

Myoko-Togakushi Renzan National Park

The rich variety of natural features in Myoko-Togakushi Renzan National Park, established in March 2015, attest to millennia of geological activity. The terrain includes the active volcanos of Mt. Myoko and Mt. Yake; the Togakushi Range, formed by a once-undersea volcano; and Lake Nojiri, created when lava from an eruption of Mt. Kurohime tens of thousands of years ago flowed into a nearby river valley.

The park's human history includes the practice of Shugendo, a form of mountain worship that contains elements of Buddhism, Taoism, and native Japanese Shinto religions. The founding of the shrines on Mt. Togakushi arose out of the yet more ancient mountain belief in the divinity of mountains, in this area mainly focused on Mt. Togakushi and Mt. Iizuna.

Winter in the Park

With appreciable annual snowfall, Myoko-Togakushi Renzan National Park offers a variety of outdoor winter activities.

Skiing and snowboarding – Togakushi Ski Area's 20 kilometers of downhill trails accommodate skiers and snowboarders of all abilities, with options for children, too. The top of Mt. Meno, the highest point in the ski park, offers a 360-degree view of the surrounding mountains and lowlands.

Cross-country skiing – Thirty-four kilometers of trails connect the Togakushi ski slopes with Kagamiike, Korigaike, and Midorigaike ponds; run across open fields in full view of the Togakushi Range; and lead through the thick Togakushi forest to Okusha Shrine.

Snowshoeing on top of the deep Togakushi snow allows access to areas of the park that are inaccessible in summer due to thick vegetation.

Hot springs abound, fed by geologic activity that created this landscape eons ago. These springs are especially popular in winter but are open to visitors year-round.

Spring, Summer, and Fall

With a moderate climate in spring and fall, and warm summer temperatures, Togakushi has much to offer outside of the snowy winter season.

Walking trails lead to most of the highlights of the park. The Go-sha Meguri (Five Shrines Tour) is a 10-kilometer path connecting the five shrines of Togakushi, from Hokosha to Okusha. Other paths lead through forests and wetlands to the Togakushi Forest Botanical Garden; past the Korigaike and Midorigaike ponds; and to Kagamiike Pond, where, on clear days, the five peaks of the Togakushi Range can be seen mirrored on the surface of the lake.

Bird-watching – Over one hundred species of birds, both migratory and resident, have been spotted in the park. These include the blue-and-white flycatcher (*oruri*), one of the top three songbirds of Japan, and the rock ptarmigan (*raicho*). The area around Mt. Hiuchi is the northernmost habitat of ptarmigans in Japan.

Hiking in the mountains of Togakushi is popular, but be sure to select a trail suited to your ability. The trail up Mt. Iizuna is suitable for all types of hikers, while the terrain of the Togakushi Range can be difficult, even dangerous, to negotiate. Japanese black bears live in the park and hikers should always stay alert.

Accommodation is available near the Togakushi ski area and Chusha and Hokosha shrines. Camping facilities are available at Togakushi Campground, located near the pastures of Togakushi Farm.