

## Kuju Mountain Range

### The Four Seasons of Kuju

The Kuju Mountain Range refers to a group of five peaks, distributed across an area 15km east to west, just over Aso's northern caldera wall in Oita Prefecture. Kuju boasts the tallest peaks on mainland Kyushu, the highest, Mt. Nakadake, reaching 1,791m. Other well-known peaks in the wider Kuju area are Mt. Kuju (1,787m) and Mt. Kurodake (1,587m), many of whose lower slopes are covered with primary forest. Hiking trails cross the mountains, offering opportunities to explore a fascinating landscape.

In 1934, the region was designated part of the Aso-Kuju National Park, an area of unique volcanic landscapes, sprawling grasslands, and awe-inspiring panoramic views. Kuju is a favorite with both Japanese and international hikers throughout the year as the scenery changes with the seasons. Due to the volcanic nature of the area, there is an abundance of underground hot springs. Visitors will find some of the best hot spring facilities in the country here.

Kuju is a popular destination for nature enthusiasts at any time of year, with beautiful scenery to be enjoyed in every season. In winter, the area is often covered with a blanket of snow, and hoar frost can cling to tree branches and grasses. Spring sees the area transformed into a natural wildflower garden, with fields of azalea blooming in early to late May drawing many visitors. Summer is the main mountain hiking season. August sees fields of wildflowers in bloom. These attract clouds of butterflies and other insects to the area, making it a great time for bird-watching. With autumn come the vivid colors of the leaves, particularly in the maple, oak, and other broad-leaved trees in the ancient deciduous forests. Mountainsides turn from lush green to shades of burnt orange, gold, and red. The vividness of the autumn colors differs from year to year, even in the same location; tints and timing are determined largely by the temperatures.