

A Hiking Guide to Oze

Oze has well-maintained hiking courses for every class of hiker, from the level boardwalks that crisscross the marshlands to steep mountain trails that reach high above the tree line. Hikers should keep in mind that the weather can be very unpredictable, due to the ring of surrounding mountains. A perfectly clear, warm morning can turn misty and cold by afternoon, and vice versa. Visitors are encouraged to wear appropriate clothing that is comfortable, and bring rain gear and extra layers.

WHAT TO WEAR

Hat

Solar rays are strong at high altitudes, so a hat with a brim is recommended.

Underwear or base layer

Light synthetic or wool fabric that will dry quickly.

Long-sleeved shirt

Quick-drying materials recommended.

Socks and shoes

Thick socks and comfortable yet sturdy walking shoes. For mountain trails, high-cut hiking boots.

Backpack

Size depends on length of hike and tent use. A rain cover is recommended.

Hiking pants

Lightweight synthetic, long pants, or shorts over tights.

WHAT TO CARRY

Warm layer (fleece, down, or synthetic fabric shirt)

Waterproof jacket and pants

Drinking water

Garbage bag

Oze's Mountain Lodges

There are over 20 mountain lodges (*yamagoya*) in Oze National Park, offering accommodation for hikers with two full meals and hot baths. Visitors should be aware that meals are served early, because Japanese hikers tend to arrive by mid-afternoon and make early starts in the morning. Breakfast is usually served at 6:00 A.M., with the evening meal at 5:00 or 5:30 P.M. These lodges have been operated by the same families for generations and the staff are founts of knowledge about Oze's history, nature, and other aspects of the park. They help maintain the trails as well and can update visitors on hiking and weather conditions. All the lodges follow strong conservation protocols, including toilet systems that do not pollute the water table. Guests are asked to cooperate with these efforts, including carrying out any garbage they brought in.

Staying at one of the lodges for a night or two gives hikers a deeper experience and appreciation for Oze's wild natural environment. During golden hour, the early evening sun bathes the area in a warm light, and the air cools quickly after sunset. With little light pollution, Oze is one of Japan's best sites for viewing the night sky. Early risers can enjoy the fog banks that cover the marshes, slowly rising to unveil the mountains around the plateau.

Note that the lodges can get crowded, particularly in peak seasons, so reservations should be made well in advance.

Suggested Hiking Courses

Hikers can plan their own routes using the trails that crisscross the park, through marshes and mountain forests. These are two sample courses, a one-day hike around the marshes, and a two-day hike that includes climbing Mt. Shibutsu.

Sample Course 1

Woodland Wonders and High-altitude Marshlands

A beginner-friendly descent through mountain forests to the marsh plateau and back, offering splendid views of the valley

Route: Hatomachi-toge Pass – Yamanohana – Ryugu-jujiro Crossroad – Yoppi Suspension Bridge – Hatomachi-toge Pass

Total time: 6 hours

Level: Easy

Details

This hike is mostly downhill or over flat boardwalks, except for the final ascent back up to the park's entrance. The first hour is a descent to Yamanohana, where hikers will find a Visitor Center, lodges, and a campsite. From there, the trail leads across the broad, open expanse of the marshes, with great views of the surrounding mountains, ponds, and seasonal marsh flowers. Every so often, there are rest areas, wooden platforms with benches where people may eat or rest their legs. This course follows a circular route around the marshes, but can be shortened by turning back at the Ryugu-jujiro crossroad.

Sample Course 2

Up the Serpentinite Trail

For experienced hikers, this two-day course features a steep ascent of Mt. Shibutsu, for panoramic views in all directions.

Route: Hatomachi-toge Pass – Yamanohana – Marsh walks – Mt. Shibutsu –

Hatomachi-toge Pass

Total time: 2 days (6 hours per day)

Level: Easy (Day 1); Hard (Day 2)

The first day follows the same itinerary as the first sample course. Be sure to reserve accommodation at one of the lodges in Yamanohana or the Ryugu-jujiro crossroad. On the second day, get up early and take the trailhead at Yamanohana. The trail climbs steeply through the forest before rising above the tree line. Note that the serpentinite rock underfoot can be very slippery, particularly when wet, and the wind can be strong. From Mt. Shibutsu, hikers will get open views of the marshes on the plateau and the volcanic mountains surrounding the area. The descent follows the ridge route down to Hatomachi-toge Pass.