

Sugashima Island

Toba Bay's second-largest island offers many interesting spots to hike and explore. These include the Shirahige and Benten Shrines, abandoned World War II naval ruins, and the Sugashima Lighthouse. Built in 1873, Sugashima Lighthouse is the oldest surviving Western-style brick lighthouse in Japan. Its squat cylindrical shape and white-painted bricks give it an unusual appearance.

Adventurous hikers can try climbing Oyama, the island's tallest mountain, in January or February to experience unique scenery. Bright red leaves from the Japanese boxwood (*Buxus microphylla* var. *japonica*) form a thick red carpet on the ground in winter, creating a contrast with the blue sea. This usually evergreen plant is known as *beni-tsuge* in Japanese and its transformation to such a vibrant red color is a rare sight.

Visitors can stay at a Japanese inn and experience local culture firsthand while enjoying the slower-paced island life here. There are also fishing tours, where visitors benefit from local fishermen guides. In addition, Shirongohama has beautiful beaches. During July, it hosts the Shirongo Matsuri - an important festival for the local female divers known as *ama*. Visitors can watch the female divers compete to catch a pair of abalone.