

## **Driving in Teshikaga: Mokoto Pass**

Mokoto Pass is a road that runs through the mountains north of Lake Kussharo, linking Kawayu Onsen and the village of Higashi Mokoto. Two vantage points along the route offer beautiful views over the lake and surrounding countryside.

### *Mokoto Observation Deck*

The first vantage point, the Mt. Mokoto Observation Deck and Parking (430 m), is a 30-minute drive from Kawayu. Stop here to enjoy good views of Lake Kussharo and Mt. Io, an active volcano with numerous vents that continuously emit sulfurous plumes. The Ainu, Japan's indigenous people, call Mt. Io "Atosa-Nupuri," meaning "bare mountain," in reference to the volcano's barren slopes.

### *Highland Koshimizu 725*

The second vantage point is the Highland Koshimizu 725 observatory and parking area, at 725 meters above sea level. If the weather is fair, the observatory there affords a view of Mt. Oakan, the Sea of Okhotsk, and Mt. Shari, halfway between the Akan-Mashu National Park and the Shiretoko Peninsula. Very early in the morning, clouds sometimes hang low over the surface of Lake Kussharo. When that happens, the lake is obscured by what appears to be a "sea of clouds."

### *Mt. Mokoto Trekking Trails*

The Highland Koshimizu 725 parking area serves as the start of the Skyline Trail, a two-kilometer hiking trail that winds up Mt. Mokoto. The trail takes about an hour to complete (one way) and ascends 275 meters to the peak, the highest point on the crater rim that encircles Lake Kussharo. The Skyline Trail connects to a series of other trails to form an eight-kilometer circuit trail.

Mokoto Pass is a winding mountain road. It is open year-round, but careful driving is advised in all seasons and weather conditions.