

East Tokushima Tourism Authority
イーストとくしま観光推進機構



Shikoku Trails
HIKE!
TOKUSHIMA



Huge whirlpools roaring in the deep blue indigo-dyed sea.

One million people visit the city for four days in summer, when the city is filled with dancing and the rhythm of their voices echo off Mt. Bizan.

In the spring and fall, pilgrims in their white robes, sedge hats, and carrying walking sticks make their way from the first temple to the twentieth temple here.

Everyone stares at the indigo sea of East Tokushima and the ancient temple of the pilgrimage, but...

If you extend your gaze just a little further, you will find...

A mountain with a primeval beech forest and a moss maze.

A mountain with countless waterfalls and blue rock canyons.

A mountain with an ancient temple that stands deep in a forest of mist and mysterious trees.

The mountain trails of East Tokushima are just around the corner, waiting for you!

To the undiscovered mountains beyond the indigo sea, to the beautiful nature...

Put on your hiking shoes, let's go hike!

Shikoku Trails

HIKE!

TOKUSHIMA

Undiscovered Mountains Beyond The Indigo Sea



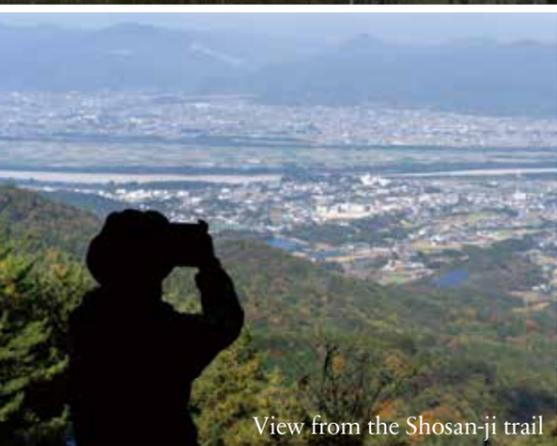
Shosan-ji pilgrimage trails & Amagoi-no-taki falls



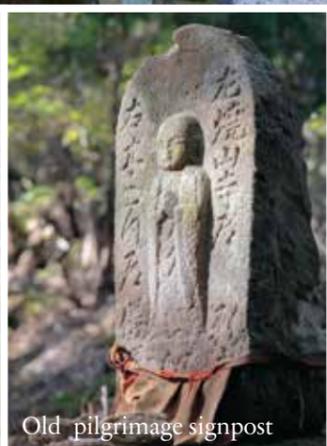
Ancient cedar tree at Joren-an



Shosan-ji pilgrimage trail



View from the Shosan-ji trail



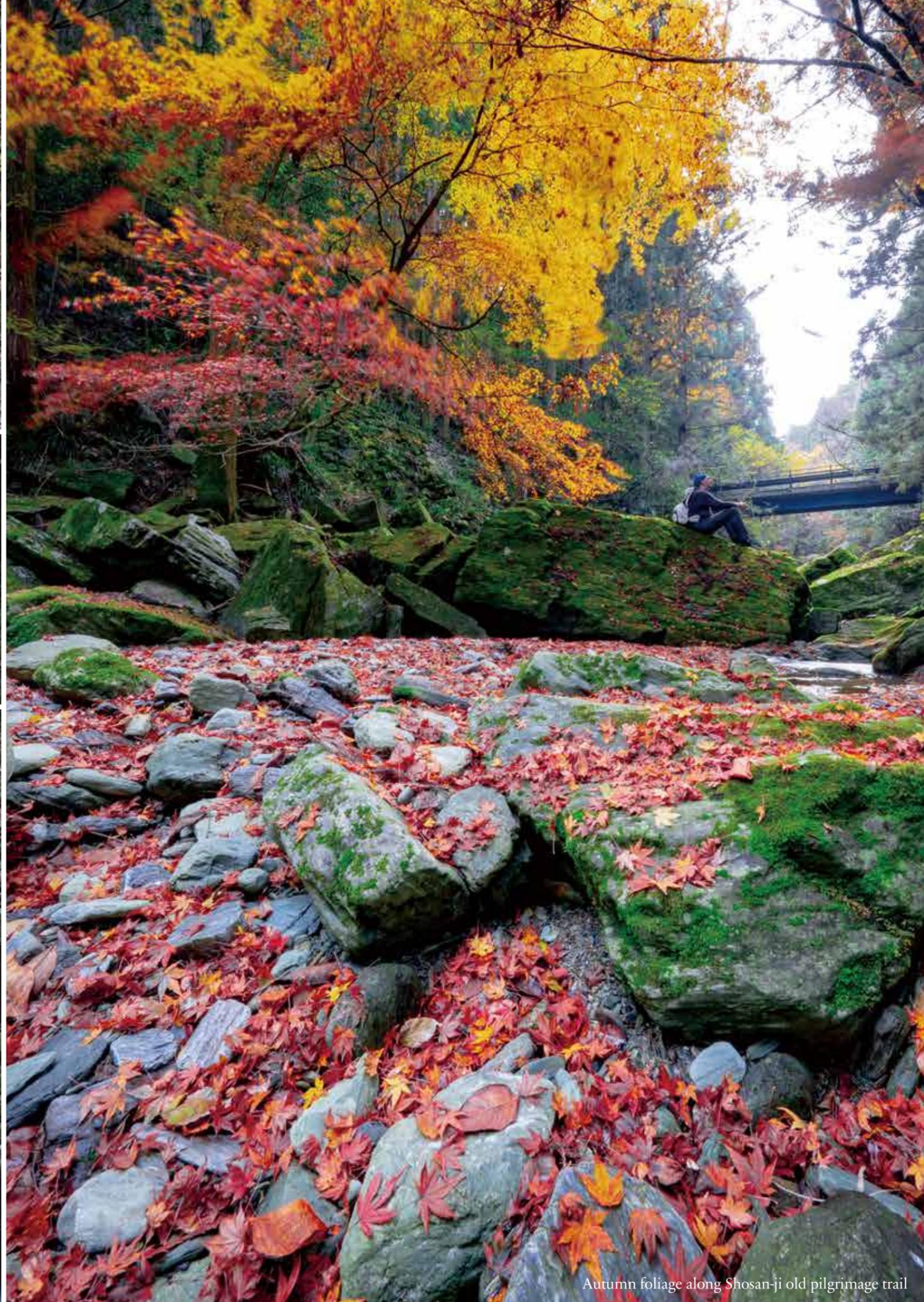
Old pilgrimage signpost



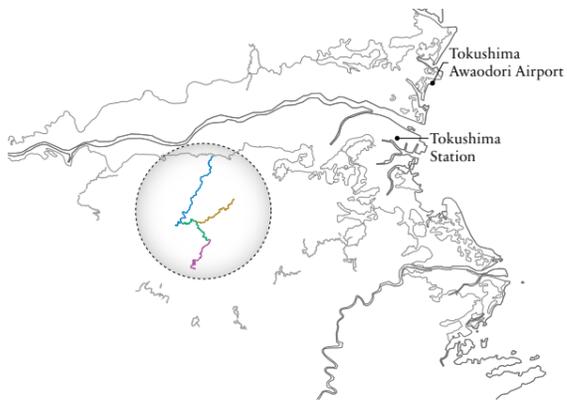
The trail to Higan-ji



In the gorge to Amagoi-no-taki falls



Autumn foliage along Shosan-ji old pilgrimage trail



Shosan-ji

Regarded as the hardest-to-reach of all the Shikoku 88 pilgrimage temples, the trail to Shosan-ji temple is 13km long with several steep ups and downs. This trail is absolutely stunning, yet definitely a challenge for even seasoned hikers to complete. The following day, you may wish to take the trail to reach the Amagoi-no-taki waterfalls. This trail is blessed with views of multiple smaller waterfalls along the way.



Route ①
Shosan-ji pilgrimage trails
14.2km



Route ① Shosan-ji pilgrimage trails

Distance : 14.2km Elevation Change : 902m
Elevation Gain/Loss : 1375m / 472m

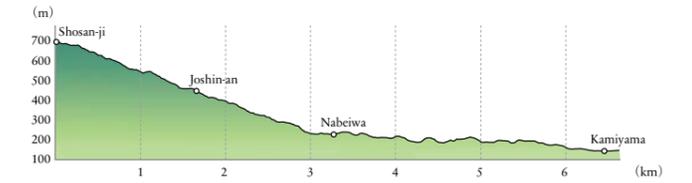
This 14km long stretch of ancient trails feature a number of stunning viewpoints. The scenery and varieties of trees change continuously as you stride along. Almost the entire network of trails is unpaved and off road. Frequent steep ups and downs require a high level of stamina and good leg muscles. While the distance of this trail is challenging, it can be divided into shorter sections which are accessible by road.



Route ② Shosan-ji~Kamiyama

Distance : 6.6km Elevation Change : 557m
Elevation Gain/Loss : 0m / 552m

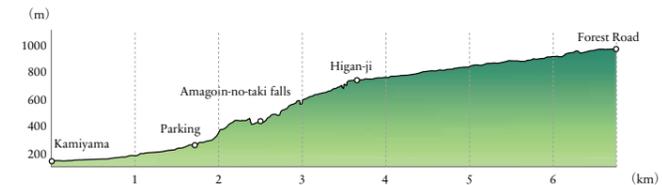
Walk in the steps of pilgrims' past on the green moss-covered stones that pave this old trail. The latter half of the route is a narrow pathway beside a crystal-clear river. Walk under the long lines of cherry blossom trees and pass by sleepy mountain villages. From Shosan-ji to Kamiyama the trail is all downhill.



Route ③ Amagoi-no-taki falls trail

Distance : 6.8km Elevation Change : 829m
Elevation Gain/Loss : 875m / 47m

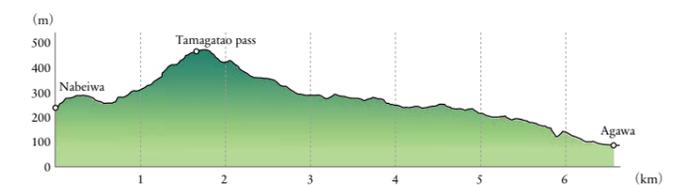
Hike 2km through a breathtakingly beautiful gorge filled with waterfalls to reach Amagoi-no-taki falls, then along moss-covered rocks within the hushed silence of a Japanese cedar forest to Higan-ji. Take a moment at each small waterfall to soak your legs in the clear blue water. Hidden at the far end of the gorge surrounded by sheer rock walls, the two big waterfalls of Amagoi-no-taki come down from opposite sides, their roar and splash are a sight to behold.



Route ④ Nabeiwa~Agawa

Distance : 6.6km Elevation Change : 386m
Elevation Gain/Loss : 237m / 386m

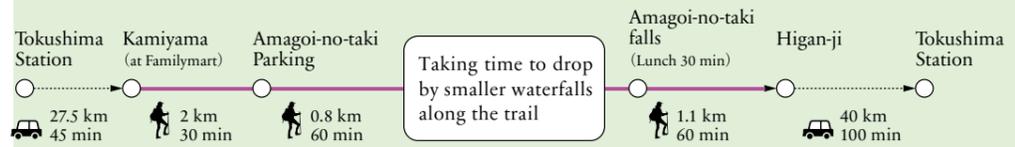
Heading from Nabeiwa, this pilgrim trail leads to the next temple by way of a short yet steep mountain trail. Beyond the Tamagatao pass, it is easy-going downhill while taking in amazing views of mikan orchards and houses scattered on steep mountain slopes. When you arrive at the riverside village of Agawa, you will be welcomed by several human-sized scarecrows who are imitating various scenes of mountain village life.



1Day Hike Tour Ex.1 Shosan-ji pilgrimage trails (Total time for the tour : 11h)



1Day Hike Tour Ex.2 Amagoi-no-taki falls & Higan-ji hike (Total time for the tour : 5h 30 min)



tour options

A 1km-long mountain trail leading to the Okunoin (inner sanctuary) of Shosan-ji located at the peak. From there, great views of Mt. Tsurugi and the surrounding mountains can be seen to the west. The trail is serene and the sacred area of the mountain has mysterious sites such as hill-sized rocks where, in ancient times, an evil snake was trapped. Ryuokutsu is a small cave that looks like it was gouged out of the sheer rock face, situated on a forested mountain slope 1km south from Shosan-ji.

Okunoin of Shosan-ji and Ryuokutsu





Mt. Kotsu



Around Kotsu-ji parking area



The approach to Kotsu-ji



Boroboro-taki falls



Old tree near Kotsu-ji



A curious Japanese serow



Huge natural colonies of 300-year-old azalea on Mt. Kotsu



View of Yoshinogawa river plains from Kotsu-ji



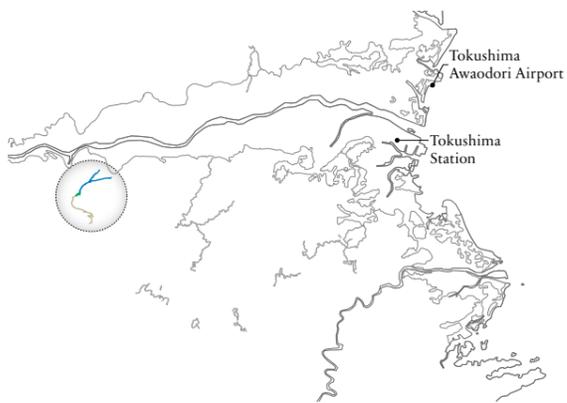
Tengu statue at Kotsu-ji



Kotsu-ji main hall



The new trail to Kotsu-ji

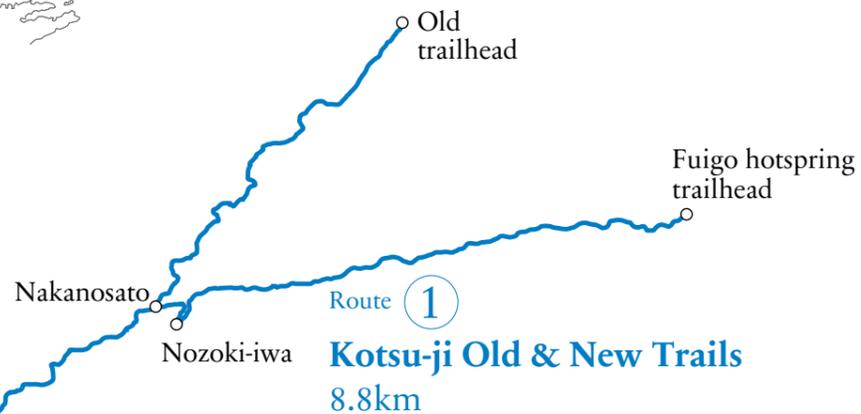


Mt. Kotsu

This 1133m high mountain features a trail with an elevation difference of over 1000m to reach its peak. From the peak, you are treated to stunning and beautiful views over the surrounding area. As you make your way to the top of the mountain, curious Japanese serow, an animal designated as a Special Natural Treasure of Japan, may show up to guide you along the path.



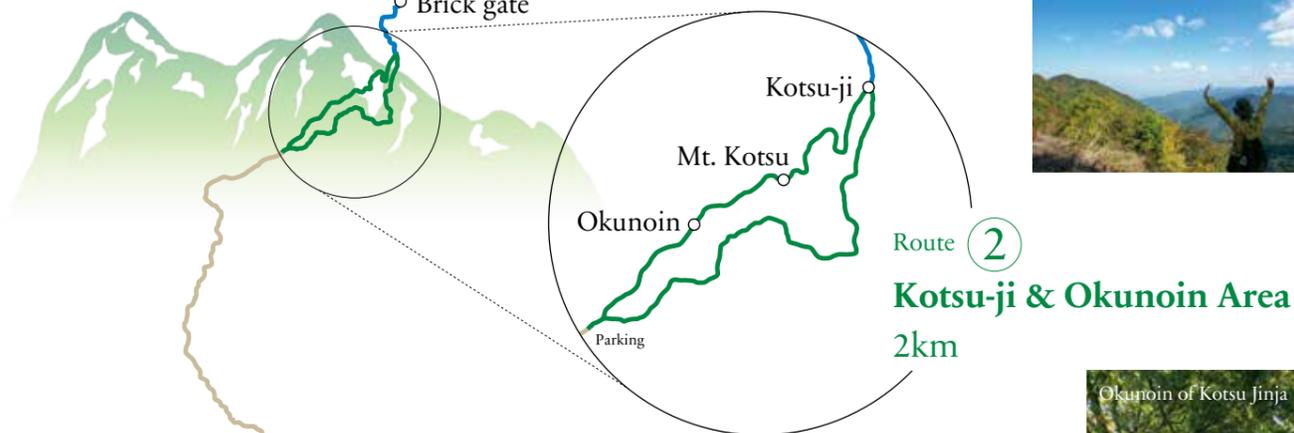
Cedar trees along the approach to Kotsu-ji



Route ①
Kotsu-ji Old & New Trails
8.8km



Great view from Mt. Kotsu



Route ②
Kotsu-ji & Okunoin Area
2km



Boroboro-taki falls



Stone stairs to Kotsu-ji's main gate



Okunoin of Kotsu Jinja



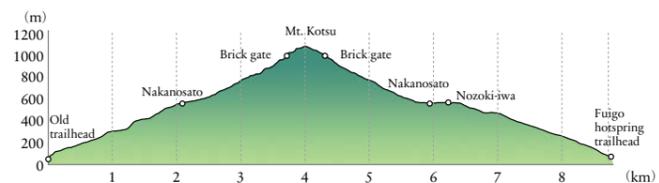
On the trail from the Okunoin of Kotsu Jinja

Route ① Kotsu-ji Old and New Trails

Distance : 8.8km Elevation Change : 1003m

Elevation Gain/Loss : 997m / 990m

A tough hike for strong legs which rises 1000m straight up with little respite. This old trail has been used as an approach to Kotsu-ji on the top of Mt. Kotsu for hundreds of years. A newer trail converted from transmission tower maintenance paths, has been added in recent times. Halfway up the mountain, the two well-maintained trails converge and head to the temple gate. Except for one small open space at the midpoint, both trails lead through the forest where the shadow of the trees protect you from the sun.

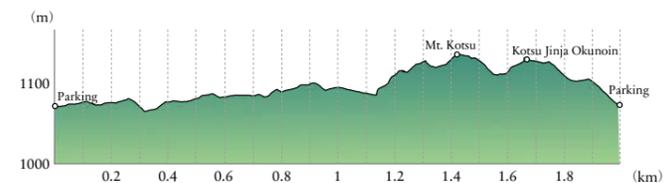


Route ② Kotsu-ji and Okunoin Area

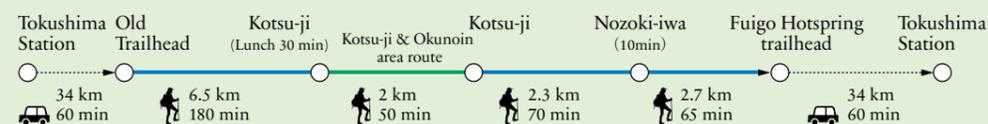
Distance : 2km Elevation Change : 72.4m

Elevation Gain/Loss : 66m / 64m

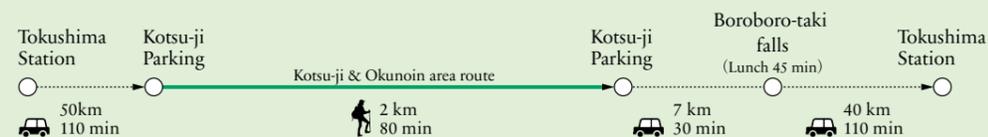
Mt. Kotsu, a place for mountain ascetic practice, provides hikers views of stone Buddhas and traces of the old training sites scattered along the trail. This trail is a short loop that starts from the temple parking area and leads to the peak, via the temple and Kotsu shrine, where a large Kobo-daishi statue stands. A narrow ridgeline trail connects the peak where you find the Okunoin (inner sanctuary) of the shrine and the parking area. With spectacular viewpoints and sacred sites, this short route is perfect for hikers of all levels to enjoy.



1Day Hike Tour Ex.1 Mt. Kotsu all around (Total time for the tour : 7h)



1Day Hike Tour Ex.2 The mountain top loop and Boroboro-taki falls (Total time for the tour : 6h 15 min)



Ancient trees around Kotsu Jinja



Kotsu-ji temple gate near the parking



Okunoin of Kotsu Jinja

tour options — Boroboro-taki falls



Boroboro-taki falls

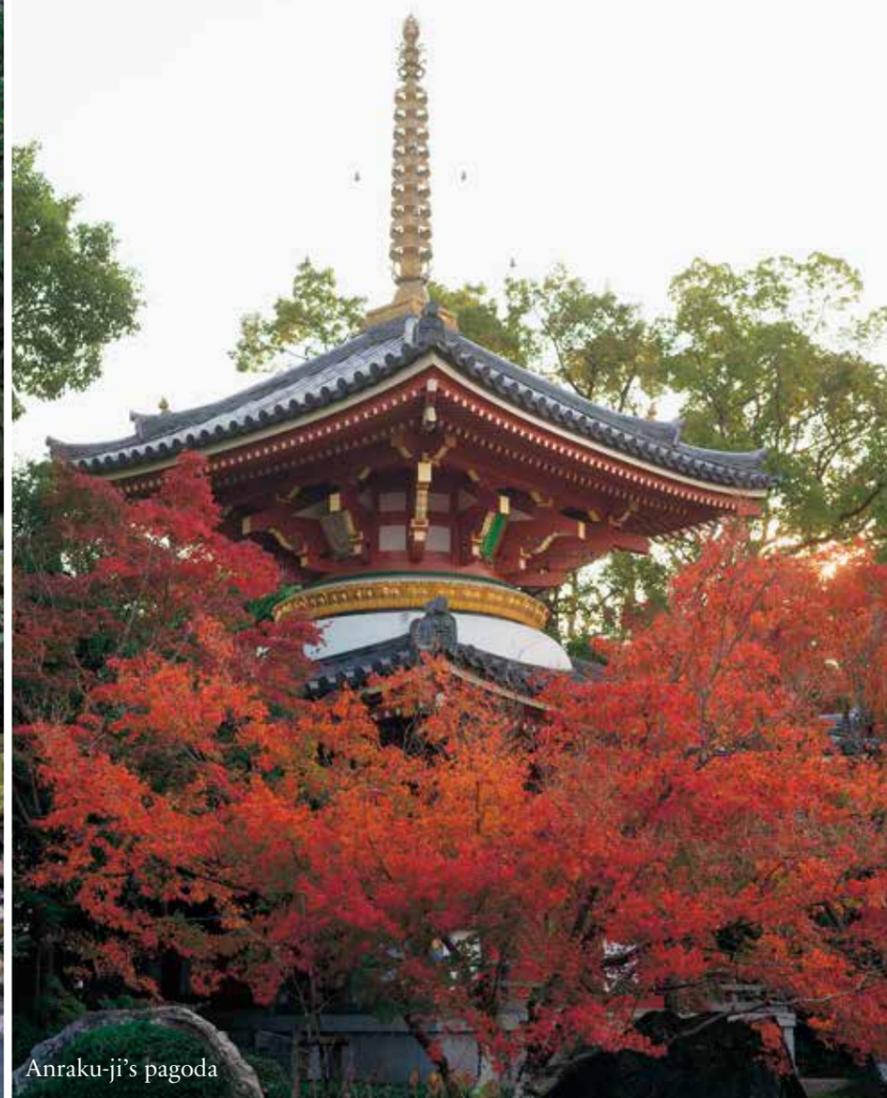
Deep in the mountains, hard to reach even by car, Boroboro-taki falls is a true hidden gem. The 30m-high waterfall is tucked into a narrow ravine shielded by the fort-like sheer cliffs. The wide waterfall creates a delicate curtain of droplets, and the splashing water fills the ravine with a soothing mist. The falls' strange name (boroboro means "tattered") comes from a legend about a monk who was practicing by the falls so hard all day and night that his clothes ended up tattered. No people live around the waterfall area anymore, but if you are lucky, a friendly Japanese serow may jump out from the woods to greet you.



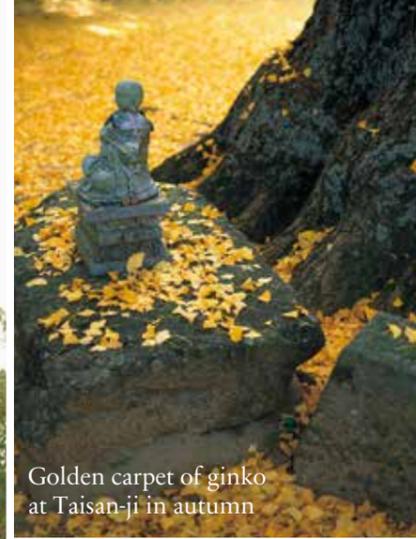
Taisan-ji old trails



Crossing a wooden bridge on the Kannon-michi trail



Anraku-ji's pagoda



Golden carpet of ginkgo at Taisan-ji in autumn



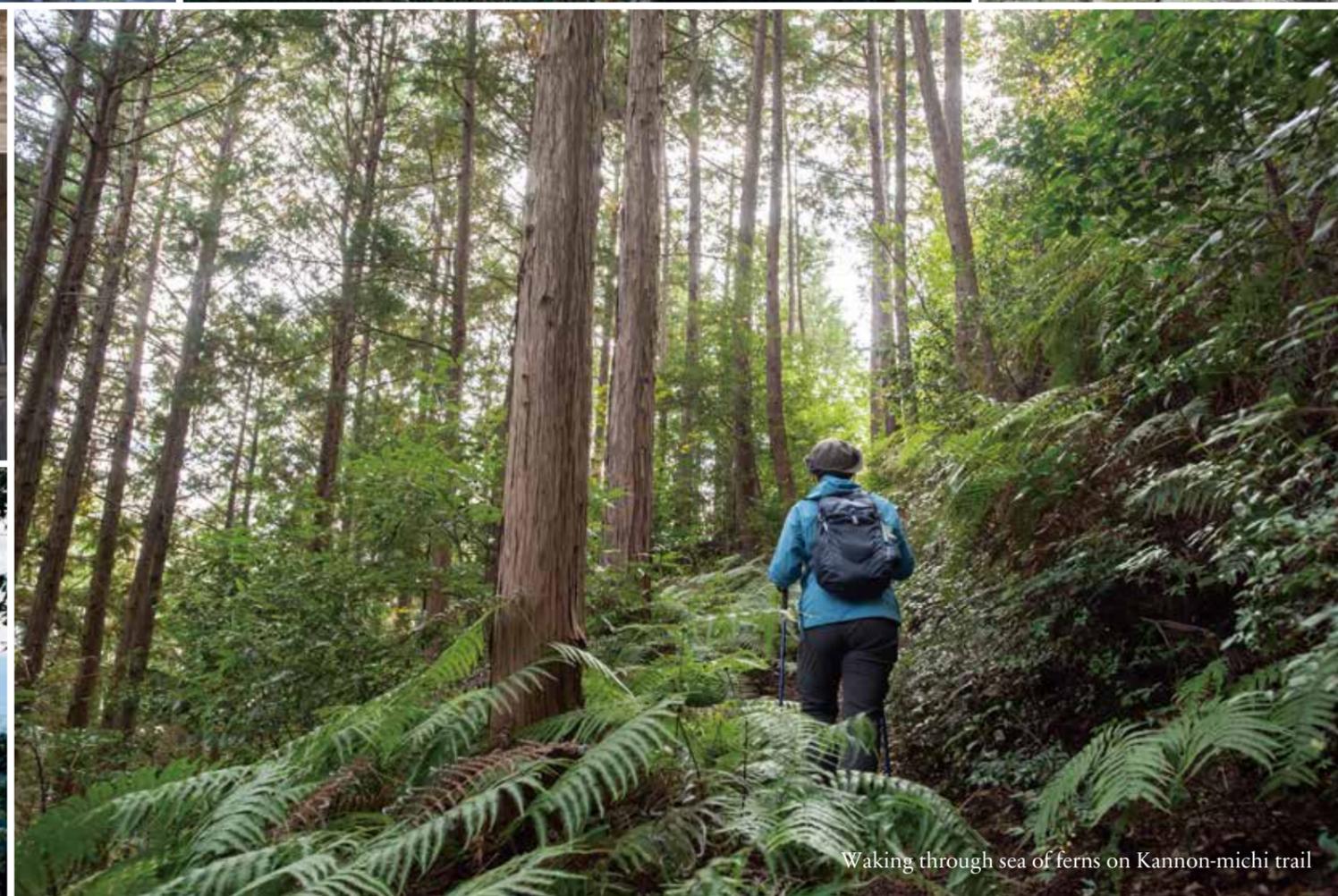
Old stone buddhas along Kannon-michi trail



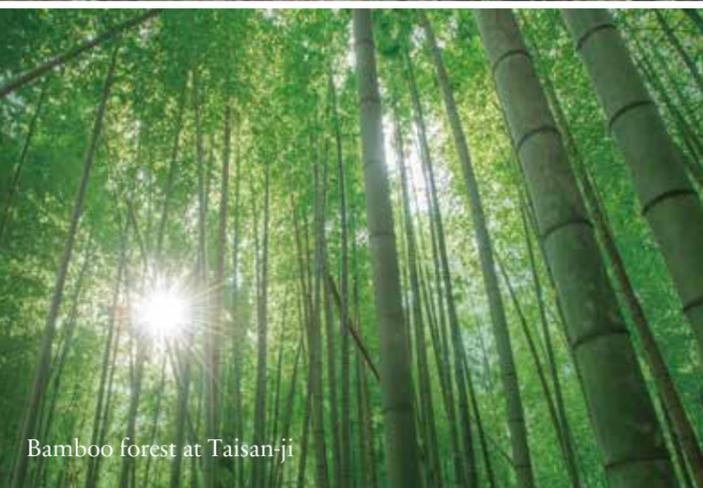
Kannon-michi trail



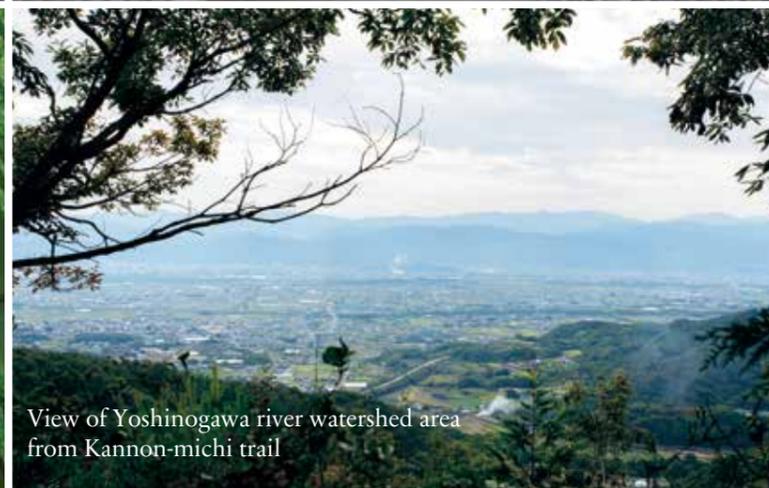
Niōmon (Niō gate) of Taisan-ji



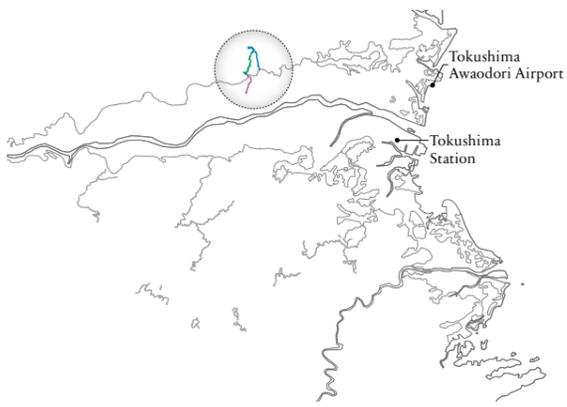
Walking through sea of ferns on Kannon-michi trail



Bamboo forest at Taisan-ji



View of Yoshinogawa river watershed area from Kannon-michi trail



Mt. Oyama

The historical trails that run over Mt. Oyama connect three temples, including Taisan-ji temple that is located near the peak of the mountain. Along the quiet old trail, small stone images of Kannon dating to Japan's Edo period still stand to guide hikers. Several viewpoints offer panoramas over the Yoshino-gawa river basin.



Okunoin of Taisan-ji



At the trailhead of Kannon-michi trail



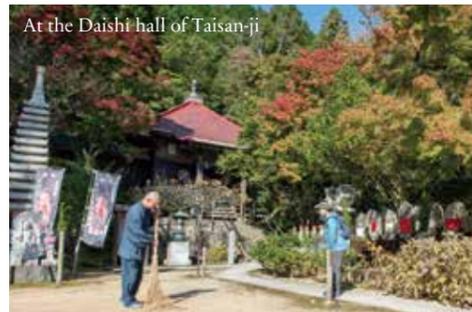
Old street to Anraku-ji



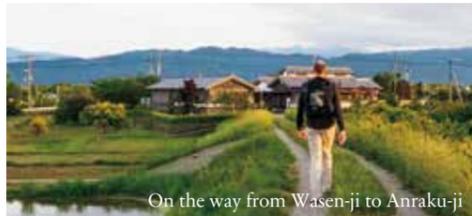
Anraku-ji



Yamabushi of Taisan-ji



At the Daishi hall of Taisan-ji



On the way from Wasen-ji to Anraku-ji



Night prayer service at Taisan-ji

Route ① Taisan-ji pilgrimage trail

Distance : 4.2km Elevation Change : 614m

Elevation Gain/Loss : 614m / 0m

This was historically the most commonly-used trail to Taisan-ji and is a steep climb from Ebisu Jinja to the temple located 450m high. Thick undergrowth lined by tall ferns along both sides of the trail form a green tunnel. After walking up the old stone stairways leading through a bamboo forest to the temple bell-gate, an ancient ginkgo tree stands tall in front of Taisan-ji main hall. In autumn this turns the grounds into a beautiful golden carpet. 1km further up from the temple is its Okunoin (inner sanctuary), and from there it is a short walk to the mountain peak. As this route sometimes crosses the winding driveway that leads to the temple, it is easy to set pickup points.

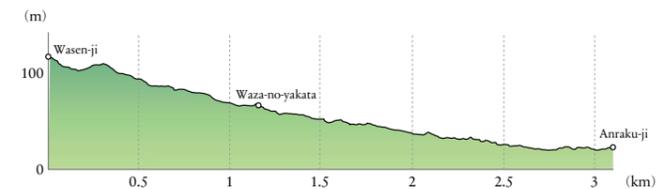


Route ③ Awa sugar trail

Distance : 3.1km Elevation Change : 101m

Elevation Gain/Loss : 0m / 100m

The area between Wasen-ji and Anraku-ji historically produces Wasanbon, a traditionally made Japanese fine-grained sugar, which is only made in Tokushima and Kagawa. Walking down the paved country roads through sugarcane fields, hikers can find some old buildings that used to be sugar factories. Waza-no-yakata, a traditional handcraft museum, offers visitors displays of the traditional sugar making process and the chance to try indigo-dyeing. The entire route is downhill, allowing hikers to cool down their tired legs after hiking up and down the mountain of Taisan-ji.

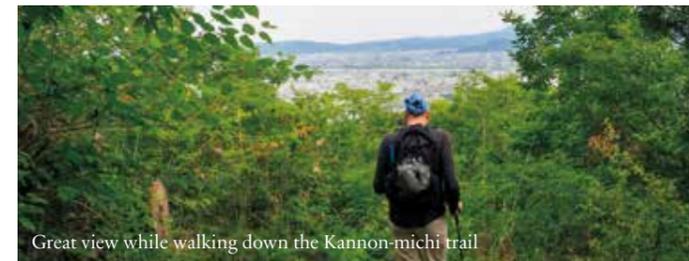
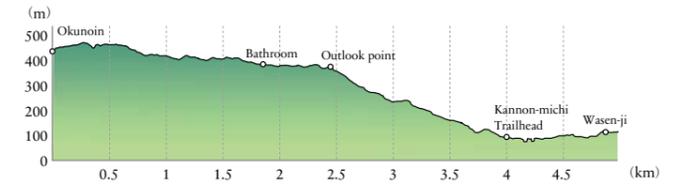


Route ② Kannon-michi

Distance : 5km Elevation Change : 400m

Elevation Gain/Loss : 98m / 423m

This mountain trail has been used for visiting Taisan-ji from the Wasen-ji side of the mountain since the Edo-era (over 200 years ago). Once forgotten by time, a local volunteer group uncovered the trail that the forest that had reclaimed and re-invigorated it. A mini-Saikoku 33 pilgrimage was set along the trail in the old days and most of the 33 stone Kannon-bosatsu still remain standing along the path. The natural appearance of this trail contributes to the feeling of exploring an untouched forest. Half way up provides great views of the Yoshino-gawa river plains. Around the mountain edge, the trail is a little more adventurous as it becomes a bit rougher. Depending on the weather, some stream crossing might be required.

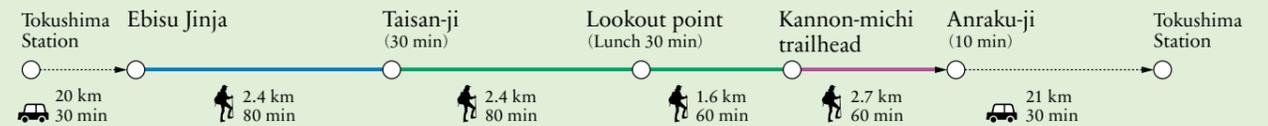


Great view while walking down the Kannon-michi trail

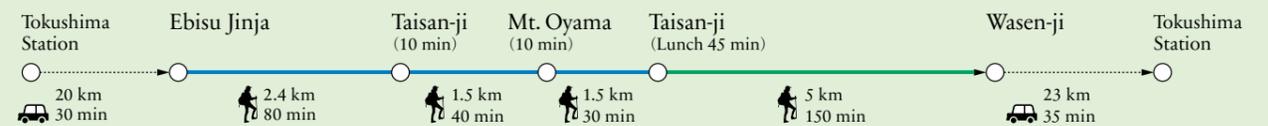


Giant ginkgo tree in front of the main hall of Taisan-ji

1Day Hike Tour Ex.1 All three routes hike (Total time for the tour : 7 h)



1Day Hike Tour Ex.2 All about Mt. Oyama hike (Total time for the tour : 7 h 30 min)





Burning flames of the Saito Goma fire ritual of Shugendo, mountain ascetic training



Monks continue chanting, regardless of the intense heat and smoke



A monk crossing the burning fire on his bare feet



140kg+ of mochi for men to carry at Chikara-mochi



The Saito Goma and Chikara-mochi at Taisan-ji

Taisan-ji is located at an altitude of 450m on Mt. Oyama.

Founded over 1450 years ago, the temple is recognized as the first Buddhist temple in Tokushima. It is the first temple of two pilgrimages in Shikoku. Furthermore, it is also one of the best autumn foliage sites in Tokushima. While all these delights draw visitors year-round, the first ceremony for the main deity of the year, always held on the third Sunday of January, gets the biggest crowds.

Taisan-ji has a strong tie to Shugendo, mountain ascetic training, so the main part of the ceremony is a Saito Goma fire ritual to pray for good luck and to ward off bad luck for the year, performed by monks in Shugendo practitioner attire. Before the ceremony, a big pile of evergreen tree branches and leaves cover a stack of logs built up like a big campfire. Before lighting the large green altar on fire, the monks conduct religious routines with a sword and other old-fashioned arms to purify the area.

Once the fire is lit, smoke immediately starts billowing out from the green altar. Before long, a small blaze will ignite from within the altar and quickly begin to engulf the logs while flames rise high into the air.

After the altar is burnt down, the monks quickly make a bed of burning coals and walk over them on their bare feet. The ritual, called Hiwatari, which literally means “crossing fire,” is meant to drive out disasters with cleansing fire. By the time the monks have finished, the coals have become cool enough for other people to walk on, so anyone who wants to pray for good health in the coming year can cross the warm coals on their bare feet.

There is another popular event only at Taisan-ji after the Saito Goma. The event, called the Chikara-mochi competition, attracts many families with small children to take part. The origin of the competition dates back over 400 years ago. A samurai commander prayed at Taisan-ji wishing to gain enormous strength, and when his wish came true he became a legendary warrior. To show his gratitude to the temple’s deities, he carried heavy stone towers and mochi (rice cakes) from the bottom of the mountain all the way up to the temple. To honor his tale, during Chikara-mochi, adult men and women compete by how far they can walk while carrying the mochi without dropping it. The men are required to carry a 140kg+ huge mochi and a 70kg one for adult women. While the heavy weight is used in the adult division, the majority of participants in Chikara-mochi are toddlers and kids, who of course carry smaller mochi. So many join that their competition often takes hours!

The Saito Goma fire ritual and Chikara-mochi at Taisan-ji

HP : <https://taisANJI.jp/>
 Address : 14-2, Oyama, Kanyake, Kamiita-cho, Itano-gun, Tokushima
 Date : The 3rd Sunday of January
 Parking : Free
 Contacts : 088-694-5525

Shukubo (Temple Stay) at Anraku-ji

Anraku-ji is the 6th temple of the Shikoku 88 temple pilgrimage. This temple has the first Shukubo (temple stay) of the pilgrimage, if visiting the 88 temples in numerical order.

The history of the Shukubo can be traced back to the later 16th century, when the lord domain of Tokushima designated Anraku-ji as one of eight temples to provide food and shelter to pilgrims and travelers. Since then, Anraku-ji has supported the pilgrims of Shikoku for over 400 years.

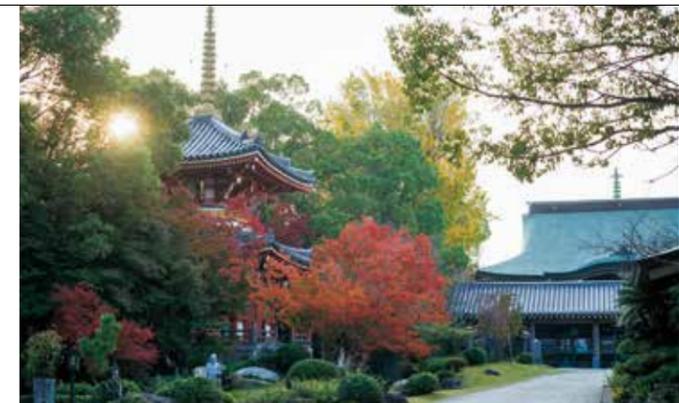
At the Shukubo, today’s guests can unwind and relax in the hot springs that are said to have been discovered by Kobo-daishi himself. The dinner at the Shukubo offers meat and fish in order to give pilgrims sufficient energy to walk all day long. It also features a traditional local dish, “Sobagomejiru,” which is a buckwheat berry soup.

Anraku-ji’s prayer service is held after dinner, unlike the majority of other Shukubos which hold their services in the early morning. Guests are called to the main hall, chant the heart sutra with the temple monks, and listen to the priest’s sermon. Then, the truly special part of the service that guests can join only at Anraku-ji begins. Guests are invited into the dark backroom of the main hall, where only the candles and flames from the Goma fire ritual dimly light the thirteen sculpted buddha images on the walls. Guests will then float a tiny candle in a cup down a blue-lit stream by the wall. Looking at the flickering candles floating away mesmerizes the senses and calms the mind, as only the monks’ chanting echoes in the quiet space.

Anraku-ji has 60 buddha sculptures created by Myokei Matsumoto, one of the greatest of all modern sculptors of Buddhist statues, as well as many other valuable Buddhist arts. A 3m-tall standing Amida-nyorai statue is one of them. Only guests staying at Anraku-ji’s Shukubo can enjoy the privilege of being able to take a long time to appreciate the art while chatting with the temple monks.

Shukubo (Temple Stay) at Anraku-ji

HP : <https://shikoku6.or.jp/>
 Address : 8 Teranonishikita, Hikino, Kamiita-cho, Itano-gun, Tokushima
 Check in/out : 13:00~20:00 / 9:30
 Night prayer service : 19:00~
 Fee : 6950 yen ~ w/t 2 meal, 3850 yen~ w/o meals (incl. tax)
 Number of rooms : 57
 Parking : free (50 cars)
 Contact : 088-694-2046



A temple monk greeting you on your arrival



Enjoy souvenir hunting at the temple shop



After dinner, preparation for joining the prayer service



Night prayer service at the main hall conducted by temple monks



Floating a candle on the water, thinking of departed loved ones and ancestors



Praying to the Goma fire for your wish to come true



The quiet time for admiring the Buddhist arts inside the temple buildings



The pagoda at night



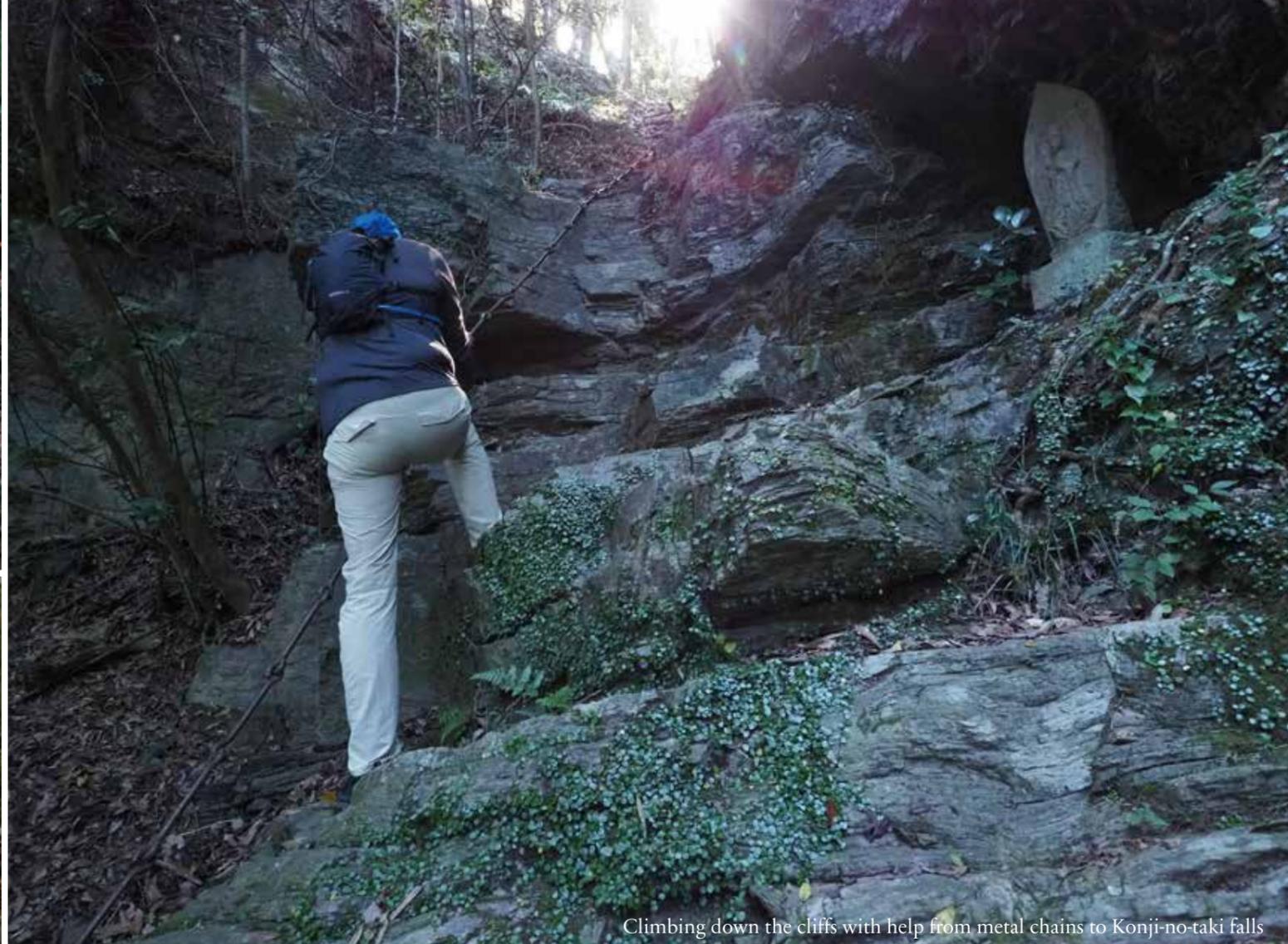
Mt. Bizan & Konji-ji



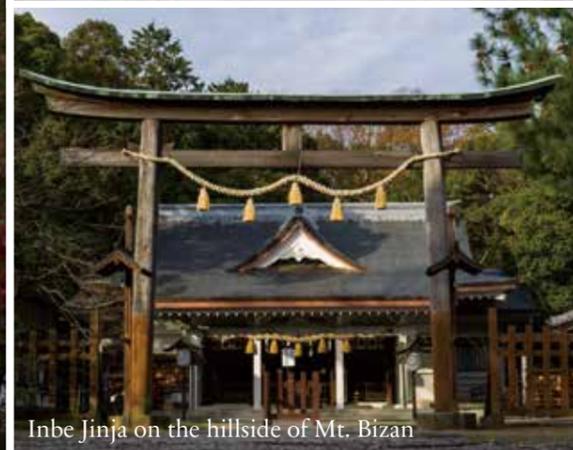
Konji-ji in the fog



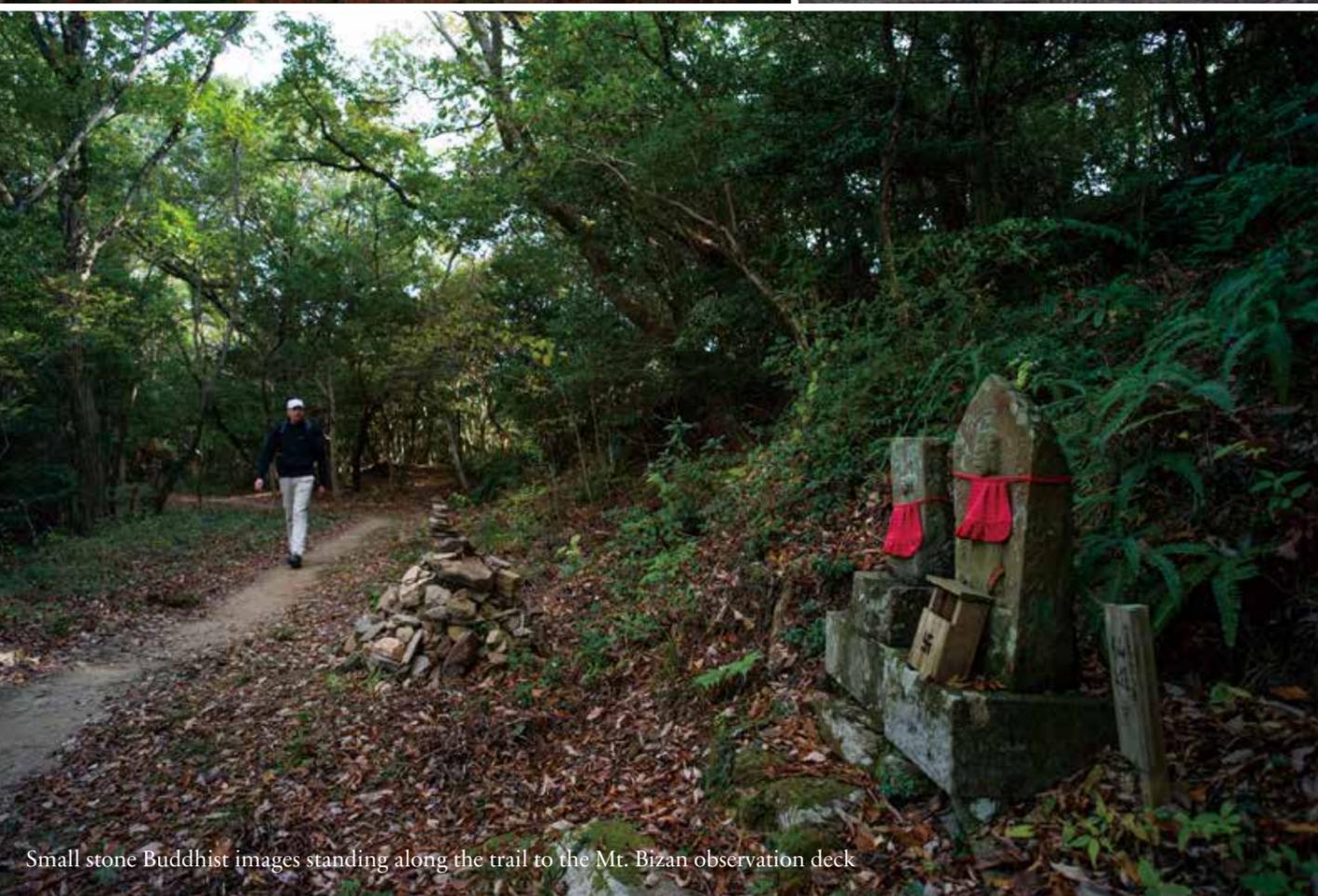
Azuri-goe trail



Climbing down the cliffs with help from metal chains to Konji-no-taki falls



Inbe Jinja on the hillside of Mt. Bizan



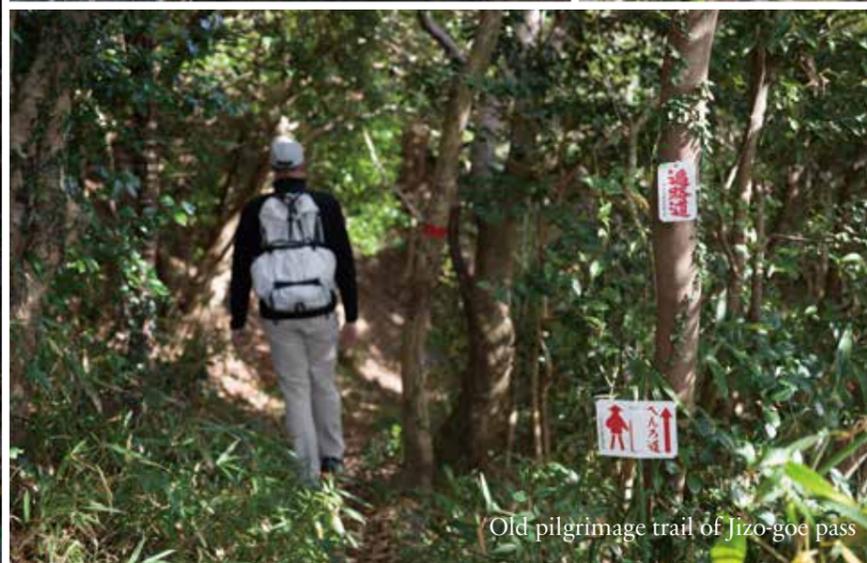
Small stone Buddhist images standing along the trail to the Mt. Bizan observation deck



Views from Mt. Bizan observation deck



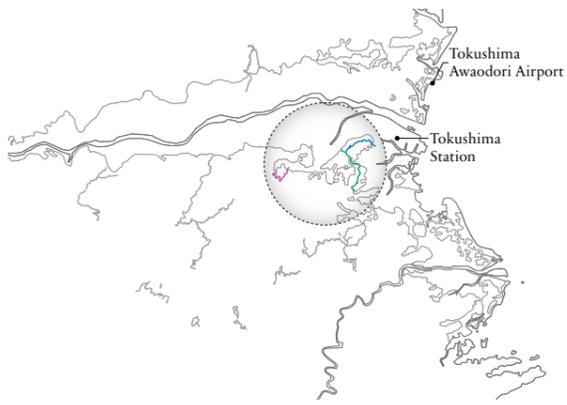
The stone Jizo image on Jizo-goe pass



Old pilgrimage trail of Jizo-goe pass



Jizoin temple



Mt. Bizan

Mt. Bizan is Tokushima city's own backyard mountain. Go past the popular observation deck and step into the mountain beyond, where several challenging hikes and rock cliffs with chains will await you. Although Mt. Bizan is one of the lower mountains in the area, what this mountain can offer should not be underestimated. Hike it and find out for yourself!



Konji-ji pilgrimage trail

Route ① Mt. Bizan trail 6.4km



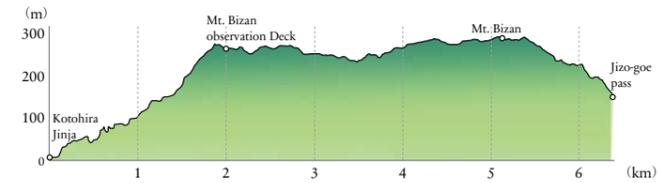
Mt. Bizan trail

Route ① Mt. Bizan trail

Distance : 6.4km Elevation Change : 287m

Elevation Gain/Loss : 327m / 188m

Sitting in the middle of Tokushima city, Mt. Bizan is a symbol of the city. The trail crosses the summit from west to east following the ridgeline. Though it's only 290m high, the climb to the observation deck next to the ropeway station on the top still challenges hikers with some steep rocky parts. Along the thru-hike trail you will encounter occasional up and down inclines, old stone buddhas standing along the trail, and good viewpoints in all directions. It is easy to forget that the mountain trail is reachable by a short walk from the city center, while striding through the quiet green tunnel with soft leaves underfoot and the sound of birds singing.

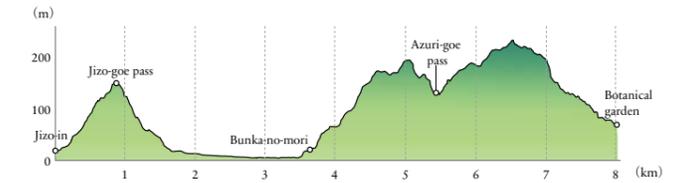


Route ② Jizo-goe and Azuri-goe

Distance : 8.1km Elevation Change : 227m

Elevation Gain/Loss : 422m / 375m

This old beautiful pilgrim trail called the Jizo-goe pass gives hikers a shortcut through the western edge of Mt. Bizan to get to Oji Jinja, also known as the cat shrine, where another thru-hike trail starts. At one end of the trail is a large park with several museums and a library, while at the other end is a botanical garden and zoo. Both ends are quickly accessible from Tokushima station, making them easy to reach for busy tourists, especially suitable for those with little kids, who want to have a quick fun hike. These well-maintained trails consist of occasional mild climbs and descents through forests, which provide carpets of acorns below the happy little hikers' feet. Around the midpoint of the trail, do not miss the officially-designated lowest mountain of Japan, Mt. Bentenyama (6m), poking out from rice fields far away.

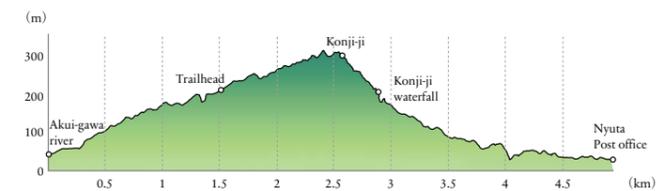


Route ③ Konji-ji pilgrimage trail

Distance : 5km Elevation Change : 296m

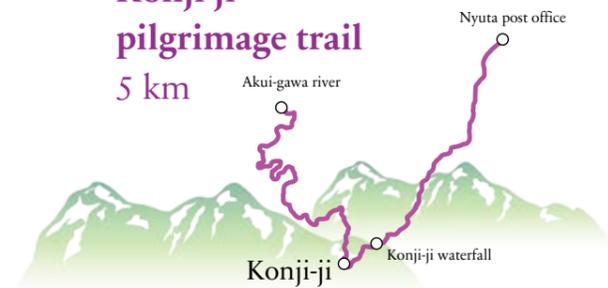
Elevation Gain/Loss : 361m / 376m

This pilgrim trail has served as the approach to the mountain temple, Konji-ji, since ancient times. With the temple as the midpoint, one side of the trail is a mix of unpaved paths and paved roads passing through idyllic villages and orchards on the edge of the mountain. The other side is a wilder and much more adventurous trail that eventually reaches waterfalls falling from lofty cliffs. The waterfall is elegant and delicate, instead of thundering and brash. A mystical atmosphere permeates the entire area. Here, monks and the devout practice waterfall meditation, one of the best-known forms of ascetic training. Along the mountain path to the sacred site, more challenges await you. High rock walls to be scaled with the aid of thick metal chains and a metal ladder leaning against the cliffs. Safer detours are available for those with a fear of heights.



Konji-ji waterfall meditation site

Route ③ Konji-ji pilgrimage trail 5 km



Route ② Jizo-goe & Azuri-goe 8.1km

Botanical garden



Konji-ji pilgrimage trail



Acorns on Azuri-goe trail

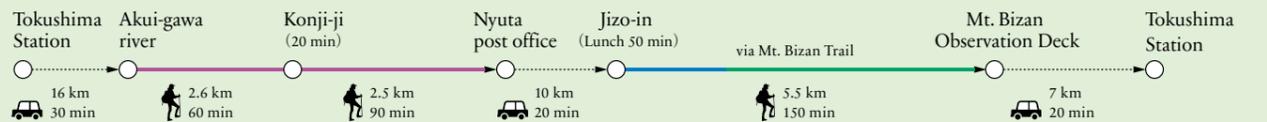


Oji jinja (the cat shrine)

1Day Hike Tour Ex.1 Family-friendly Tokushima city sightseeing hike (Total time for the tour : 7 h 30 min)



1Day Hike Tour Ex.2 Tokushima city's own pilgrimage trails (Total time for the tour : 7 h 30 min)





Waterfall meditation under the Konji-no-taki falls



Standing still in the falls, clearing the mind



Goma fire ritual in the main hall of Konji-ji

Waterfall Meditation and Goma Fire Ritual at Konji-ji

Konji-ji offers an opportunity to experience takigyō, waterfall meditation.

Konji-ji is located close to the peak of a 495m tall mountain, where the practice site is located deep in a forest downhill from the temple. The waterfall, called Konji-no-taki, is 40m+ high and slides down the sheer rock face covered with small trees and grasses. The water flows from a modest stream which originates at the temple. The water gently flows down the rock wall and hits the rocky ground. A tranquil and mystic atmosphere surrounds the space.

Prior experience or knowledge of takigyō is not required. From arriving at the temple and throughout the practice, the temple monk will give you one-on-one instructions on what to do, so there is no need to worry or feel nervous.

First, you are given instructions about the entire process, including the symbolic finger gestures, inside of the temple. Then, move into the main hall to chant sutras with the monk in front of the temple's main deity. If you do not have enough confidence to follow, just listening to the chanting is fine.

To get to the waterfall, you will walk down an approximately 500m long trail. The trail itself is a part of the training, with some challenges along the way such as climbing down giant rocks aided by metal chains. At the site, you will change into white kimono-like practice robes, then you will be guided in prayer in front of a small temple. Finally, facing the waterfall, you will execute the traditional hand gestures by imitating the monk who is by your side. The monk will stand under the waterfall with the guests while he chants the heart sutra with his resonant voice. Even being under the water while chanting the heart sutra twice, many participants noted that they do not feel particularly cold even in winter. A participant once commented that many disorganized thoughts popped up in his mind at the beginning, but through the ritual, his mind started clearing up, and finally, fell into the perfect focus and silence.

The temple monk is flexible about the waterfall meditation timing and would accommodate the guests' request.

Konji-ji also holds a monthly Goma fire ritual on the 10th and 11th of each month. It is free to drop in and join the prayers while the monk performs the consecrating fire, which is unique to Esoteric Buddhism. Privately holding the Goma for you or submitting your wishes to the regular Goma is available for those who seek for some advice to overcome their life challenges or just want to pray.

Konji-ji

HP : <http://www7b.biglobe.ne.jp/~konjiji/index.html>
 Address : 230 Konji, Nyutacho, Tokushima city, Tokushima
 Parking : free
 Waterfall meditation : All year round. Advance booking required. 5000 yen per person
 Goma fire ritual : Monthly Goma is held on the 10th (from 8 pm) and 11th(from 11am) of the month. Free to join.
 For inquiry on details of holding private Goma or submitting your wishes to regularly held Goma, contact Jigen-ji, 088-644-1232 or konjiji@kxa.biglobe.ne.jp

Fall Festival Season in East Tokushima

Visitors to Tokushima will find many shrines of various sizes all around the prefecture. Each village has its own shrine and holds annual festivals and ceremonies. Late September throughout October is the fall festival season for the majority of villages and during this period there are festivals being held almost every weekend.

Unique in East Tokushima are the lion dances in the north bank plain of the Yoshino-gawa river and fireworks in the watershed villages beside the Katsuura-gawa river.

Lion Dance in the north bank plain of Yoshino-gawa river

Historically, the area between the Yoshino-gawa river and the Asan mountains laying on the prefectural border between Kagawa and Tokushima, has always had a lot of lion dance groups. Naruto city has 12 groups and Itano town has 4.

This area's lions make fast and sharp moves while drummers in colorful kimonos dance while beating drums at the same time. During the festival, they perform the dance at the shrine, then visit each house in the village to dance for its residents. If you stroll around the village streets in this region, you might be lucky enough to see a lion dance.

Fireworks in the watershed villages of Katsuura-gawa river

Tokushima is recognized as the birthplace of Shikoku fireworks. However, the fact that Tokushima is the biggest producer of fireworks in Western Japan is relatively unknown. In olden times, there would be several gunpowder depots for Tokushima's armaments. The specialist skills to deal with gunpowder were nurtured and over time changed from military use into the peaceful fireworks that we see today.

In big urban cities, people can only see fireworks on special occasions, but for the residents around Katsuura-gawa river, fireworks are a familiar sight. For each village's fall festival, families in the village contribute and buy fireworks for the finale of their own festival.

In October, almost every Saturday and Sunday night, you may hear the sound of fireworks in this region. Some larger villages set off as many as 1000 fireworks and people can see the private firework show from their balcony or window without being bothered by the crowds usually present at city firework shows. The fireworks are usually set off from the middle of a paddy field or river bank, so locals can see them up close. It is as if you are standing right under an umbrella of sparkling lights with the colorful rain pouring over you.



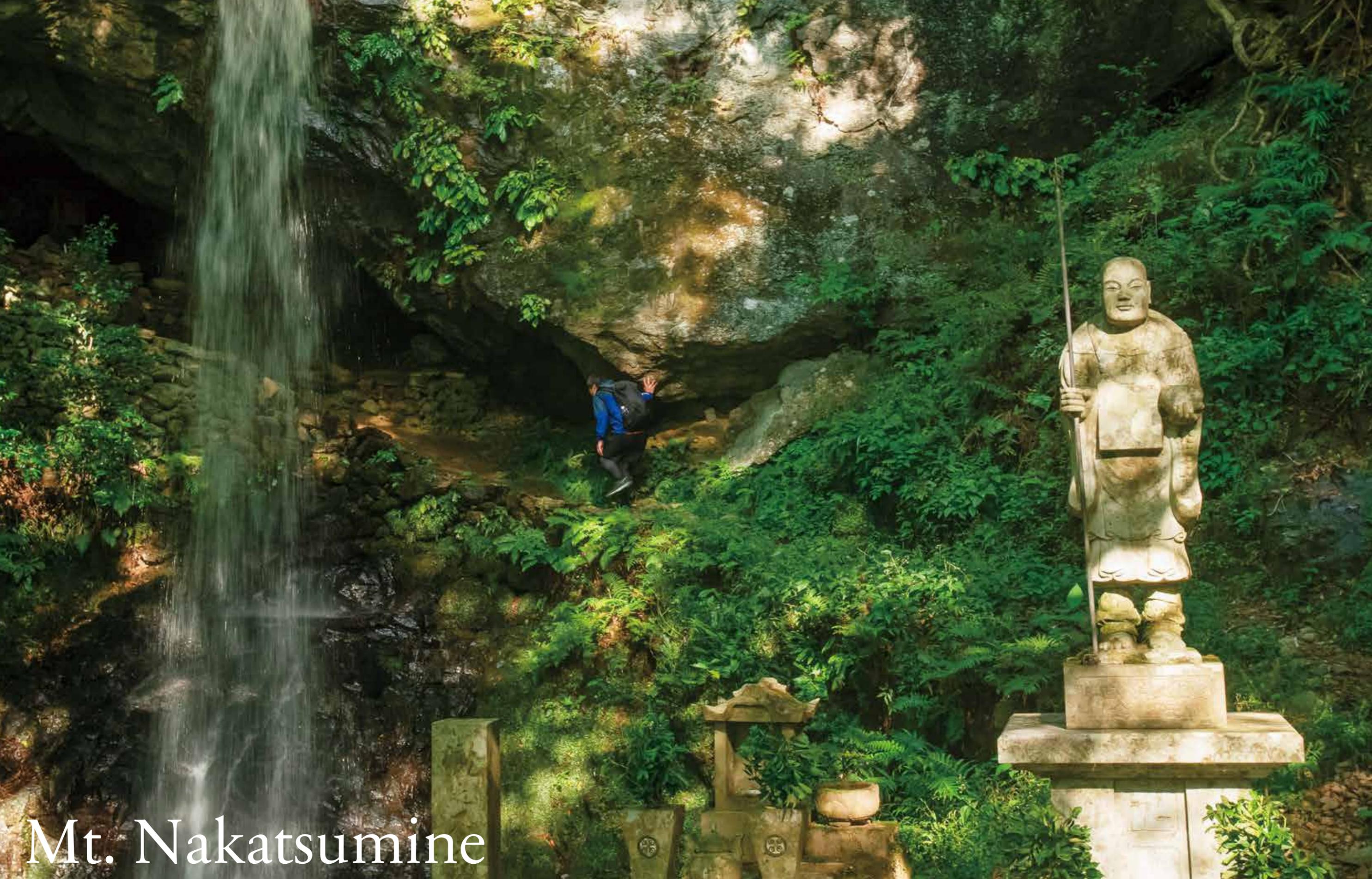
Fall festival fireworks on the riverbanks of Katsuura-gawa river



Fireworks blooming right above your head



Lion dance at fall festivals in Naruto



Mt. Nakatsumine



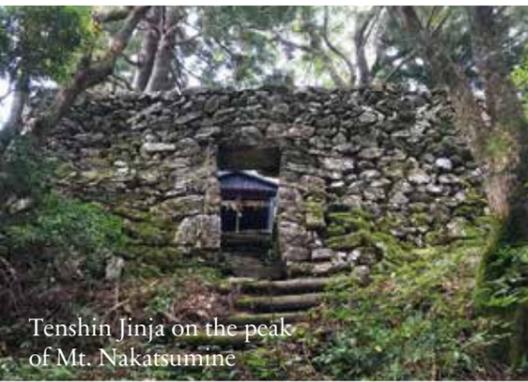
Large old cedars at Hoshi-no-iwaya



One of the Fudo-Myoo figures at Hoshi-no-iwaya



On the way to Hoshi-no-iwaya



Tenshin Jinja on the peak of Mt. Nakatsumine



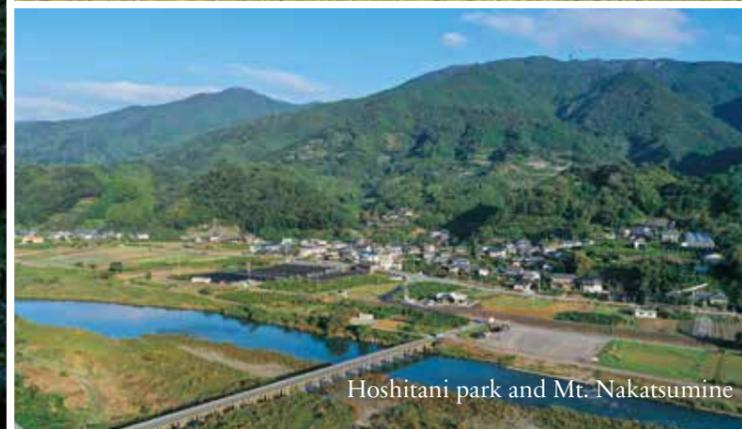
Autumn foliage around Nakatsumine mountain



The trail from Hoshi-no-iwaya to the peak of Mt. Nakatsumine



A village shrine on the way to Sagakyo gorge



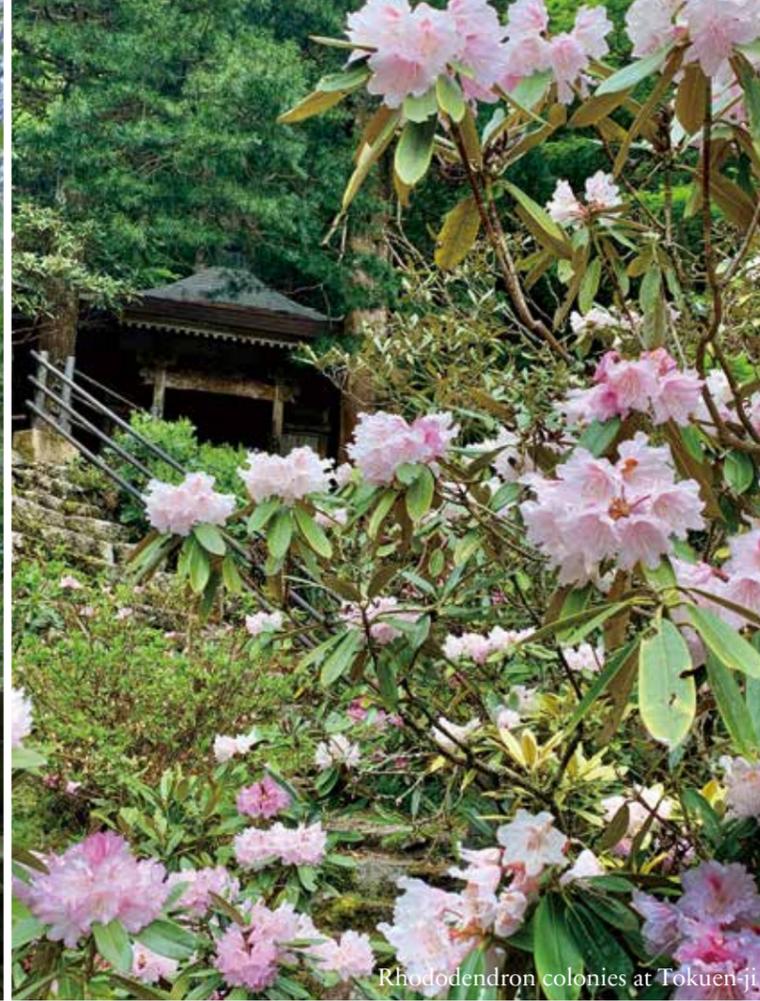
Hoshitani park and Mt. Nakatsumine



Hatagotaki falls



Buddha-ishi



Rhododendron colonies at Tokuen-ji



On the rocks near Tsuetategongen pass



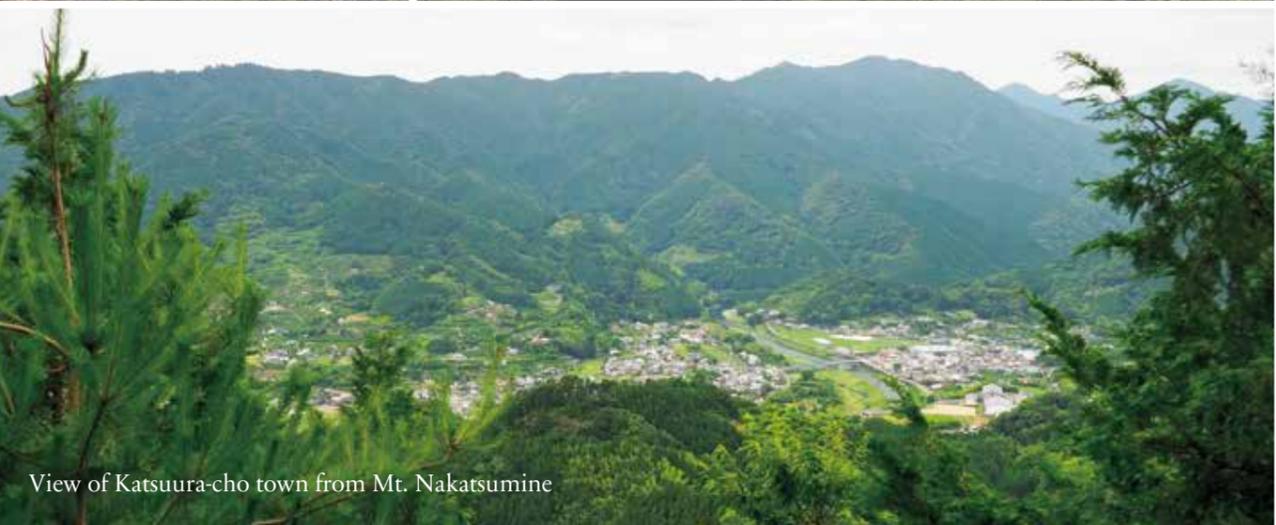
Nyoirin-ji



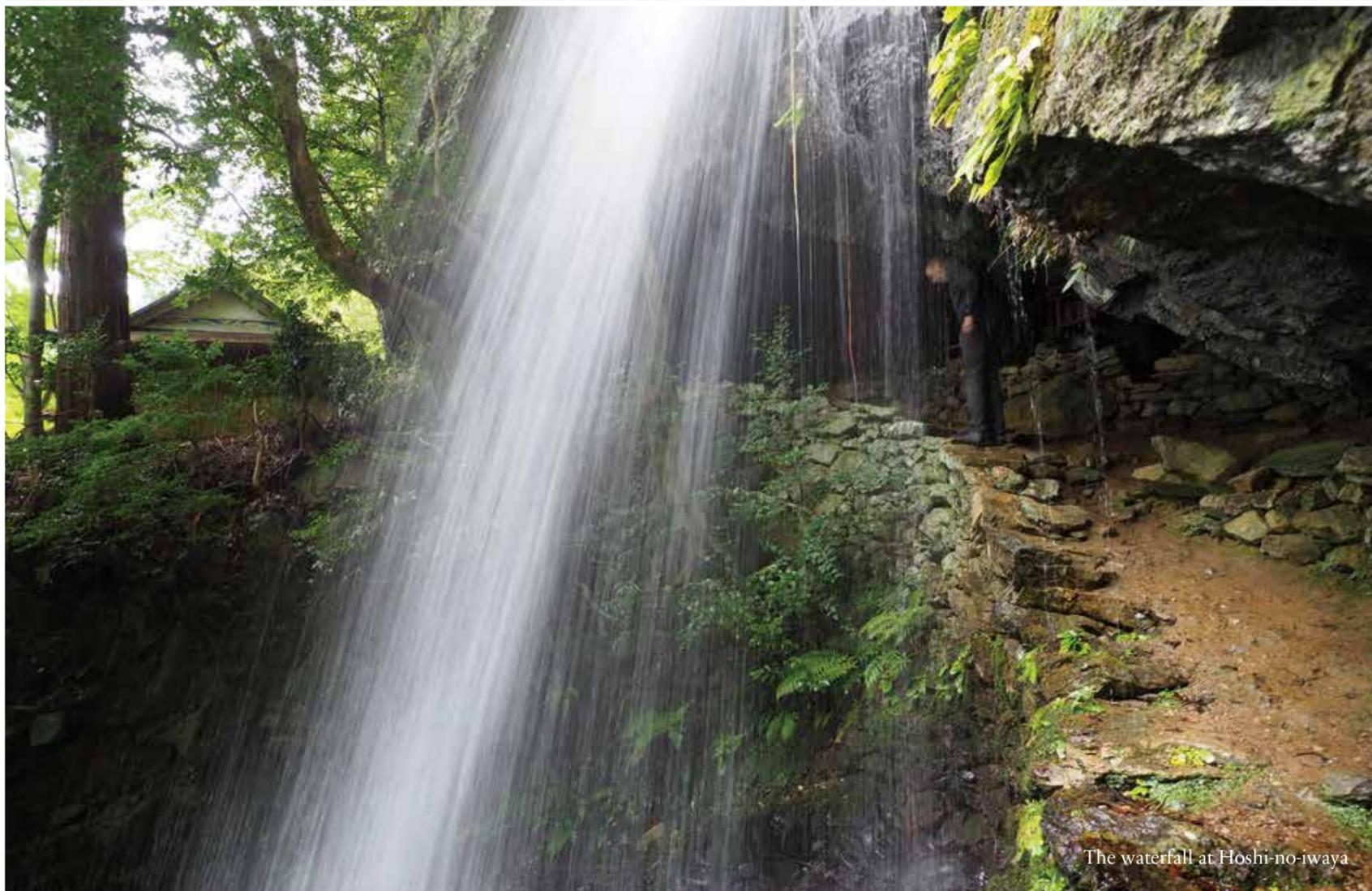
The ridgeline trail to Mt. Nakatsumine



The Ippushindo trail



View of Katsuura-cho town from Mt. Nakatsumine



The waterfall at Hoshi-no-iwaya



Mt. Nakatsumine

Standing at the eastern edge of Shikoku's mountain range, Mt. Nakatsumine is the most recognizable mountain near Tokushima city. Aside from the waterfalls, temples, and viewpoints showing the surrounding area, multiple trails allow you to choose various routes to reach the peak according to your experience and time limitations. You will never get bored with this mountain.



Hatagotaki falls



Route ④
Tokuen-ji to Mt. Nakatsumine ridge line
11.4km

From Kanetani trailhead 20 min drive
From Nyoirin-ji 35 min drive
From Mt. Nakatsumine 55 min drive

Route ③
Mt. Nakatsumine North-east side loop
9.5 km

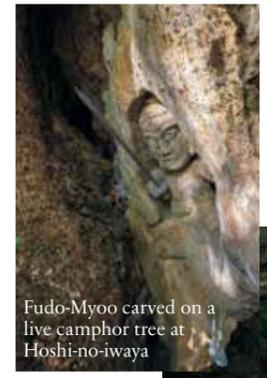


Route ②
Temple to temple peak hike on Mt. Nakatsumine
4.3km

Route ①
Hoshi-no-iwaya loop
6.4km



Sagakyo gorge



Fudo-Myoo carved on a live camphor tree at Hoshi-no-iwaya



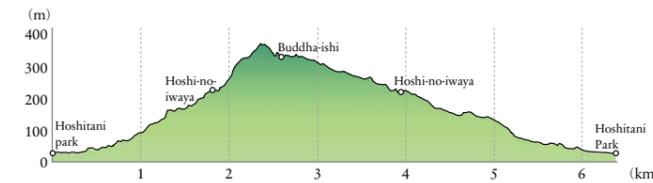
Hoshi-no-iwaya

Route ① Hoshi-no-iwaya loop

Distance : 6.4km Elevation Change : 348m

Elevation Gain/Loss : 346m / 347m

At Hoshi-no-iwaya, you can enjoy walking behind waterfalls and witness the cascading water creating translucent curtains before your eyes. It is here that legend says Kobo-daishi once defeated an evil star causing disasters in the surrounding area, sealing it in the depths of the cave. The serene Hoshi-no-iwaya is hidden in a valley located on Mt. Nakatsumine's south slope. Two ancient cedar trees stand tall besides the stone stairs like they are guarding the temple. A Fudo-Myoo figure carved on a 450-year-old live camphor tree and other mysterious things can be found there. The two routes to get there from Hoshitani park are both well-maintained and not too steep with nice viewpoints along the way. This loop is a short but very satisfying hike.

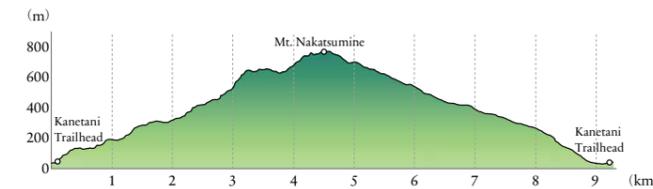


Route ③ Mt. Nakatsumine North-east side loop

Distance : 9.5km Elevation Change : 745m

Elevation Gain/Loss : 792m / 783m

This route is a loop of the Ippushindo trail and Iyashi-no-michi trail, following the ridgeline on the two adjacent north-eastern slopes of Mt. Nakatsumine. Both trails have several viewpoints for vistas in many directions and feature various vegetation and scenery along the trail. It combines a pleasant mix of comfortably walkable flat stretches, mild inclines, and challenging uphill rocky climbs. Though the route distance and elevation change require hikers to have a moderate level of stamina, there is never a dull moment on these trails all day.

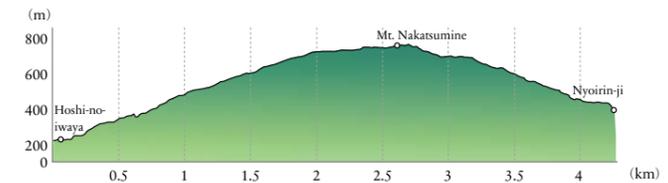


Route ② Temple to temple peak hike on Mt. Nakatsumine

Distance : 4.3km Elevation Change : 546m

Elevation Gain/Loss : 545m / 372m

This route connects two temples, Hoshi-no-iwaya and Nyoirin-ji, via the peak of Mt. Nakatsumine. First, take a short detour from the trail to the peak, and walk 200m to see the Buddha-ishi, which is a pyramid of 53 small stone buddha images on a cliff facing a stream. Return to the route and steel yourself for the demanding uphill climb to reach the park at the peak of the mountain. There is a small shrine at the peak as well as an area for hikers, with wooden benches and tables, to have a nice lunch/tea break. Enjoy great views of the mountains and the wide stretch of rice paddies along the Katsura-gawa river from 773m high. To reach Nyoirin-ji, located on the opposite side of the mountain, it's a 2km walk down the quiet trail through a forest of cedar trees.

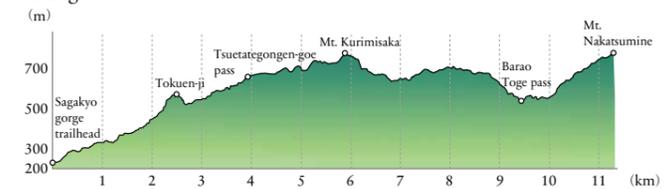


Route ④ Tokuen-ji to Mt. Nakatsumine ridge line

Distance : 11.4km Elevation Change : 557m

Elevation Gain/Loss : 924m / 368m

Walking along the beautiful Saga-kyo gorge, with countless small waterfalls and shiny green moss-covered rocks on the river, discover the secret unmaned temple deep in the remote mountains. Enjoy pink rhododendron blooming in spring and the colorful patchwork of foliage during fall at the quiet and elegant Tokuen-ji. From the temple, a short walk provides access to the thru-hike trail running over the ridgeline on the eastern edge of the Shikoku mountains. Small ups and downs continue but it is all unpaved and a relatively easy walk at an average height of 600 to 750m with spectacular views on both sides of the trail. The distance of this route is long but very good for those who enjoy speed hiking or through hiking.



1 Day Hike Tour Ex.1 Temples and waterfalls on Mt. Nakatsumine hike (Total time for the tour : 8 h 30 min)						
Tokushima Station	Hoshitani Park	Hoshi-no-iwaya (30 min)	Mt. Nakatsumine (Lunch 40 min)	Nyoirin-ji (20 min)	Hatagotaki falls (70 min)	Tokushima Station
21 km	2 km	2.7 km	1.8 km	12 km	17 km	
40 min	50 min	110 min	60 min	35 min	40 min	

1 Day Hike Tour Ex.2 Mt. Nakatsumine great view hike (Total time for the tour : 7 h 30 min)					
Tokushima Station	Kanetani Trailhead	Mt. Nakatsumine (Lunch 40 min)	Hoshi-no-iwaya (30 min)	Hoshitani Park	Tokushima Station
12 km	4.5 km	2.7 km	2 km	21 km	
40 min	180 min	70 min	40 min	40 min	

tour options

Hatagotaki falls

Five main waterfalls of various shapes and sizes as well as uncountable smaller falls continue along the gorge at the deep end of a valley in Mt. Nakatsumine. The trail along the gorge and waterfalls flows along the wild terrain of the gorge, running up, over, and between the giant rocks. This, along with some stream crossings, gives the hikers a feeling of adventure. In the summer, the water temperature goes up enough for hikers to be able to walk through the water bare-legged to approach the falls and walk around in the clear blue stream. Since the trail has some rough patches and slippery rocks, good stamina, care, and proper hiking shoes are required.



Hatagotaki falls



Kamikatsu

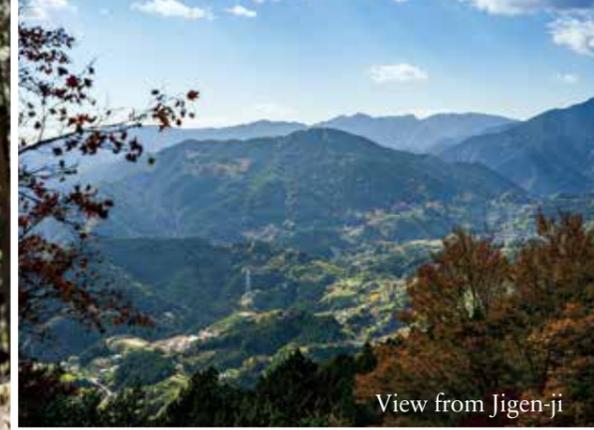
(Jigen-ji / Mt. Yamainudake / Mt. Takamaru)



Moss forest on Mt. Yamainudake



On the trail of Mt. Takamaru



View from Jigen-ji



Kashihara terraced rice fields



Beech and moss forest on Mt. Takamaru



Autumn foliage on Mt. Takamaru



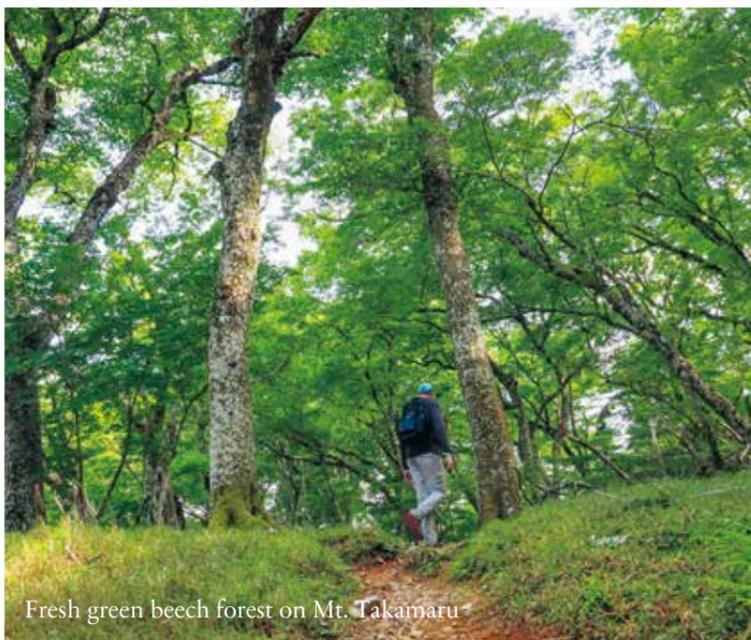
Onbuchi falls



Takamaru millennium forest



Hiking up Mt. Takamaru



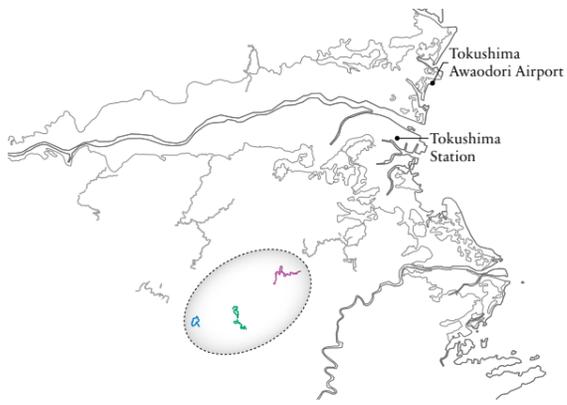
Fresh green beech forest on Mt. Takamaru



Foggy mountains of Kamikatsu

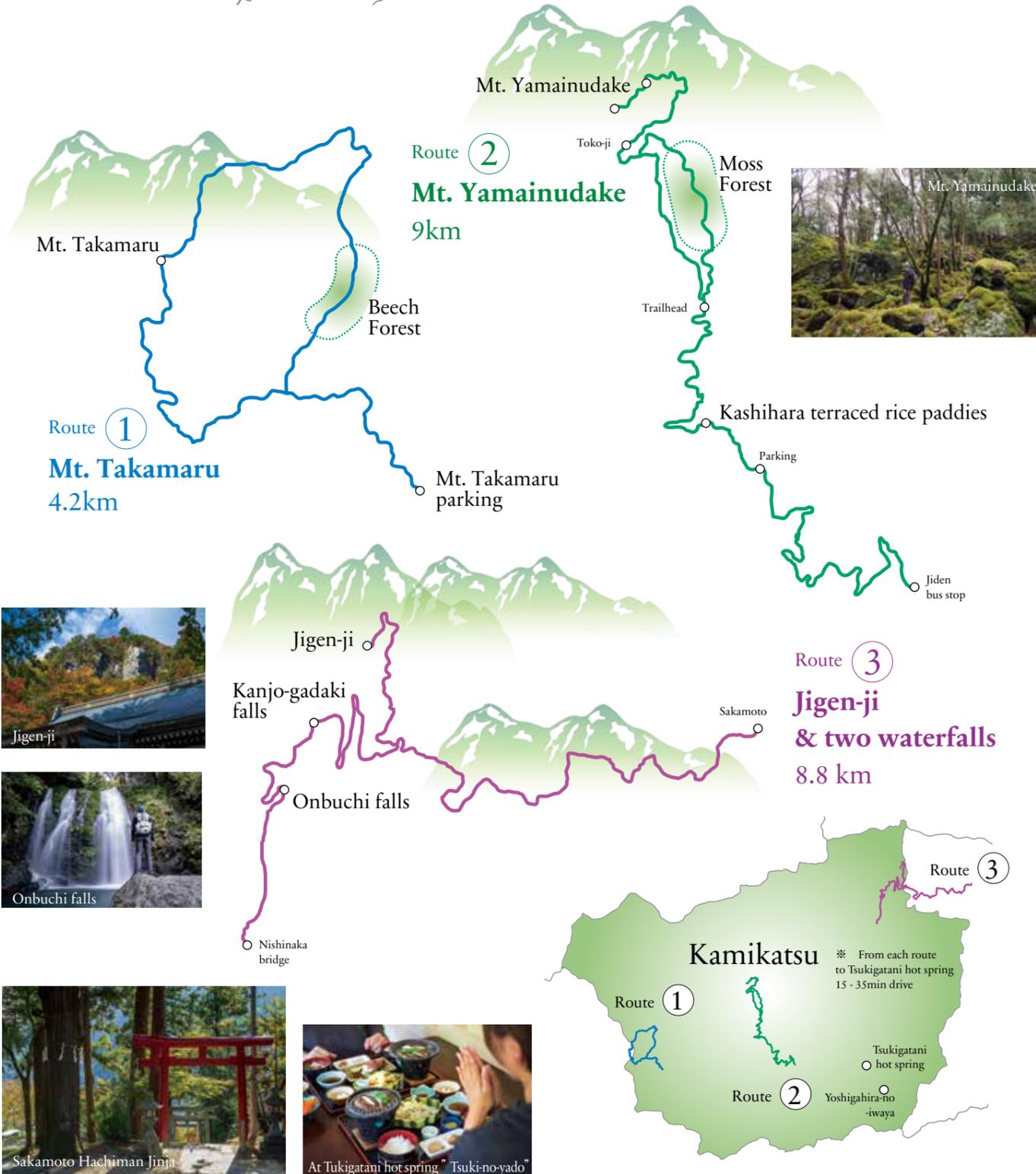


Kanjotaki falls



Kamikatsu

One of the most beautiful villages in Japan to have conserved its natural treasures. The town is surrounded by mountains covered with primeval beech forests, shining green moss, and mystical waterfalls. As these stunning scenes unfold around you, stop, take in the tranquil vistas, and become lost in time.

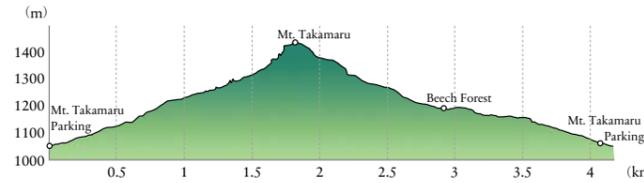


Route ① Mt. Takamaru

Distance : 4.2km Elevation Change : 383m

Elevation Gain/Loss : 383m / 383m

This 1438m high mountain is well-known for its huge primeval forest of carefully conserved beech trees, and is a popular hiking destination all year round. An easily-accessible trailhead is located at an altitude of 1000m, well-maintained loop trails connect the peak and a large parking lot for convenient day-hike experiences. The trails are covered with beech and other broadleaf trees, and are especially popular during the beautiful autumn foliage season. The peak itself is completely open and offers hikers 360 degrees views of layers of the surrounding mountains that continue beyond the horizon.



Route ③ Jigen-ji and two waterfalls

Distance : 8.8km Elevation Change : 388m

Elevation Gain/Loss : 387m / 384m

This route features an old pilgrim trail leading to Jigen-ji and two beautiful waterfalls. The trail starts from a shrine and leads through hilly mountain villages and mikan (mandarin orange) orchards for a while before becoming a proper mountain trail that is well-maintained by locals. Two waterfalls, Kanjogadaki and Onbuchi falls, have totally different appearances, but are each mesmerizing in their own way. The water from Kanjogadaki falls 80m becoming a mist, blown around by the wind like a delicate chiffon ribbon. A short distance downhill, the lesser-known Onbuchi falls lies waiting to be discovered behind a small mikan orchard, as it pours into a turquoise blue basin.

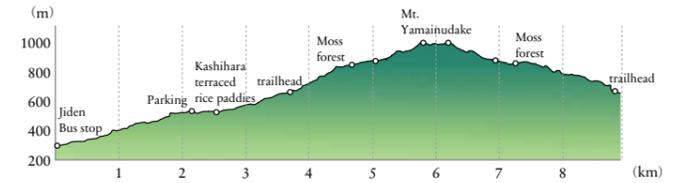


Route ② Mt. Yamainudake

Distance : 9km Elevation Change : 720m

Elevation Gain/Loss : 823m / 461m

This route leads you to a hidden, one-of-a-kind moss mountain in Tokushima. This undiscovered mountain was covered with piles of green rocks scattered by the collapse of the mountain summit 300 years ago. Over time, green fluffy mosses gradually covered the debris and formed this huge 8 hectare moss forest. Once a training site for mountain ascetic practitioners, the trail around the moss forest is like a maze, requiring climbing up and down rocks and crawling on all fours through tunnels. The best season to visit is during and right after the rainy season when the fresh leaves and wet moss shining green in the misty fog is a real wonder to behold. On the way to the trailhead, also enjoy walking through picturesque terraced rice paddies.



tour options

Tsukigatani hot spring area

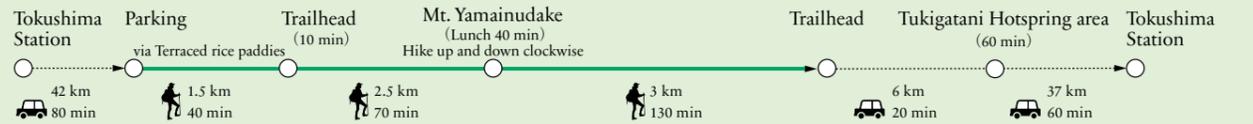
This area, centering on the hot spring inn, Tsukinoyado, and the Katsura-gawa river, offers various tourist attractions including a cozy café and a camping facility that provides a variety of kid-friendly nature programs. A new cable suspension bridge crosses the river 15m above the water with some transparent windows, showing you the river flowing far below your feet and making your heart pound. The restaurant in Tsukinoyado offers a variety of dishes featuring locally grown food products of the season. Both the restaurant and the hot spring have glass walls facing the river allowing you to view the amazing scenery of the water and mountains while enjoying a relaxing time.



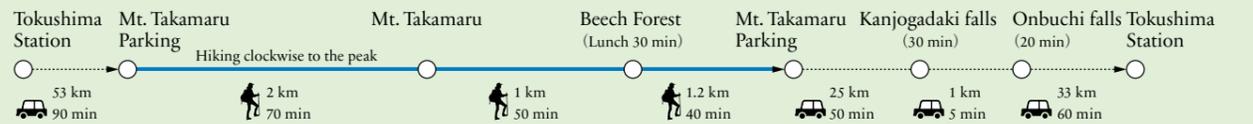
Yoshigahira-no-iwaya

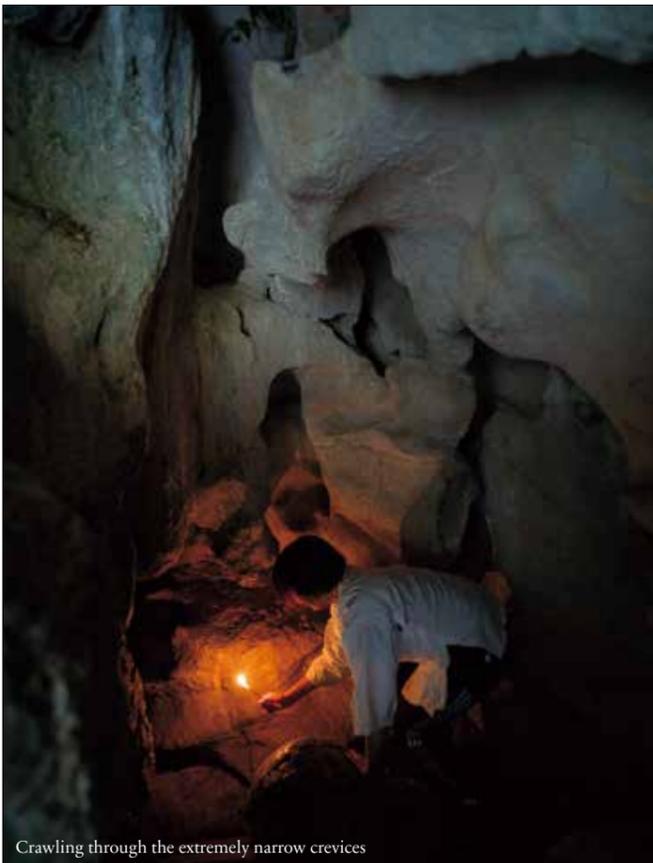
Yoshigahira-no-iwaya is a cave created by gigantic rocks standing tall and magnificent in the middle of a primeval forest, said to have been there for over 400 years. Moss covered stones are scattered around the fort-like rocks and a small shrine to the dragon god is enshrined inside the cave, creating a mysterious feeling. One legend says that a traveling vendor who for days sheltered in the cave from a sudden snowstorm without food, was saved by a bear.

1Day Hike Tour Ex.1 Moss mountain hike and hot springs (Total time for the tour : 8 h 30 min)

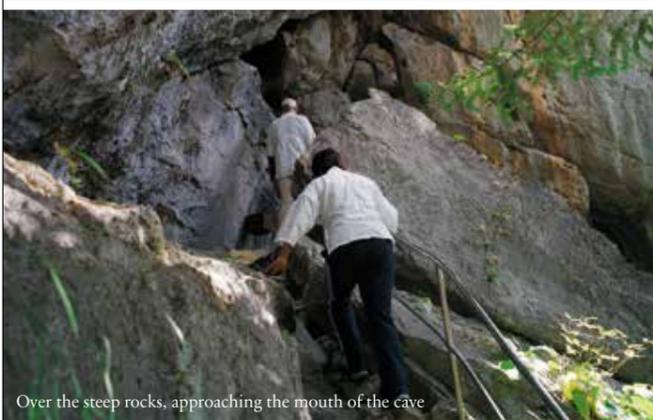


1Day Hike Tour Ex.2 Mt. Takamaru hike and two waterfalls (Total time for the tour : 7 h 30 min)





Crawling through the extremely narrow crevices



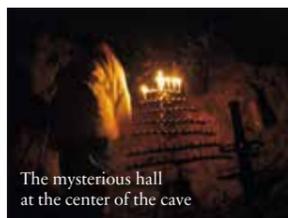
Over the steep rocks, approaching the mouth of the cave



True darkness inside the cave. Only a handheld candle is your aid



Prayers at the main hall of Jigen-ji



The mysterious hall at the center of the cave

Ana-zenjo at Jigen-ji

Jigen-ji is renowned as the temple of Ana-zenjo.

The Japanese word, ana means “hole” and zenjo, a Buddhism term, refers to “a calmed and stable state of mind.” At Jigen-ji, a practitioner of Ana-zenjo must enter a dark, narrow cave deep in the sheer cliffs standing behind the temple, go through the winding tight path to reach the cave’s center, then return to the mouth of the cave, aided only by the dim light of a handheld candle.

A legend of the cave says that the young Kobo-daishi was practicing Goma fire rituals in front of the mysterious cave in the deep mountains when an evil dragon emerged from the cave, trying to attack him. He defeated it and entrapped it deep within the cave.

Before even reaching the cave, the walk from the main part of the temple up a 500m-long steep path challenges the practitioners to overcome it. A Sendatsu (guide) always comes along to guide you throughout the whole process.

After entering, the cave walls soon narrow to a tight damp slit which you can barely squeeze through sideways. It’s almost impossible to figure out how to move forward without the Sendatsu telling you how to contort your body to fit through. You have to get down on all fours and crawl horizontally through tiny crevices while avoiding the fangs of looming stalactites.

After reaching the small dome at the centre of the cave system, where the evil dragon was said to be petrified in the wall and a small statue of Kobo-daishi is sitting on the limestone altar, the Sendatsu leads you to chant the Heart Sutra. To return back to the cave entrance you must repeat everything you did before in reverse. The last part before re-emerging from the cave is slightly different. You must stretch your arms and legs to become as flat and thin as possible to scramble out of an especially tiny hole. It is called Tainai-kuguri, meaning you are re-born like a new baby coming out of the womb. Finally, back to the outside world and Ana-zenjo ends.

Ana-zenjo is surely a tough practice but it is worth the experience, as you will feel the strong sense of achievement and the elation of breathing fresh air and seeing sparkling sunlight. The feeling of being re-born is not an exaggeration. In fact, many people from all around Japan visit the temple for Ana-zenjo every year. Keep in mind that a certain level of physical fitness is mandatory for Ana-zenjo. The whole practice in the cave usually takes 30 minutes to an hour, but if many people participate at once, expect to be inside for longer. Make sure to check if your body size can handle the labyrinth by squeezing between the “test stones,” two stone pillars 26 cm apart by the temple gates, before signing up.

Jigen-ji

HP : <http://www.anazenjo-jigenji.com/>
Address : 18 Kanjodaki, Masaki, Kamikatsu-cho, Katsuura-gun, Tokushima
Parking : free
Advanced booking required to participate in Ana-Zenjo.
For more details about participation, contact Jigen-ji (Tel : 0885-45-0044)

Sakamoto Akari-no-sato lantern festival

Sakamoto Akari-no-sato is a lantern festival held at Sakamoto Hachiman Jinja on October 13 and 14 every year. Sakamoto is located deep in the mountains on the western edge of Katsuura town.

More than 600 hand-crafted paper lanterns are placed all around the shrine and up its steep stone stairway with over 300 steps. In the dark, the warm glow of the lights shining through the paper lanterns form lines that guide festival goers and give the space a fantastical appearance like a glowing swarm of fireflies dancing in and around the shrine.

Arriving at the festival, you are greeted by the tasty smells from food vendors to whet your appetite. You will hear the cheerful sounds of bells and drums being played by local groups, the traditional festival songs having been passed down for many generations.

The festival ends with a fireworks show on the 14th. It is spectacular to see hundreds of fireworks blossom into chrysanthemums and willows as they are shot from the lower grounds into the night sky above, sparkling right at your eye level.



The lights leading you through the darkness of night



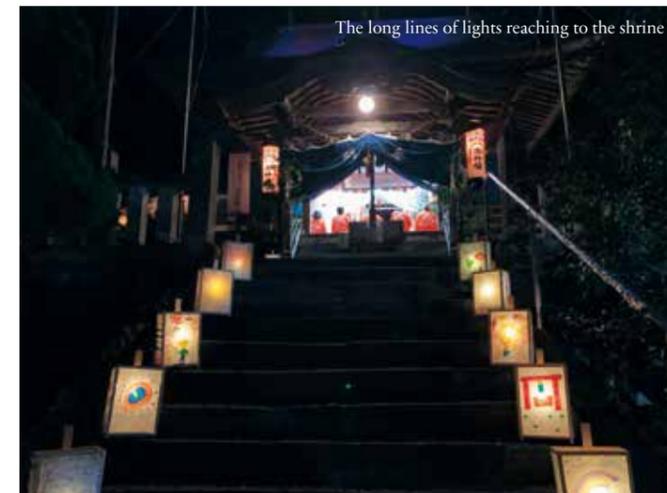
The ceremony inside the shrine

Sakamoto Akari-no-sato lantern festival

Date : October 13 and 14
Light-up time : 18:00~21:00
Event sites : Sakamoto Hachiman Jinja and Fureai-no-sato Sakamoto area (Miyahira, Sakamoto, Katsuura-cho, Katsuura-gun, Tokushima)
Parking fee : 200 yen (including discount coupons for the festival food vendors)
Contact : Akari-no-sato festival committee (Fureai-no-sato Sakamoto)
Tel : 0885-44-2110



Like a forest of big fireflies



The long lines of lights reaching to the shrine



Voices of laughing local kids echoing in the forest of lights



The path of lights along the stone stairs



The big lantern sign



Mt. Kumoso and Mt. Toishigongen



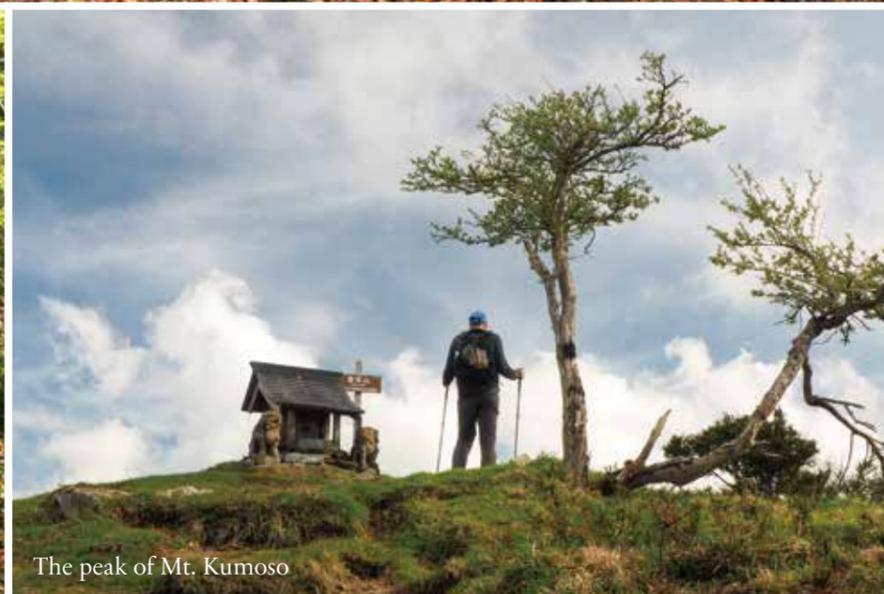
Autumn in Mt. Kumoso



The peak of Mt. Toishigongen



Mossy trail on Mt. Kumoso



The peak of Mt. Kumoso



The camping site of Gakujiin-no-mori botanical garden



View of Shikoku mountains from the top of Mt. Kumoso



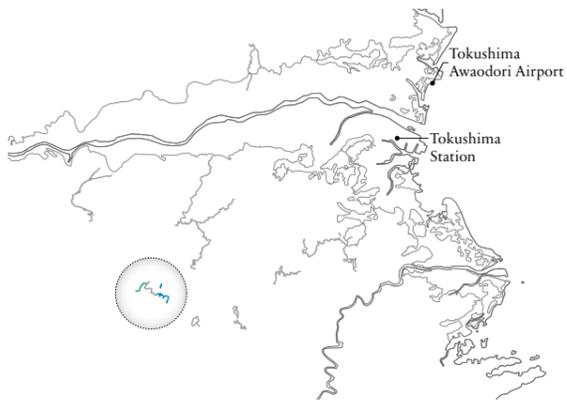
Hime-no-taki falls



Near the trailhead of Mt. Kumoso



Hiking up Mt. Toishigongen

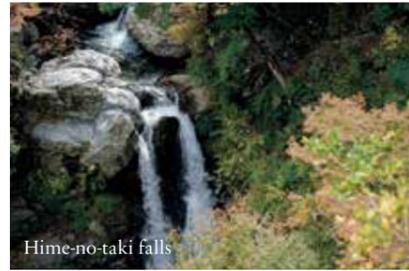


Mt. Kumoso

Mt. Toishigongen and Mt. Kumoso are both over 1300 m tall, but are easy to hike because the trailheads are located at an altitude of around 1000m. These mountains are well known for various flowers, as well as beech and other deciduous trees that paint the surrounding mountains with different colors each season. On your way to the mountains, stop and enjoy the rare alpine plants and flowers at the botanical garden located on the mountainside.



Kangetsu Chaya restaurant at Gakujin-no-mori



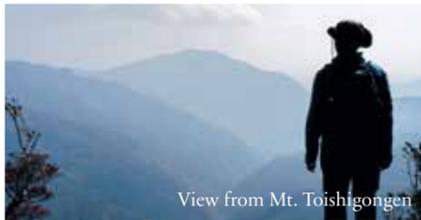
Hime-no-taki falls

Route ② Mt. Toishigongen Round Trip 5km

Mt. Toishigongen



Mt. Toishigongen trail in summer



View from Mt. Toishigongen



Colorful autumn forest on Mt. Toishigongen

Gakujin-no-mori (Alpine plants garden)

Driveway

Jintsudaki falls

Super Rindo entrance (Forest road)



Super Rindo in Autumn

Route ① Mt. Kumoso Round Trip 6.8km

Mt. Kumoso



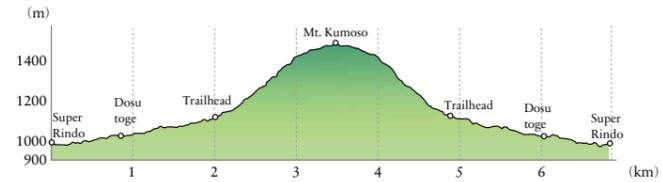
The trailhead of Mt. Kumoso

Route ① Mt. Kumoso Round Trip

Distance : 6.8km Elevation Change : 523m

Elevation Gain/Loss : 520m / 546m

This route allows you to fully appreciate the pleasant natural forests of beech and other broadleaf trees, shading moss-covered stones and fallen tree trunks along the trails of Mt. Kumoso. It presents a shining fresh green world in early summer, and carpets of golden leaves in fall. The trail first follows a mountain stream, then steeply ascends through the moss and beech forests. After hitting the ridgeline, you reach an open peak where you can enjoy panoramic views of layers upon layers of mountains. The trailhead is on the Super Rindo, the longest forest road in Japan. Though unpaved, cars can still access the trailhead on the forest road.



Blooming rhododendrons colonies in Gakujin-no-mori



At Kangetsu Chaya of Gakujin-no-mori



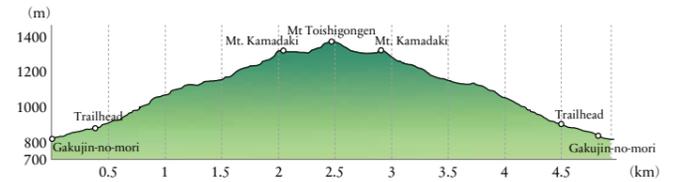
Fringed irises in Gakujin-no-mori

Route ② Mt. Toishigongen Round Trip

Distance : 5km Elevation Change : 557m

Elevation Gain/Loss : 584m / 584m

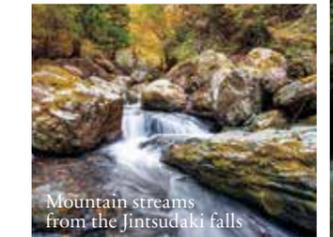
This trail is well maintained and easy to climb with many viewpoints. Along it, alpine plants grow in clusters, and when they are in bloom, you can enjoy the "mountain of flowers" with their pink and purple colors. In autumn, it is pleasant to stroll through the colorful fallen leaves. The trailhead is located at the back of the campground in the botanical garden Gakujin-no-mori, which was built to preserve the natural environment of the mountainside and protect some rare endangered plants at an altitude of 1000 meters in the deepest part of Kamiyama town. The park is especially popular in spring, when peach-colored rhododendrons and bluish-purple fringed iris bloom all over the park. As well as the large campground, there is also a café.



tour options

Jintsudaki Falls

At the bottom of Mt. Kumoso, at the far end of a beautiful river and gorge, the majestic Jintsudaki falls secretly thunders. The falls are surrounded by high rock walls where the water drops 30m and hits the basin so hard that it causes blasts of mist to blow around. Visitors often find it hard to stand up straight here! In the cold of winter, the waterfall freezes and creates breathtakingly beautiful pillars of crystal blue ice that attract crowds of people. Another elegant waterfall, Hime-no-taki falls is nearby too.



Mountain streams from the Jintsudaki falls



Jintsudaki falls

1Day Hike Tour Ex.1 Mt. Toishigongen & Gakujin-no-mori (Total time for the tour : 9 h)



1Day Hike Tour Ex.2 Mt. Kumoso (Total time for the tour : 8 h 30 min)



The Gakujin-no-mori's campground allows campers to light a bonfire directly on the ground, which is quite rare in Japan. The camping sites are completely isolated from the lights and noises of the town at night. The campsite offers total silence, so campers will have a good sleep in their tent or cottage under the star-filled sky.

A two-day tour with an overnight stay at the campsite to hike both mountains, is highly recommended.

