

Ebino Kogen Highlands

The plateau of Ebino Kogen Highlands is 1,200 meters above sea level in the Kirishima Mountain Range. Records indicate that as early as the tenth century, the area was being visited by practitioners of shugendo, mountain ascetics, and the Satsuma feudal lords that ruled this area. During the Edo period (1603–1867), sulfur mining began in earnest in this area and continued until 1962. In the 1950s, Miyazaki Prefecture began developing the area for nature tourism, building huts for mountain climbers, and building a road to the plateau.

The landscape of Ebino Kogen Highlands has been shaped by the surrounding volcanoes whose toxic gases and volcanic activity have limited the variety of plants that can grow here. Japanese pampas grass, however, thrives in this difficult environment. In fact, a common theory on how the plateau was named involves the pampas grass, which turns reddish-brown —*ebi no iro* or “the color of shrimp”—in the fall as a result of the gases.

Miyama Kirishima azaleas prosper in this harsh environment. The high-altitude azalea—it grows in areas 700 meters above sea level and higher—blooms from late May until early June. As volcanic activity stabilizes and the soil quality improves, the surrounding forest may encroach on the azalea’s territory. However, for now, the region’s unique harsh environment is the Miyama Kirishima azalea’s greatest ally.