

Takachiho Valley: Overview

Takachiho Valley is a place of dramatic topography and scenery pervaded by the images of the gods and goddesses of Japan's creation myths and legends. The steep precipices plunging down to the swirling currents of the Gokase River of Takachiho Gorge were formed by pyroclastic flows from double eruptions around 120,000 years ago and 90,000 years ago that also gave birth to the nearby volcano, Mt. Aso and its massive caldera. In 1934 the valley was designated a National Scenic Spot and Natural Monument, and in 1965, it was included in the Sobo-Katamuki Quasi-National Park. Cooling and erosion over time created cliffs of basalt columns with vertical rib-like protrusions that give them the look of scales on a dragon's back. Cliff heights range from 80 to 100 meters and are best viewed from the 1-kilometer gorge promenade as you look down the sheer walls or close-up from a rowboat on the Gokase River. Other features include the Manai Falls, enhanced also by a close-up view from the water, and the three arched bridges that span the valley. One valley legend describes servants fleeing the fall of Mitai Castle in 1591 who, for lack of a bridge to cross the river, threw an enormous spear across to use as a bridge. Another link to regional myth is found in the river's Onokoro Pond, believed to be where Izanami and Izanagi (the divine couple credited with creating the islands of the Japanese archipelago) gave birth to the natural formations and people of Japan. A huge boulder, dubbed the Stone of Kihachi's Might, is said to have been hurled by the fearsome demon Kihachi during a legendary battle he lost to Mikeiri no Mikoto, the brother of Japan's first monarch.