

## Walking Trails - The Trail to the Cedars of Takamori

The second hiking trail from the Minami Aso Visitor Center passes through the forests of Takamori, home to two giant cedars shrouded in an ancient myth. Takamori, a small town of about 6,000 people, is located in the eastern part of Kumamoto Prefecture, nestling on the southern side of the caldera rim. It has a beautiful view of Nekodake, one of the five peaks of Mt. Aso (the others being Mt. Takadake, Mt. Nakadake, Mt. Kishima, and Mt. Eboshi).

Takamori-don no Sugi, two famous cedar trees with trunk diameters of more than 10 m, and more than 400 years old, are located on the way up to the southern rim of the caldera, near the Kyushu Nature Trail. It is thought that the trees, one male and one female, seem to be reaching out to one another with their entwined branches. They are associated with the sixteenth century feudal Lord Takamori Korenao and one of his vassals. Following defeat at the Battle of Aso in 1586, they committed ritual suicide and are said to be buried under the cedars. The site is now known as a power spot that people visit to pray for good fortune in marriage. Visitors will also find a number of old shrines surrounded by lush forest along the route.