

Climbing Mount Takaiwa: *Torii* gates and “Rocky Hill”

The trailhead to the beginner-level climb up 881-meter-high Mt. Takaiwa is a 30-minute walk from town. From the azalea-filled Hobaru Azalea Garden, the trail rises slowly for a while through cedar forests. One stretch passes through a series of weather-worn *torii* gates, and the beams of sunlight breaking through the forest create quite an ethereal atmosphere. The trail steepens as it approaches the higher slopes, and craggy cliffs and massive rock outcroppings become more prevalent—hints of the reason this mountain has earned the name “Rocky Hill.” Like the other mountains in the area, Japanese dogwood trees grow everywhere, adding splashes of white to the forest with their June blossoms. A small shrine sits near the peak, where from ancient times farmers have come to pay their respects to the gods and pray for a good harvest.