

Mt. Meakan and Mt. Akanfuji Profile

Mt. Meakan (1,499 m) and Mt. Akanfuji (1,476 m) are two of the tallest volcanoes in Akan-Mashu National Park. Mt. Meakan, a composite volcano with 10 peaks, is an iconic symbol of the park and the powerful geological forces that define it.

There are three hiking trails to the summit of Meakan: the Meakan Onsen Trail, the Onneto Trail, which forks off to Akanfuji, and the Akankohan Trail. Each of the trails is divided into 10 stages with waypoints known as “stations.”

A variety of alpine flowers grow above the tree line along the three hiking routes. These include the small, yellow *Meakan-kinbai* (*Potentilla miyabei* Makino) and the white-petaled *Meakan-fusuma* (*Arenaria merckiioides* Maxim.). Both of these flowers were discovered on Mt. Meakan and thus bear its name in Japanese.

From the Eighth Station of Mt. Meakan, the landscape is rocky and moonlike, and dotted with sulfur vents that emit steam. Mt. Meakan has two main craters, Pon-machineshiri Crater and Naka-machineshiri Crater. Pon-machineshiri is the largest, at 300 meters deep and 700 meters wide, and is closest to the summit. It contains two colorful lakes, said to be acidic, and is a habitat for birds, including Pacific swifts, which make their nests in the crater wall in summer. From the highest points around Mt. Meakan, there are panoramic views of Lake Akan and the surrounding mountains of eastern Hokkaido.

A different view of Mt. Meakan can be seen from the summit of Akanfuji, a 2.5-hour round trip from the top of Meakan or a 1.5-hour round trip from the fork in the Onneto Trail, near the Eighth Station.

Meakan Onsen Trail

This trail is slightly more challenging than the other two trails up Mt. Meakan but takes the shortest time to hike. The trailhead is a two-minute walk on the road heading northwest from the Meakan Onsen parking lot. The path starts with a gentle ascent through a forest of Sakhalin spruce, one of the few tree species able to survive in the nutrient-deficient volcanic soil of Mt. Meakan’s northwestern slopes. Many of the trees on these slopes are over 260 years old.

The path steepens from the Second Station. Around the Third Station, taller trees give way to low-lying Japanese stone pines. From the Fifth Station, Lake Onneto is visible. If the weather is clear, it may be possible to see the Daisetsuzan mountain range in the distance to the northwest. As you approach the summit, the landscape changes from alpine shrubs and flowers to distinctly volcanic terrain, scattered with small steam vents and giant rocks ejected during past eruptions. From the Eighth Station onward, the trail becomes precipitous and winding, leveling out along the crater rim.

Onneto Trail

The Onneto Trail is slightly longer than the Meakan Onsen Trail and begins at the Onneto Campground parking area. The ascent, through a dense forest of broad-leaved and needle-bearing trees, is gradual. The forest is at its greenest in summer, with seedlings, ferns, and other plants growing along the trail. You may spot luminous moss (*hikarigoke*) in the shade under rock outcroppings and within tree trunks.

Past thick ranks of Japanese stone pines around the Fifth Station are fields of cowberry, black crowberry, mountain harebell, and other hardy alpine flowers. At around the Eighth Station, the trail diverges. You can choose to take a side excursion to the peak of Mt. Akanfuji or continue up Mt. Meakan. The last stretch of the trail as it approaches the peak of Meakan is a steep, slippery path of rock and gravel. Watch out for falling rocks, and enjoy the views of the vast Pon-machineshiri Crater to your left.

The road to the Onneto Campground, where the trailhead is located, is closed from around December to April.

Akankohan Trail

This trail is accessible via the Furebetsu Forest Road to the west of Lake Akan, and is about a 20-minute drive from the town of Akanko Onsen. It takes between three and four hours to reach the top of Meakan on this trail, which has the gentlest incline but is the longest of the three Meakan trails. You will pass through a Sakhalin spruce forest before reaching swathes of Japanese stone pines at an altitude of about 1,000 meters. From here, there are excellent views of the Naka-machineshiri Crater, Lake Akan, and Mt. Oakan. The section of the trail above the tree line passes through a volcanic moonscape near the Naka-machineshiri Crater rim. Hissing steam from the vent in the crater can sometimes

be heard in this area. Near the summit, the trail merges with the Onneto Trail. From here, it is a short climb to the peak.