

【Shizen Tanshō Course】

The Shizen Tanshō Course is an easy nature trail that begins at Hasu Pond and ends at the Kidoike bus stop. It covers 4.1 kilometers, with an elevation change of 160 meters, and requires approximately two hours to complete.

This course passes through the Shiga Highlands' distinctive landscapes, including subalpine wetlands, mountain ponds, and primeval forests, all of which change with the seasons. From early spring to autumn, marsh plants flower on the Tanohara Wetlands, and in autumn the waters of Kido Pond reflect the surrounding foliage. The Shizen Tanshō (or “Nature Hike”) Course's array of representative landscapes makes it a good candidate for a hike with a local guide from the Shiga Kōgen Guide Association.

One particularly noteworthy sight along the course is Watasugedaira, a broad, marshy stretch that is covered with tussocks of hare's-tail cotton grass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*). When the cotton grass blooms in summer, its 30- to 60-centimeter-long spikelets open into the fluffy white tufts from which it gets its name. When the entire field is in bloom, it appears to be covered in mid-summer snow.

Another visually striking plant that grows along the course is a luminescent moss called goblin gold (*Schistostega pennata*), which can be found in crevices under gnarled tree roots and rock falls. This greenish moss's glow is caused not by phosphorescence, but by specialized cells that reflect even faint amounts of light.