

In the north of Nozawa Onsen, you'll find the picturesque Tsutsujiyama hill, an especially captivating sight in June when it's in bloom with around 5,000 azaleas that color the slopes bright red. From the park at the top of the hill, which is also home to the tiny Hyakuban (100) Kannon temple, you have great views of the village, the ski area, the Northern Alps, and the five peaks of the Hokushin Gogaku mountain range. The outlook is a 25-minute walk up a narrow, winding path lined with 100 Kannon monuments. Kannon is Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, and these 100 Kannon statues are used by the locals in ceremonies to pray for their ancestors and for people's safety. The Kannon lend a spiritual ambience to a short nature trail surrounded by lush greenery: the perfect getaway to refresh your mind.

Walking along this winding path lined with Kannon monuments is considered to be the equivalent of visiting the trio of pilgrimage tracks that make up "Japan's 100 Kannon"—the Saigoku 33 Kannon in the Kansai area, the Bando 33 Kannon in the Kanto area, and the Chichibu 34 Kannon in Saitama prefecture. That's because legend has it that the Kannon monuments, built by villagers between 1839 and 1849, are placed on soil that was brought back from these three sacred pilgrimages.