

Kirishima-Kinkowan National Park

Chart an Adventure from Ever-changing Sakurajima to the Mysteries of Kirishima

Kirishima-Kinkowan National Park in the south of Kyushu island offers a wide range of natural attractions, from an active volcano in its own bay, to beautiful coast line and beaches, and deep, mysterious forests. Part of today's park was the first national park in Japan.

Kinkowan Bay is comprised of a series of vast undersea volcanic caldera, craters formed when a volcano collapses, which were created by a number of huge eruptions countless millennia ago. At its center is a new active volcano, Sakurajima. Originally an island, an eruption by the volcano linked it to the mainland. Sakurajima is in a state of perpetual change caused by the volcano, which is in a constant state of low-level eruption. The gentle rise of ash that drifts over its peaks may fluctuate, but for the people who live on its slopes it is just part of their day-to-day life. Periodic magma flows are slowly reclaimed by vegetation, which itself changes with time. You can tell how long ago an eruption occurred by the types of plants that dominate.

Expand Your Senses in a Vibrant Natural Setting

Kinkowan Bay is full of life. Dolphins playfully appear above the water before diving down to the bubbling fumaroles below created by volcanic forces. This radiating heat extends to the park's southern beaches, where locals have engaged in sand bathing for centuries. On the beach, you can lie down and be covered in a cocoon of heated sand in which you can relax, as the gently lapping waters of the shoreline soothe your spirit. There are countless *onsen* hot springs in the area, not least on Sakurajima itself. Sakurajima is visible from many outdoor baths and footbaths that welcome all, whether you have been hiking or just taking in the views.

The fertile, nutrient-rich lands created by volcanic conditions produce enormous *daikon* radishes and provide feed for the region's world-class beef, pork, and chicken, while the pristine waters abound with delicious fish eaten as sashimi or cooked.

Venture to the Southern Coast

For those wanting to stray from the beaten path, you can follow the sweeping shoreline south. At the southernmost reaches of the park is Cape Sata, known for its breathtaking cliffs. Walk the picturesque route to the remote observatory and enjoy panoramic views of the historic lighthouse and seas beyond.

Explore the Forest of the Mountainous North

Alternatively, you can head north up to Kirishima, a mountainous, misty region home to countless legends. The entrance to this area is Kirishima Jingu Shrine, a site of immense spiritual significance that invites you to make your own pilgrimage. The large shrine and expansive grounds are famous for their seven mysteries, which you are invited to seek out for yourself as you explore, as well as nature trails that take you to peaceful forest glades well-suited to contemplation.

From this gateway you can enter the Kirishima Mountain Range, where mists mix with rising steam from the bubbling hot springs. You can eat local food steamed by volcanic jets, as well as take in numerous secluded mountain hot spring retreats that have been Japan's original nature resorts since antiquity.

Discover a Highland Resort in the Volcanic Peaks

In the heart of Kirishima you will find yourself in the highlands of Ebino Kogen, a sweeping plain flanked by towering volcanoes. While Japan's southern island of Kyushu generally enjoys higher than average temperatures, you can see snow at these heights until early spring, and the cooler temperatures provide a welcome break from the intense summer heat. This mountain resort is a paradise for nature enthusiasts and there are extensive hiking routes you can embark on all year round that range from the relaxing to the bracing as you explore the gentle trails or scale the volcanic peaks and lakes.

This vibrant, intense landscape is also known as Japan's first honeymoon route, and whatever your route you are sure to fall in love with its unique charm.

Discover the wild beauty of Kirishima-Kinkowan National Park, and let these fantastic lands take you on your own adventure.