

## Welcome to Akiota

The town of Akiota lies in the mountains of northwestern Hiroshima Prefecture, near the border of neighboring Shimane Prefecture. Akiota is about an hour's drive from the city of Hiroshima, and the climate is cooler because of the town's high altitude, which ranges from 284 meters above sea level at city hall to 1,346 meters at the peak of Mt. Osorakan.

The 16-kilometer-long Sandankyo Gorge, a part of Nishi-Chugoku Sanchi Quasi-National Park, is Akiota's major attraction. The gorge is best visited in summer, when the temperatures are moderate, or in autumn, when the leaves turn a beautiful red and yellow. Other local sights include Mt. Osorakan and Mt. Shinnyu, both of which offer nicely situated camping grounds. Mt. Osorakan—the highest peak in Hiroshima prefecture—gets the most snowfall in the area and is a popular ski resort. Akiota is also home to the colossal Nukui Dam. The dam is open for tours, and visitors can witness the release of vast amounts of water at scheduled times from spring to early summer.

During the Edo period (1603–1868), the region was renowned for its *tatara* iron smelting, a process in which foot-pressed bellows are used to force air into a clay furnace. The iron ore was brought from the nearby Chugoku Mountains, where the soil is rich in iron sand. The Ota River and its tributaries, which snake through Akiota and empty into the Seto Inland Sea, were used to transport iron and other goods to what is now the city of Hiroshima. Ironmaking began to decline in the late Meiji era (1868–1912), and the development of railways and roads reduced traffic on the Ota, resulting in depopulation. Ninety percent of Akiota is now covered with forest, and the lush environment has made the area a magnet for nature lovers.