

Sandankyo Gorge

The 16-kilometer Sandankyo Gorge along the Shibaki River is unspoiled nature at its best. Located in northwestern Akiota, the gorge is a part of Nishi-Chugoku Sanchi Quasi-National Park and has been designated a Special Place of Scenic Beauty by the Agency for Cultural Affairs. There are only six gorges that have been honored with this designation in Japan, and Sandankyo Gorge is the only one of these in the western part of the country.

Nature conservation and preservation are taken seriously here, but visitors can experience the gorge's beauty firsthand by walking on elevated or paved paths against the backdrop of the ravine's rushing water, which are laid out so as not to disturb the ecosystem. Walking courses range from a beginner's stroll to an advanced all-day trek, and hikers are encouraged to choose the appropriate course for their level. Boat rides to Kurobuchi Pool and Sarutobi Rock allow visitors to observe colossal cliffs and untouched forest from the water.

The forest around Sandankyo Gorge consists of a mixture of ancient conifer and evergreen trees. There are more than 1,800 different kinds of moss in Japan, and approximately one-sixth of these can be seen on the Sandankyo trail. Sandankyo Gorge's tall cliffs and cascading waterfalls are reminiscent of the Chinese landscape paintings (*shan shui*) that inspired early explorers of the gorge, such as photographer Kuma Nanpo (1876–1943), to preserve its beauty.

Plentiful moisture in Sandankyo Gorge creates rich plant life in all three hiking seasons—spring, summer, and fall. The landscape is especially picturesque under the greenery of summer and during the fall foliage season. It is best experienced with all five senses: Listening to the rushing of the white water and wind circling through the ancient arbor, smelling the piney, organic scent of the forest, touching the fresh water and fallen leaves, tasting the sweet, unpolluted air, and, of course, seeing its beauties up close. Only a 75-minute bus ride from the city of Hiroshima, Sandankyo Gorge is a special place unto itself, where visitors can immerse themselves in nature.