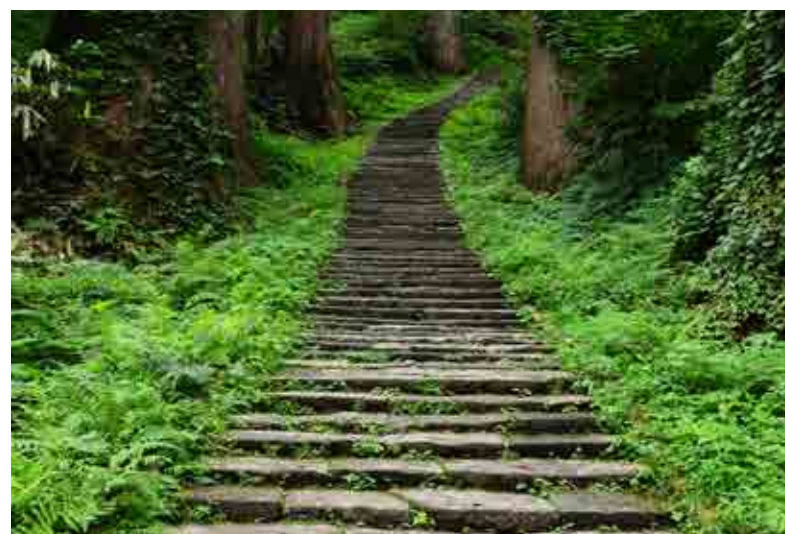
(Nationally designated significant natural monument, awarded 3 stars in the Michelin Green Guide Japan)

The 580 cedar trees that line both sides of the path are 350 to 500 years old. Seeing lines of Yamabushi or other pilgrims wearing shōzoku garments passing through the impressive trees is now a characteristic of summer.



## 2 Mt. Haguro's Zuishin-mon: The Gate of Dual Deities

Zuishin-mon, the Gate of Dual Deities, at the entrance of Mt. Haguro is where the 2,446-step stone stairway begins. The gate was known as "Niō-mon" before the separation of Shinto and Buddhism in the Meiji era (1868-1912). The Niō statues that were placed inside are now enshrined in Shōzen-in Koganedō at the foot of the mountain.



## 3 Stone Stairway on Mt. Haguro

The 2,446-step stone stairway stretches roughly 2 km from the Gate of Dual Deities to the summit. It took the 50th head monk, Tenyū, 13 full years to construct. It takes about one hour to walk up to the summit. There are 33 engravings on the steps, and it is said that if you can find all of them your wishes will come true.



## 15 Mineiri at Mt. Haguro

Mt. Haguro's mineiri are entry rituals performed by Haguro Yamabushi following in the footsteps of Prince Hachiko. In summer's Natsu-no-Mine, members of the general public climb the Three Mountains of Dewa. In Aki-no-Mine, Yamabushi spend around one week in autumn training in the mountains. Finally, winter's Fuyu-no-Mine has two Yamabushi spend 100 days on the mountain. Fuyu-no-Mine is concluded on New Year's Eve at the Shōreisai festival at the top of Mt. Haguro, where the two Yamabushi compete with what they learned during their training.





**5 Jiji-sugi: The Grandpa Cedar Tree**  
(Designated Natural Monument of Japan)

*Jiji-sugi, the Grandpa Cedar Tree, is an ancient cedar tree believed to be over 1,000 years old. The tree has a circumference of 10.5m at the base, 8.25m at the trunk, and is both the biggest and tallest cedar on Mt. Haguro.*

**6 The Five-Story Pagoda of Mt. Haguro**  
(National Treasure)

*Originally constructed by Taira-no-Masakado during the Heian Period (794-1185), the current pagoda was purportedly rebuilt in 1372. The roof was built in an antique Japanese style, kokerabuki, and the wooden pagoda was made using a technique called san-ken-go-sō or “three ken (a Japanese unit of measurement) and five layers,” producing a structure regarded as one of the most beautiful pagodas in Japan.*



**7 Minami-dani: Mt. Haguro's Southern Valley**  
(Designated Yamagata Prefectural Historical Site)

*The southern valley on Mt. Haguro houses the remains of Shikkōji temple. The temple, located 400m along the path after turning right at the base of the San-no-Zaka steps, is where Matsuo Basho stayed while on his journey writing The Narrow Road to the Deep North. The place has become a hidden sanctuary on Mt. Haguro due to its tranquil atmosphere, which makes one feel as if time is standing still.*



**8 Mt. Haguro Saikan**  
(Designated Tsuruoka City Tangible Cultural Property)

*The Mt. Haguro Saikan is a temple at the top of the San-no-Zaka steps that was formerly known as Kezōin temple. There were previously over 30 such temples on the mountain; however, this is the only one remaining after the separation of Shinto and Buddhism in the Meiji period (1868-1912). The temple is currently used for praying and sampling shōjin-ryōri, the ascetic cuisine of the Yamabushi. It is also the location of Yamabushi training during the Fuyu-no-Mine ritual.*



**9 Mt. Haguro's Sanjin Gōsaiiden**  
(Nationally Designated Important Cultural Property)

*Sanjin Gōsaiiden (previously Jakkōdera) is the main shrine building at the top of Mt. Haguro. The building enshrines the deities of Mt. Haguro, Mt. Gassan, and Mt. Yudono together. Its valuable wooden structure and thatched roof, dating back to the middle ages, have also been preserved. The pond in front of the building, Mitarashi-ike, is also called Kagami-ike (“Mirror Pond”) after the offerings of bronze mirrors that have been made to it since the Heian period (794-1185).*



**10 Mt. Haguro Hachiko Shrine**  
(Designated Important Cultural Property of Tsuruoka City)

*This shrine is dedicated to Prince Hachiko, who enshrined the Three Mountains of Dewa and was said to have saved people from their suffering in his day. The shrine was originally a Buddhist hall built to commemorate the founding of the mountains; however, Mt. Haguro became exclusively Shinto following the separation of Shinto and Buddhism, so in 1874 it was renamed to Hachiko Shrine.*



**11 Mt. Haguro's Shōzen-in Koganedō**  
(Nationally Designated Important Cultural Property)

*In the past, Shōzen-in Koganedō, at the bottom of the hill, was called Shōkondō (lit. “small golden hall”), in contrast to Daikondō (lit. “big golden hall”: now Sanjin Gōsaiiden) at the top. The reflecting golden light of the 33 Kanon statues inside led to the name being changed to Koganedō (lit. “golden hall”). Visitors can also pay their respects to Otake Dainichi Nyorai at the Otake-Dainichi-Dō Hall, which has gathered many worshippers in recent years.*



**12 Lodging Town of Tōge**  
(Inside the Tsuruoka City Historical Scenic Beauty Preservation Development Project Priority Area)

*Mt. Haguro's temple town, Tōge, is lined with pilgrims' lodgings and has a long history of supporting worshippers at the Three Mountains of Dewa and their shugendō pilgrimages. For centuries, the lodges have reliably provided guides and shōjin-ryōri ascetic cuisine to pilgrims.*



**13 Event of Great Torches at Shōreisai**  
(Nationally Designated Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property)

*The Shōreisai festival is held on New Year's Eve at the conclusion of Fuyu-no-Mine, a ritual where two elder men from Tōge are chosen to become Matsuhijiri: Yamabushi who spend 100 days in the mountain praying for a successful harvest and peace on earth. Evil demons, represented by pine straw effigies, are overpowered in the Ōtaimatsu ritual, which takes place overnight from New Year's Eve into New Year's Day.*



**14 Shōjin-ryōri: Ascetic Cuisine of the Three Mountains of Dewa**

*Shōjin-ryōri ascetic cuisine consists of lovingly prepared meals made using traditional techniques and ingredients sourced from the mountains. Mountain worshippers at the Three Mountains of Dewa eat ascetic meals to purify their bodies in preparation for heading into the mountains.*





# 18 Mt. Gassan

(Nationally Designated Natural Monument)

Amitabha (Buddha of the Salvation in the Afterlife) = Amida Jōdo = The Past  
Tsukuyomi-no-Mikoto (Deity Who Governs the Night and Water)

Revered since time immemorial, the awe-inspiring 1,984m Mt. Gassan is known as a mountain that represents the past and where the ancestors rest. Gassan is synonymous with paradise, and Midagahara at the eighth station, in particular, makes for a mystical scene with its wetland full of blooming alpine plants.

## The Moon and the Afterlife: A Pure World



### 16 Old Haguro Road

Starting from the Hachiko hamlet and stretching to the top of Mt. Haguro, the old Haguro road is the route that Prince Hachiko is said to have taken when he practiced shugendō training on Mt. Haguro. Traces of previous pilgrimages remain in Subeno, a sacred area associated with Prince Hachiko.



### 17 Remains of the Kiyokawa Checkpoint

Pilgrims who came by boat along the Mogami River began here, then paid their respects at Goshonōji Shrine and headed for Mt. Haguro via the old Haguro road from the Hachiko hamlet. This also marks the location Matsuo Basho landed at before visiting the Three Mountains of Dewa at the start of the Edo period, and a commemorative monument has been erected accordingly.



### 19 Gassan Shrine

The deity worshipped at the top of Mt. Gassan is called Tsukuyomi-no-Mikoto. Amitābha, the Buddha in control of the afterlife, was enshrined there long ago. On the 13th of August every year, consecrated bonfires called saitōgoma are lit to send ancestral spirits home during the Saitō Festival.



### 20 Happō Nanakuchi: Entrances to Mt. Gassan

(photo: The Hondōji entrance, one of the Happō Nanakuchi entrances from the Edo period)

Happō Nanakuchi refers to the eight pilgrimage entrances to Mt. Gassan. Each entrance previously had its own temple and pilgrims' lodge. The entrances are the Arasawa entrance (Haguro entrance) on Mt. Haguro, the Hijiori entrance at Aun-in temple, the Iwanesawa entrance at Nichigatsuji temple, the Shimekake entrance at Chūrenji temple, the Ōami entrance at Dainichibō, the Ōisawa entrance at Dainichidera temple, the Hondōji entrance at Hondōji temple, and the Kawadai entrance at Shōkōji temple (closed during the Kanei era, 1624-1644).





**21** Branch Shrine of Gassan Shrine, Ideha Shrine, Yudono-san Shrine & Gassan-Ideha-Yudono-san Sanjinja Satellite Shrine (Former Nichigatsuji Temple Main Hall)  
(Nationally Designated Important Cultural Property)

*This hall is located at the Iwanesawa entrance, one of the Happō Nanakuchi entrances to the mountain, and was built in honor of the three spirits of Mt. Gassan, Mt. Haguro, and Mt. Yudono. The former Nichigatsuji temple was first built in 1387, with the current iteration being a reconstruction; however, the priceless building still maintains the structure it had before the separation of Shinto and Buddhism, and is the biggest wooden structure in the Tōhoku region.*



**22** Mt. Yudono Shrine (Former Hondōji Temple)

*Mt. Yudono Shrine is located near the Hondōji entrance, one of the Happō Nanakuchi entrances. There were previously around 20 pilgrims' lodges near the entrance, and the nearby collection of daisantō (substitute-visit monuments) stands as proof of the commoners' faith, a glimpse into a bygone era when the temple was popular among pilgrims to The Three Mountains of Dewa.*



**23** Group of Substitute-Visit Monuments at Hondōji Temple  
(Nishikawa Town Designated Tangible Cultural Property)

*Substitute-visit monuments were used when someone who was physically unable to go pay their respects requested the chief priest do so in their place. They were commissioned using part of the contributions from the people who requested them.*



**24** Mt. Yudono Shrine (Former Dainichiji Temple)

*Mt. Yudono Shrine is located at the Ōsawa entrance, one of the Happō Nanakuchi entrances. St. Dōchi built the pilgrimage path called "the Dōchi path" to Dainichiji temple during the Oei era (1394-1427), and it is said to have become very popular among worshippers from Kantō, Fukushima, and the Okitama region.*



**25** Group of Substitute-Visit Monuments at Dainichiji Temple  
(Nishikawa Town Designated Tangible Cultural Property)

*Dainichiji was most prosperous during the middle of the Edo period, when the lines of pilgrims heading for The Three Mountains of Dewa are said to have become very long. The many substitute-visit monuments and other artifacts that remain in the vicinity offer a glimpse into the lives of contemporary people.*

## The Future **26** Mt. Yudono

Dainichi Nyorai (Symbol of Eternal Life) = Mitsugon Jōdo = The Future  
Oyamatsumi-no-Mikoto (Deity of the Mountain),  
Onamuchi-no-Mikoto (Deity of the Land),  
Sukunahikona-no-Mikoto (Deity of Medicine)

### A Profound Spiritual Revelation

*Dainichi Nyorai, also a symbol of the capacity of sprawling nature, is god of the mountains, the source of all life—hence the name "mountain of the future." Mt. Yudono is a sacred place, where visitors feel reborn after touching the Goshintai monument from which warm water flows.*







## 27 The Ancient Road of Dewa Province: Rokujūrigoe Kaidō

*The ancient road of Dewa, Rokujūrigoe Kaidō, stretches about 100km to connect inland Yamagata Prefecture with the coast, and prospered as a path for pilgrims to the Three Mountains of Dewa during the Edo period. The remains of lodges and teahouses that once welcomed pilgrims, along with the Nanatsu-taki falls that Yamabushi used for takigyō (waterfall meditation), can be found lining the road.*



## 28 Historical Three-Story House of the Endō Family

(Prefectural Designated Tangible Cultural Property)

*Tamugimata is a small district along the ancient road of Dewa, Rokujūrigoe Kaidō, and the location of the historical three-story house belonging to the Endō family, once a lodge that welcomed pilgrims to the Three Mountains of Dewa. The multi-story building has a thatched hipped roof built to combat the deep snow that falls in the region.*



## 29 Niō Gate at Dainichibō Temple

(Prefecturally Designated Tangible Cultural Property)

*Dainichibō is the administrative temple of one of the Happō Nanakuchi entrances, the Ōami entrance, a training dōjō for visitors to Mt. Yudono, and the shrine of a mummified “Buddha of the flesh” (St. Shimmyokai). Statues of Fūjin, god of wind, and Raijin, god of thunder, can be found at the Niō Gate, as can the enshrined statues of Niō, the Deva kings.*



## 31 Chūrenji Temple’s Shimekake Cherry Tree

(Tsuruoka City Designated Natural Monument)

*The Chūrenji Shimekake Cherry Tree is a 200-year-old tree that blooms on the grounds of Chūrenji at the Shimekake entrance, one of the Happō Nanakuchi entrances. Kōbō Daishi (a.k.a. Monk Kūkai) is said to have practiced shugyō training under this tree. Legend has it that in the year of the ox, a lucky year for Mt. Yudono, the sacred rope around the tree ties itself.*



## 30 Ōdan-sugi at Dainichibō Temple

(Prefectural Designated Natural Monument)

*Dainichibō Ōdansugi is a giant cedar tree that towers over the grounds of the old Dainichibō lodge at the Ōamiguchi entrance to the mountains. The tree is an estimated 1800 years old, is 27m tall, with an 8m circumference at the roots, and a 6m wide trunk. This is a key location along the Rokujūrigoe Kaidō where pilgrims clasp their hands together to pray for successful completion of their Shugyō training.*

## The Fuyu-no-Mine Ritual and Shōreisai Festival

Text by Daisaburō Sakamoto



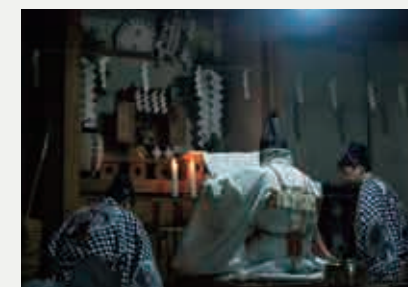
One of the Three Mountains of Dewa, Mt. Haguro, is known as home of the Yamabushi and the training rituals that they undertake in each of the four seasons—though only the Aki-no-Mine ritual and Fuyu-no-Mine ritual remain.

Due to anti-Buddhist sentiment in the Meiji era (1868-1912), Jakkōji temple at the top of Mt. Haguro was abandoned and became Dewa Sanzan Shrine, and the Aki-no-Mine ritual was moved to Kōtakuji Shōzen-in at the base of Mt. Haguro, with the newly-named Dewa Sanzan Shrine taking over the Fuyu-no-Mine ritual. The Fuyu-no-Mine ritual takes place in conjunction with the Shōreisai festival during New Year’s: after being temporarily cancelled following the anti-Buddhist movement, Shōreisai was moved to Shōzen-in Koganedō before returning back to Dewa Sanzan Shrine at the top of Mt. Haguro in the middle of the Meiji period.



On New Year’s Eve two Yamabushi, called “Matsuhijiri,” are chosen from the Tōge township at the base of Mt. Haguro to stay on the mountain for 100 days and train while praying for a good harvest of five staple grains (rice, barley, soy beans, azuki beans, and sesame seeds). This is known as the Fuyu-no-Mine ritual. During the festival the two Matsuhijiri compete by showing the results of their training in a ceremony called “Genkurabe.”

Exactly what sort of festival is the Shōreisai? 1,300 years ago, a demon named Soranki came to the area and sent down flames between a gap in the black clouds, creating a stench on the mountain top that drifted down and caused many people to get sick and die. The people started praying and were answered by the gods, who said, “Create the likeness of the demon and burn it to ash!” By following this command, the people were able to destroy Soranki, which is how the Shōreisai festival is said to have originated.



The festival is run following tradition: on New Year’s Eve at around 3pm there is the Amimaki ritual, in which an effigy of Soranki is woven out of straw and then sliced to death. However, the demon has a strong will to live, and once the sun goes down it is thought to come back to life. This is represented in a ritual called “Maruki-naoshi” in which the demon is remade as two pine straw torches about half the size of the original effigy.

At 11pm, the straw “demons” are pulled along by young people in the open area at the top of the mountain, before being burned in a rite that kills the demon, Ōtaimatsu-hiki, which coincides with Mt. Haguro bringing in the New Year.

Following this, a ritual called “Kuniwakeshinji” is performed by Yamabushi who were reborn in the New Year: Dewa Yamabushi from the 33 eastern provinces, Kumano Yamabushi from the 24 western provinces, and Mt. Yasuhiko Yamabushi from the 9 provinces in Kyushu.

The 33 provinces that make up the territory of the Haguro Yamabushi are thought to derive from the pre-Meiji (1868) belief that the Kanon enshrined on Mt. Haguro split into 33 separate vessels to save the people. 33 life-size Kanon statues are enshrined at Shōzen-in Koganedō at the base of the mountain, and on New Year’s Eve there is a big prayer session with a truly mesmerizing atmosphere.



Unfortunately, there are many aspects of the Shōreisai that I must leave out: I have only touched on the tip of its deep meaning, but the above is essentially what the Shōreisai festival means to me.

Remains from the Jōmon period (14,000-300BC) are visible at the bottom of the mountain, which means it is easy to see that New Year’s celebrations have been held there for a very long time. This festival has seen changes and has been held by many people over the course of time. If you get the chance to experience the festival, you will be able to feel the sheer power of this history rock you to your core.