

Towada-Hachimantai National Park

Scale Sacred Heights and Serene Shores Sculpted by Volcanic Might

The far-flung reaches of northern Honshu are readily accessible from Tokyo by Shinkansen. But another world awaits you in the mountain ranges and expansive lakes that make up Towada-Hachimantai National Park. With landscapes defined by their stillness, this sparsely populated region offers unspoiled panoramic views of a Japan that still feels like a frontier; whether you are adventuring along one of its many hiking routes, or following ancient spiritual pilgrimage routes into its mysterious interior.

Ascend to Hachimantai

In this serenity, you are reminded of the monumental scale of movement that first crafted these lands. In the southern Hachimantai area of the park, the immense dormant stratovolcano of Mt. Iwate sleeps quietly on a volcanic plateau. The Yakebashiri lava flow that snakes from the mountain was deposited by an 18th century eruption. These landscapes recall the staggering forces that quite literally created the Japanese islands as we know them today. Also, as seen in the many religious carvings and statues that line the ridge of the crater summit, these same landscapes form the base for a unique history and spiritual culture that continues to thrive to the present day.

As you explore further into the volcanic peaks, you will begin to sense the incredible forces lying dormant beneath you. Volcanic fumes drift lazily across the slopes; and bubbling mud seeps and hot spring (*onsen*) fountains punctuate the dense forests and volcanoes. Here you can experience the unique culture born from the Japanese people's relationship with nature as well. The many remote hot springs have since ancient times contributed to Japan's singular bathing culture. The varied mineral compositions carried up from deep within the earth have gifted the area with an array of resorts, known as much for their varied atmospheres as for the healing qualities of their respective waters.

From Hachimantai to Towada

Once past the volcanoes, and over the moors and marshes that lie between them, your next destination is the double caldera (volcanic crater) of Lake Towada. This forms the gateway to the northern Towada area of the national park. The vast caldera lake opens up before your eyes with its mysterious depths conjuring forth countless legends that continue to inspire to the present day. The lake's clear waters and steady shores suggest a stillness that mirrors the untamed primeval forests that envelop the perimeter of the lake.

The play of wind across the lake surface is enlivened by the movement of *himemasu* salmon who now call the sacred waters home.

Set against the vast scope of the still lake, these signs of life become all the more poignant--like a testament to the harsh conditions that the earliest settlers to the northern reaches of Honshu Island met. In the foothills surrounding the lake Towada Shrine stands as a welcoming point for ancient pilgrimage routes. The legends of vanquishing the monstrous forces that used to hold dominion over these lands are a perfect metaphor for the hardships endured by those who braved the harsh volcanic landscape to reach the lake's waters.

From Hachimantai to Towada

Once past the volcanoes, and over the moors and marshes that lie between them, your next destination is the double caldera (volcanic crater) of Lake Towada. This forms the gateway to the northern Towada area of the national park. The vast caldera lake opens up before your eyes with its mysterious depths conjuring forth countless legends that continue to inspire to the present day. The lake's clear waters and steady shores suggest a stillness that mirrors the untamed primeval forests that envelop the perimeter of the lake. The play of wind across the lake surface is enlivened by the movement of *himemasu* salmon who now call the sacred waters home.

Set against the vast scope of the still lake, these signs of life become all the more poignant--like a testament to the harsh conditions that the earliest settlers to the northern reaches of Honshu Island met. In the foothills surrounding the lake Towada Shrine stands as a welcoming point for ancient pilgrimage routes. The legends of vanquishing the monstrous forces that used to hold dominion over these lands are a perfect metaphor for the hardships endured by those who braved the harsh volcanic landscape to reach the lake's waters.

Beyond Lake Towada

For those enticed by this spirit of adventure, the mountain ranges that open up to the north of Lake Towada are waiting, broken up by numerous secluded hot springs and towns to relieve the rigors of the day amidst the steaming waters. Many of the hot springs boast their own bathing culture and are known for their therapeutic waters and a relaxing atmosphere largely unchanged over the centuries.

While this remote region boasts a peaceful landscape all year round, it is one that changes dramatically with the seasons. In the winter, a thick blanket of snow is draped over the entire national park, allowing

for a complete line-up of winter sports, including exceptional skiing and snowboarding with the picturesque mountain landscapes as the backdrop. Whether you want to explore off-piste (back country) terrain or take it easy on a relaxing day out in the elements, you can end your day with one of the region's famed local hot pot dishes before dipping into an outdoor hot spring in the snowy fields.

Warm Hospitality in Snowy Climbs

Come spring, the spirit of “overcoming adversity” that defines the Tohoku area of northeast Japan is all the more apparent, as bright green buds take over the lowlands before finally reaching all the way to the once-snowy peaks come summer. As time passes, these rich greens of summer blend into the rustic yellows, reds, and browns of autumn. Throughout the year, you are spoiled by a seemingly endless choice of ways to explore the spectacular landscape -- from casual walking routes and steep hiking trails to sightseeing boats and canoes gliding over the shimmering surface of Lake Towada itself.

Your journey through Towada-Hachimantai National Park is one packed with contrast that mirrors the volcanic energy that has wrought this landscape over the millennia -- at times, exhilarating - at others times, tranquil -- and, yet, always full of rustic charm and soaring legends of dragons and gods that dwell in the mystic peaks and deepest depths.

Towada-Hachimantai National Park beckons visitors with dramatic mountain landscapes shaped by powerful volcanic energy, serene lakes and ponds, a range of fun year-round outdoor activities, spiritual adventures, rich folklore and relaxing resorts.