

Mt. Ponpon

If you visit Nibushi Onsen on the shore of Lake Kussharo, take the time to climb nearby Mt. Ponpon. The hike to the 360-meter-high summit (the trail is roughly two kilometers long) takes about an hour. After arriving at the peak, try stamping your feet. You may hear a strange “ponpon”-like sound, which has led to speculation that the mountain is hollow. Mt. Ponpon is known for another phenomenon: thick green moss growing over its surface year-round. This is due to the warm ground temperatures that prevent snow from accumulating. Consequently, even in the depths of winter, you can hear the chirps of band-legged ground crickets, which in most places are only active during the summer and autumn months.

Sweet solitude

Despite its small size and unusual features, Mt. Ponpon does not attract huge numbers of visitors. Consequently, during the summer months, an overgrowth of foliage can obscure the path that leads toward the mountain, making it hard to find. Look out for the start of the trailhead, which begins just off Route 52. Persistence will be rewarded, however—Mt. Ponpon and its surrounding areas are ideal spots to enjoy a leisurely forest stroll, birdwatching, or some serious hiking.

The surrounding area

While in the area, stop by the nearby Kawayu Eco-museum Center, which has comprehensive information on local flora and fauna, as well as details on the geographic history of Akan-Mashu National Park. For a place to stay for the night, try the relatively close-at-hand Sunayu Campsite, situated on the shores of Lake Kussharo.

Please note: Brown bears and hornets inhabit this area, so inform yourself about these animals, prepare before visiting, and stay alert while there.