

【Ikemeguri Course】

The Ikemeguri Course is an intermediate nature trail that begins at the Suzurikawa bus stop, from where hikers can reach the trailhead via a 5-minute ride on a ski lift. From there, it is a 9.6-kilometer hike with an elevation change of 360 meters to the Shimizuguchi bus stop. The trail takes about 3 hours and 30 minutes to complete.

As the name *ikemeguri* (“pond tour”) suggests, this course passes by several picturesque ponds fed by snowmelt and rain. The water level fluctuates with the seasons—a unique characteristic of the alpine wetland biosphere.

At Shibu Pond, visitors can see floating islands of vegetation buoyed by gas trapped among their roots. The islands are covered in patches of round-leaved sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*), a green and red carnivorous plant that traps insects in sticky, hair-like protrusions. In autumn, the sundew turns completely red, competing with the colorful autumn foliage of the surrounding trees.

Farther on, a raised boardwalk takes hikers through a broad marsh called the Forty-Eight-Pond Wetlands (*shijūhachi ike shitsugen*). Japanese arborvitae, a plush evergreen whose limber branches were traditionally used to make snowshoes, form a bushy tree line around the waters.

The largest and most impressive sight is Ōnuma Pond, a large body of water that has been turned cobalt blue by copper sulfate runoff. Occasionally, bubbles of volcanic gas seep up through the gravel bed and gently break the surface of the water.