

Shiobara Nature Study Path: Visitor Center or Hataori Onsen to Arayu Onsen Shrine

Option 1: via the Visitor Center trailhead

Option 2: via the Hataori trailhead

Option 3: via Arayu-Fuji (northern route beyond Lake Ōnuma)

Option 4: via Yoshinuma (southern route beyond Lake Ōnuma)

Distance: Arayu-Fuji Route: 8.0 km

Yoshinuma Route: 7.5 km

Duration: Arayu-Fuji Route: 270 minutes (each way)

Yoshinuma Route: 240 minutes (each way)

Nearest Bus Stops:

- Visitor Center trailhead: Nanatsu Iwa Suspension Bridge. Cross the river via the suspension bridge to the Visitor Center.
- Hataori Onsen trailhead: Either the Shiobara Monzen or Shiobara Hataori stop.
- Arayu Onsen Shrine trail terminus: No direct bus service. Approximately 20 minutes by taxi from the Shiobara Onsen Bus Terminal.

Trail Overview:

In 1958, the Shiobara Nature Study Path was the first trail to be designated a Nature Study Path by the Japanese government. The 8-kilometer hiking trail has two trailheads—one at the Visitor Center and one at Hataori Onsen. The two trails converge into a single path that continues to Lake Ōnuma. From Lake Ōnuma the trail splits again, and both routes end at Arayu Onsen Shrine. The Arayu-Fuji route to the north is a trail of medium difficulty that scales Mt. Fujiyama (1,180 m). The Yoshinuma route to the south is an easy walk that skirts the Yoshinuma wetlands. Both routes begin and end in the same locations; they can be combined to make a trail known as the Lake Ōnuma Loop.

Highlights:

Mt. Sumaki Fuji (accessible via the Hataori trailhead)

Mt. Sumaki Fuji (710 m) is a hill on the route from the Hataori trailhead, not far from where the two trails meet. At the summit is a statue of Fudō Myō-ō, one of the Five Wisdom Kings of Buddhism. At the foot of the steep stairs to the summit is Sumaki

Fujiyama Park. The park contains large red pines and a variety of oak trees, including Japanese pin oaks.

Kotarō ga Fuchi (Kotarō's Abyss) (accessible via the Visitor Center trailhead)

A series of low, wide waterfalls and moss-covered boulders characterize this area, a favorite rest stop along the trail. The name Kotarō's Abyss refers to an ill-fated sixteenth century feudal lord of Shiobara, Koyama Kotarō, who reportedly threw himself from a great height into the swiftly flowing waters below. Legends surrounding his death recount a tangled web of failed attempts to avenge his father's death and a star-crossed romance with the daughter of his father's assassin.

Arayu Onsen Shrine (trail terminus for both routes)

A wooden building at the shrine houses a stone pagoda that was offered in the hope of relief from an epidemic in 1518. It resembles a stone lantern that contains carved figures. The pagoda was designated an Important Cultural Property in 1958.