

Osaka Falls

These ethereal waterfalls are located on the outskirts of Gero, in a forest growing on now-petrified lava that once flowed from nearby Mt. Ontake. Osaka Falls is comprised of 216 waterfalls, all of which are over 5 meters tall, and is the largest group of such sites in Japan. The primeval natural environment is the result of two eruptions of Mt. Ontake, which released lava flows reaching as far as Gero. The lava eventually cooled, forming long columns and slabs which can be seen (and even walked on) by hiking on the area's trails.

Just steps into the trail, trekkers are immersed in nature and surrounded by lush foliage. Stairs are built into sloping terrain to make the treks easier for inexperienced hikers. The higher one climbs, the closer one gets to the waterfalls, with just a single rail separating hikers from a dangerous drop at the top. The crashing falls spray water onto the staircases and trails, and the air is crisp and easy to breathe.

The trails vary in difficulty and length, ranging from a 30-minute hike to all-day treks requiring a guide. One of the easier among these is the Mitsudaki Falls Trail, which can be completed in about 3 hours and leads to three waterfalls: Mitsudaki Falls, Akaganetoyo Falls, and Karatanidaki Falls. This trail offers a condensed overview of the area's vast natural beauty.

The results of volcanic activity can be seen throughout the hiking trails of Osaka Falls. Gandate, a large boulder formed from lava 54,000 years ago, is visible from Gandate Park along the Mitsudaki Falls Trail and is a classic example of the long basalt columns formed by Mt. Ontake's eruptions. Hikers on a tight schedule can start from Gandate Park and make the return trip to Mitsudaki Falls in around 30 minutes.

The full Mitsudaki Falls Trail starts at the Himeshaga no Yu bathhouse, reminding visitors that Osaka Falls is also in a hot spring area, though the waters differ from those found in central Gero. The water here, naturally rich in carbon dioxide, is said to offer numerous health benefits and has a bubbly mouthfeel; its distinctive flavor derives from the high iron content.