

Norikura Kogen

Norikura Kogen is an expansive plateau at the foot of Mt. Norikura. It is known for its easy access, natural beauty, wide variety of year-round outdoor activities, and numerous *onsen* hot springs. With altitudes ranging from 1,200 to 1,800 meters, the area plays host to visitors looking to enjoy hiking, camping, cycling, fishing, snow sports, and water sports.

Offering a wide range of accommodations—from campsites to lodges and traditional *ryokan* inns—this area is often used as a base for hikers and cyclists headed to nearby peaks in the Northern Alps. But there is more to this charming area than just convenient lodging. A vibrant community of several hundred people have made this alpine village their home, despite the harsh natural environment of winter months at high altitudes. For visitors, those conditions are part of the attraction, along with three hot-spring sources that feed a variety of relaxing bathing options.

There are three waterfalls within hiking distance from the village. Zengoro Falls, the most easily accessible, is 21.5 meters high and 8 meters wide and is only a 700-meter walk southwest of the Norikura Visitor Center. Most of the cascades freeze over in winter, making for spectacular ice formations that are accessible with snowshoes. In May, the area's many marshes are bright with the white blooms of *mizubasho*, or Asian skunk cabbage. A short trek on a boardwalk through a marsh leads to Ushidome Pond, where, during the green season, visitors can take in views of the surrounding forest and of the peaks of the Northern Alps reflected in the still waters.